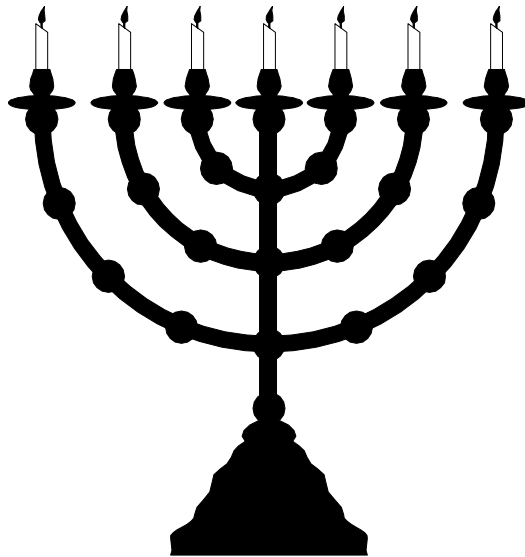


BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Last Things

*The return of Christ, the Rapture of the Church and Israel,
the Antichrist, the False Prophet and the Whore of Babylon,
the Great Tribulation and Armageddon,
the Resurrection and the Millennium,
the Great White Throne and the End of the World,
Hell and the New Creation*



by

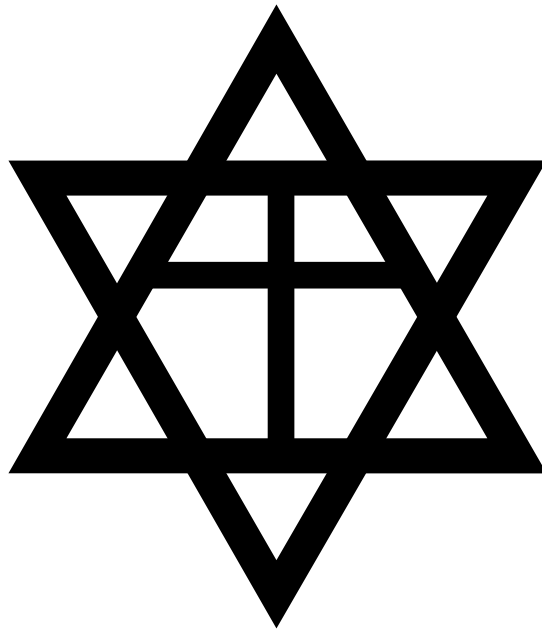
Roland Kleger

Kreuzlingen, May 2022

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BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

The Doctrine of the End Times



by

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Kreuzlingen, May 2022

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BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

5

The Doctrine of the End Times

10 *“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” (Rev 1:3)*

“I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, ‘My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?’” (Dan 12:8)

15

“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.” (Joh 13:19)

Introduction

20 The Greek word ‘*eskhatos*’ (ἐσχατος) means ‘*last*’ (of time or place), or ‘*least*’, or something similar. The corresponding noun ‘*to eschaton*’ (τὸ ἔσχατον) is used in expressions such as *the end [of the earth]*, *the [four] ends of the earth*, *the last things* etc. The plural ‘*ta eskhata*’ (τὰ ἔσχατα) can be translated as *the last things*, *the things [events] of the last days*. Hence *Eschatology* means *the doctrine of the events of the last days*.

25 Eschatology is probably (even) among Evangelicals the most controversial subject within the whole realm of Systematic Theology. Biblical exegesis cannot fully answer or solve some of the questions associated with Eschatology. One of the reasons is that the Bible does not offer anywhere a complete chronological schedule for the end times. In spite of this, careful study of the so-called eschatological and/or apocalyptic passages in the Old and New Testaments
30 makes it possible to work out a chronology of the events of the end times i.e. last days.

In the 20th century especially (but also in the 19th) **disagreements arose among Evangelicals on the subject of Eschatology**. These occasionally led to churches splitting up, e.g. over the question of the rapture or over interpretations of the millennium. What a pity! It is important
35 to respect the views of people who hold different opinions as long as they do not make salvation dependent on their doctrine. The **millennium** and the **rapture** of the Church are without any doubt the eschatological topics that have given most cause for discussion. I do

not consider that our salvation depends on our particular view of Eschatology. However, I do feel that we should not hide our personal opinion on the subject of Eschatology. Usually a reader wants to know what the opinion of the writer is. May the reader follow the well-known admonition of the apostle Paul: “Test everything; hold on to the good!” (1Th 5:21)

5

I would like to point out here that my exposition is often based on René Pache, in particular his book ‘The Return of Christ’.¹

10

Many of the religions and ideologies have their particular views on Eschatology. If there was a beginning, there must also be an end! Most of them however include utopian or materialistic ideas while others assume a total obliteration or annihilation of everything.

15

Biblical Eschatology on the contrary is realistic and, most importantly, **ethical**. It ends with the eternal glorification of the righteous and the eternal damnation of the unrighteous (see for example Dan 12:2; Joh 5:29 and Rev 20:11–22:5).

20

World history revolves, in the final analysis, around the **kingdom of God**. The kingdom of God is therefore one of the central themes of the Bible. All the groups of people mentioned in the Bible (i.e. Israel, the nations, the Church of Christ) are in some way related to the kingdom of God or ‘*kingdom of heaven*’.²

25

We must humbly admit that our knowledge of future events is only a partial one. But we do know Him who will come, that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We shouldn’t be preoccupied with questions such as: “*When will the end come?*” or “*What are the signs preceding the end times?*” or “*At what point of time will the Rapture of the Church occur?*” It is much more important to know that Jesus will return and that we will have to give account to him.

30

Because of this Peter too, after he had shown that Jesus will surely return, admonished his readers (and with them believers of all times) to live a holy life (cf. 2Pe 3:11-15). The judgement will coincide with the return of Christ (2Ti 4:1), and therefore we should be ready. In the same text Peter encourages us to be looking forward to the day of God and *hasten* its coming (2Pe 3:11-15). How can we *hasten* that day? It is well possible that Peter was thinking of the spreading of the Gospel because Jesus said that the Gospel must be preached to all nations before he returns (Mat 24:14).

¹ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955). The title of the original French edition is: ‘Le Retour de Jésus-Christ’, published by Editions Emmaüs, St-Légier, Switzerland.

² This expression is found especially in the Gospel of Matthew, which was probably written for Jews. Matthew, being a Jew himself, knew about the respect of the Jews regarding the name of God (particularly the name of *Yahweh*). It is for this reason that he probably preferred the expression ‘kingdom of heaven’ to ‘kingdom of God’.

I. The necessity, manner, and time of the return of Christ

A. The necessity of the return of Christ

1. Promises in the Old and New Testament

- 5 • **O. T.:** Dan 7:13; Zec 14:3ff.
 • **N.T.:** **Jesus:** Mat 24 and 25; Joh 14:1ff etc., **Paul:** Rom 11:25ff; 1Co 15:23; 1Th 4:14-17; 2Th 2:8; 2Ti 4:1 etc., **Hebrews:** 9:28; 10:37, **James:** 5:7, **Peter:** 1Pe 1:7; 5:7; 2Pe 3:1-15, **John:** 1Jo 2:28; Rev 1:7; 19:11ff; 22:12, **Jude:** verses 14-15.

2. To redeem his own

10 Luk 21:28 etc.

3. To judge the nations

2Th 1:7-8 etc.

4. To establish his kingdom

Dan 7:13-14; Zec 14:3ff; 1Co 15:25; 2Ti 4:1 etc.

15 5. Because of his promise of rewards

Luk 12:35-38; 2Ti 4:7-8 etc.

B. The manner of the return of Christ

1. Personally

Joh 14:3; 1Th 1:10; 1Th 4:16 etc.

2. As the Son of Man

Dan 7:13-14; Mat 24:27; Act 1:11; Rev 1:13-18 etc.

3. Visibly

Zec 12:10; Mar 13:26; Act 1:11; Rev 1:7 etc.

5 4. Suddenly

Mat 24:27; 1Th 5:2-3 etc.

5. In glory

Dan 7:13-14; Mat 16:27; 24:30; Rev 19:11-16 etc.

6. With his angels (i.e. the good angels)

10 Mat 13:41; 24:31; 25:31; 2Th 1:7; Jud 14-15 etc.

7. With his holy ones (i.e. the glorified believers)

See 1Th 3:13. The '*holy ones*'³ in Zec 14:5 could mean *angels* or *believers* or possibly both.

8. On the Mount of Olives

Zec 14:3-5; Act 1:10-12.

15 C. Time of the return of Christ

1. The Lord 'tarries'

20 We do not need to know the exact date of the return of Christ. If we knew it we would be in danger of not watching and praying, see Mat 24:36.43; Act 1:7-8. We are not exhorted to calculate the day of the return of Christ but rather to be actively engaged in the work of the Lord until that day.

The devil manages only too often to deceive people in this matter. Some believe the lie that the Lord has already returned. Others are deceived and misled by 'false christs' (cf. Mat

³ In Hebrew קְדוּשִׁים (*q^edoschim*).

24:23). Others stumble, as mentioned before, because they think that they can calculate the time of the return of Christ.⁴

5 The Word of God warns us urgently about these things: Mat 24:4-5.23-27; Luk 21:8; 2Th 2:1-3.

On the one hand, Satan tries to misuse the message of the return of Christ and on the other to rob us of the hope of his return (cf. 2Pe 3:4).

10 It is true that the Lord 'delays' his coming:

Mat 25:5 *The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.*

15 There is a specific reason for this however:

2Pe 3:9.15 *...He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...*

2. The signs preceding his coming

20 The Bible speaks of many signs that will precede the return of Christ:

a.) A falling away from the faith in the last times

- The extraordinary temptation of error: cf. Mat 24:4-5; 2Th 2:9-12; Rev 13:12ff.
- The mass falling away: 2Th 2:3; 1Ti 4:1-3; 2Ti 3:1-5; 2Pe 3:1-4.

b.) Wars

25 Mat 24:6-7; Rev 6:4; 16:14.

c.) Famine

Mat 24:7; Rev 6:5-6.

d.) Pestilence

Luk 21:11; Rev 6:8.

30 e.) Earthquakes

Luk 21:11; Rev 6:12-14; 8:5; 16:18-20 (during the *Great Tribulation*).

f.) The appearing of 'false christs' and prophets

Mat 24:5.24; Act 20:29-30; 2Th 2:9; 1Ti 4:1; 1Jo 4:1ff; Rev 16:13-14 etc.

⁴ This applies e.g. to the Jehovah's Witnesses and the New Apostolic Church.

g.) Religious persecution

Dan 7:25; Mat 24:8-10; Rev 12:13-17; 13:7-18, etc.

h.) Worldwide preaching of the Gospel

Mat 24:14.

5 i.) The appearing of the Antichrist

Dan 7:23-25; Mat 24:15; 2Th 2:6-9; Rev 13 and 17 (the beast).

j.) To begin with mankind will be under the illusion of being secure and at peace

Mat 24:37-39; Mar 13:33-37.

10 3. We are called upon to be ready

Mat 24:37-39; Mar 13:33-37; Rom 13:11-14 etc.

II. The return of Christ and the Church

The hope of the Church of Christ is that her Lord will take her to be with himself – she will be ‘caught up’.

5 *“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” (Joh 14:2-4)*

10 *“After that we who are still alive and are left,⁵ will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And we will be with the Lord forever.” (1Th 4:17)*

A. What is the significance of the ‘rapture of the Church’?

15 **1Co 15:51** *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.*

We don’t know *when or how*, however we know *that* it will happen:

20 **1Co 15:52** *...in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye...*

The pre- and mid-tribulationists, unlike the post-tribulationists,⁶ put a gap between the events of the rapture of the Church and the visible return of Christ. They see in these passages, which speak of the sudden and unexpected return of the Lord, in the first place the rapture of the Church and not the visible return of Christ to the earth.

25 However this may be, the Lord challenges us to be constantly ready because He may come at any time – even today. Each of us should ask himself personally: **“Am I ready?”**

30 We will understand the significance of the rapture of the Church better if we consider the following three questions:

1. From what place will we be ‘caught up’ when the time of the rapture comes?

35 We will be caught up *‘from alien territory’* (from the territory of the Prince of this World) and will then be *‘at home’* i.e. we will live in our heavenly home see 2Co 5:6; Heb 13:14. We shall be caught up:

⁵ I.e. then when the Lord will come in order to take his Church unto himself.

⁶ Explanations re Pre- Mid- and Post-Tribulationism will follow under B.

2Co 5:2.4 from our earthly tent (i.e. from our body)

2Th 1:7 from our troubles

5

We will be taken up out of the dominion of the devil (persecution, presence of sin and death cf. Rom 7:24). Satan will no longer be able to touch us.

2. Where will we be following the rapture?

Joh 14:3 *...If I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me **that you also may be where I am.***

10

We shall be taken up to be with our Heavenly Bridegroom forever. The members will be united with the Head forever. That also means that the members will at last be fully united among themselves:

15

1Th 4:17 *...After that we will be caught up **together with them** in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

In this way victory over death (the separation) will be finally visible (cf. 1Co 15:54-55).

20

The Scriptures also inform us about **the place** where we will meet the Lord. The kingdom of our God is not of this world (Joh 18:36). For this reason, the Lord does not unite his people on this earth but takes them up to Himself in the air.

1Th 4:17 *...to meet the Lord in the air...*

25

At the present time the world is still being ruled from the air (atmosphere) by satanic and demonic powers:

Eph 2:2 *...when you followed the ways of this world and of **the ruler of the kingdom of the air**, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

30

Eph 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms [this means the atmospheric heavens].*

35

Our meeting the Lord will take place just where the headquarters of the defeated enemy is – the enemy defeated by Christ. The triumph of the Church with her Lord just could not be greater. Henceforth it will always be clear that Jesus Christ has conquered the devil and that his Church has overcome! *Hallelujah!* By the way, the word '*hallelujah*' is only found four times in the New Testament, in Rev 19:1.3.4.6 speaking of the union of the heavenly Bridegroom with his Bride, the Church!

40

3. How will we be taken up?

See especially 1Co 15:51-53 and 1Th 4:15-18.

a.) Is the Return of Christ in order to take his Church to himself identical with his appearing to judge the nations?

- 5 The commentators have different opinions. For more about this see **B** below. I tend to agree with Pache when he says:

10 According to the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ in His glory will descend the first time from the sky. While He is still *in the air*, the believers will be taken up to meet Him on the clouds (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). On the other hand, when He shall come to judge the nations, He shall appear with His Church (all His saints) and put His feet *on the Mount of Olives*, from which He went up into Heaven (Zech. 14:4, 5; Acts 1:11, 12). It is normal that the Bridegroom would not present Himself in the same manner as the Judge. We shall see below what
15 interval there will have to be between these two appearances. But it is certain that in order to come to earth “with all his saints,” the Lord must first have come to gather them.⁷

b.) We will be caught up from this earth

1Th 4:14-17 speaks about the resurrection of those who have died in Christ and about the transformation of believers still living at the time of the rapture. Here we see that the believers
20 will be ‘caught up’ from the earth.

c.) A signal will be given

See 1Co 15:52; 1Th 4:16 (*at the last trumpet*).

d.) We will be caught up to be with our Lord (our Head)

25 Cf. Joh 14:2-3 and 1Th 4:14-17:

- First of all, those who have died in Christ (who will be raised): 1Co 15:52; 1Th 4:16.
- Then the believers who are still living (who will be transformed): Mat 24:40-41; 1Co 15:52; 1Th 4:16.

e.) We will meet our Lord in the air.

30 See 1Th 4:17.

⁷ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 111. Furthermore, Paul explicitly says in 1Th 3:13 that the Lord will appear *with all his holy ones*.

B. When will the rapture take place?

This is one of the most controversial questions among Evangelicals. The three views are as follows:

- 5 • **The pre-tribulation** view teaches that the Church will be 'caught up' *before* the 70th year-week spoken of in Dan 9:24-27, i.e. before the Great Tribulation (at the time of the Antichrist).
- **The mid-tribulation** view teaches that the Church will be 'caught up' *in the middle* of the 70th year-week spoken of in Dan 9:24-27, i.e. *in the middle* of the Great Tribulation, immediately before the persecution by the Antichrist begins.
- 10 • **The post-tribulation** view teaches that the Church will be 'caught up' *after* the 70th year-week spoken of in Dan 9:24-27, i.e. *after* (or at the end of) the Great Tribulation; in other words the rapture will coincide with the visible return of Christ.

- 15 Most of the a-millennialists and post-millennialists⁸ do not even ask the above question, because in their view Israel as a nation is no longer important, neither now nor in the future (in spite of what Paul says in Rom 11:25ff). According to them, the reign of the Antichrist will be a time of persecution of the Church of Christ at the end of which (i.e. at the end of the Great Tribulation: cf. Rev 7:14) Christ will return. He will take his Church to be with himself
- 20 and forth-with judge the nations and the angels. The amillennialists and the postmillennialists say that at this point of time the created world will disappear, i.e. the eternal state in new heavens and on a new earth will then begin. They are convinced that there will be no millennium on earth after the return of Christ. They point to passages like Dan 12:2 and Joh 5:29 that do not indicate a separate resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous. Later in
- 25 the chapter about the *millennium*, we will return to this question in the context of Rev 20:1-10 and 1Co 15:23-28. It seems to be clear from these passages that the resurrection of believers and unbelievers doesn't happen at the same time. Among the premillennialists⁹ we find representatives of all three positions: pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, post-tribulation. Post-tribulationist Premillennialism is also known as *classic* or *historical Premillennialism*.
- 30 Dispensationalists¹⁰ especially adhere to Pretribulationism. It is also possible to adhere to the pre-tribulation view without being a dispensationalist. By the way, there are different shades of Dispensationalism.

Here are some of the arguments used by the representatives of the three different positions:¹¹

35 1. Pre-tribulationism

Pache gives 18 arguments, which in his opinion speak for pre-tribulationism.¹² Here is a summary of the important also including some of my own:

⁸ A-millennialism teaches that there will be no millennium on this earth, while post-millennialism teaches that Christ will return after the millennium.

⁹ Pre-millennialism teaches that Christ will return before the millennium.

¹⁰ Dispensationalism stresses among other things a clear separation between the different epochs of redemptive history.

¹¹ For an objective discussion on these three positions see *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* by Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer and Douglas J. Moo (Grand Rapids: Academie Books; Zondervan Publishing House, 1984). A representative of each position presents and gives reasons for his case. Then the representatives of the other two positions question his case.

¹² René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 118-124.

1. *Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth (Rev 3:10).* The Greek text says literally, *I will also keep you from* (or: *out of* [Greek ἐκ {εκ}]) *the hour of trial*. In the context of Revelation, the *hour of trial* is without any doubt the period of the Great Tribulation. The pre- and mid-tribulationists see in this an indication that the Church of Christ will not have to go through the great tribulation.
2. The judgements of the Great Tribulation in **Rev 6:16** are called '*the wrath of the Lamb*'. The Church of Christ doesn't have to fear this wrath. She isn't waiting for Jesus to come as her Judge but as her Bridegroom with whom she will celebrate the wedding feast (cf. Luk 21:28; 1Th 1:9-10; Rev 19:7-9).
3. Peter says (**1Pe 4:17**): *For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God...* If God begins with us, who believe in Christ, it is because we are not to be judged with the world, i.e. the unbelievers (cf. 1Co 11:32). The representatives of pre- and mid-tribulationism say that because the Church is being disciplined daily, she will not have to go through the judgment of the Great Tribulation (cf. Heb 12:5-8; 1Co 11:31-32).
4. Jesus will return visibly at the end of the Great Tribulation, the time of the Antichrist (cf. Rev 19:11-21). His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives and then he will judge the nations. In Zec 14:4-5 we read that he will come *with all his holy ones*. Who is meant by these holy ones? 2Th 1:7-8 speaks of angels, Paul says however in **1Th 3:13** that Christ will come with his *holy ones*. When Paul speaks of holy ones, he always speaks of believers, not angels. The word he uses for angels in 2Th 1:7 is the normal one ἄγγελος (*Angelos* = *messenger, angel*). Rev 19:6-14 seems to confirm this: the bride (i.e. the Church) is already with her Bridegroom in the heavenly realms before the visible return of Christ. In order for Christ to appear with his own, they must logically have been 'taken up' to be with him beforehand. Furthermore the Church must appear before the judgement throne of Christ before the marriage feast of the Lamb in order to receive her wages (the so-called judgement of rewards: cf. 1Co 3:12-14; 2Co 5:10).¹³ This is only possible if the Church is taken up before the visible return of Christ in order then to reign with him on the earth (cf. Rev 5:10).
5. John, in his vision, saw that those given authority to judge were already seated on their thrones when the martyrs of the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev 7:13-14) were raised (**Rev 20:4**). Who are these judges? There is only one sovereign judge, Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has entrusted all judgement (Joh 5:22,27). It pleases the Lord however to let believers participate in the judgement of the world (cf. 1Co 6:2-3). These judges, seated on their thrones before the resurrection of the martyrs of the Great Tribulation (Rev 20:4), must be the holy ones, i.e. the believers. If they themselves had gone through this terrible period of persecution, they would have been killed. If however they are at that time (already) alive then they must have been **taken up already**, i.e. before the Great Tribulation. **Rev 4:4** also indicates this: *The elders* (already glorified believers) seem to be with the Lord before the beginning of the Great Tribulation (which begins chronologically at Rev 6:1). This argument assumes that the judgments set down in Revelation must be considered as chronological.¹⁴
6. Jesus says: *"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed."* (Luk 17:28-30). Lot and his daughters left the town of Sodom before the judgement came (cf. Gen 19:22). If Jesus says that the day of his return will be just like

¹³ More regarding this in the chapter '*The Judgement*'.

¹⁴ This view is preferred in this treatise. Compare my brochure *The Revelation to St. John*.

this then it is possible to conclude that the Church of Jesus (like Lot before the judgement on Sodom) will be 'taken up' before the judgement of the Great Tribulation. The presence of Lot and his family in Sodom had, in a way, delayed God's judgement. Immediately after they left the judgement fell. Could the words of Paul in 2Th 2:6-8 indicate the same thing?

5 As long as the Church of Jesus, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is here on earth the manifestation of the Antichrist (and with it the judgement of the Great Tribulation, the time of the Antichrist) will be held back (cf. ὁ κατέχων [*ho katéchōn* = *he who holds {it} back*] in 2Th 2:6-7).

7. It is noteworthy that none of the letters of the New Testament (which were written for the

10 **Church of Christ**) explicitly mentions the Great Tribulation. Could this be an indication that the Church will not have to go through this time of judgement? The word *Church* (in Greek ἐκκλησία [*ekklēsia*]) is however, mentioned many times in Rev 1–3 but not in chapters 6–18, which describe the events of the Great Tribulation. Rev 4 could also indicate that, at this point of time, the Church will already be in the presence of the Lord,

15 in heaven (see the reference to *the elders*). The description of the Great Tribulation begins in Rev 6. Here the word *Church* no longer occurs. The following verses could be a strong indication that the Church is already with her Lord at this time Rev 4:4; 11:15-17; 12:11-12; 19:1-10.

8. **The two witnesses in Rev 11:2ff** (1260 days, 42 months) and their acts of retaliation (by calling fire from heaven and changing water into blood) remind us more of the times of Moses and Elijah than of the time of grace and of the Church of Jesus. In addition to this we read in **Rev 14:6-7** that during this time of judgement **an angel, flying in mid-air, will proclaim an eternal gospel**. During the epoch of the Church, it is the responsibility of believers (not angels) to spread the *Good News*. Hence, we could conclude that this period,

20 i.e. the time of the Great Tribulation, is a different dispensation to that of the Church of Christ.

9. **Rev 12:10** speaks of those who rejoice over the judgement of the people on earth. Who are they, if not those who had been caught up before the judgement? The following verse confirms that they are Christians. Once again, we may conclude that the rapture of the

30 Church must take place before the time of the Antichrist. We should also mention that the representatives of mid-tribulationism could also use this argument to back up their view.

10. If the rapture of the Church happened in the middle, or at the end of the Great Tribulation, it would be possible to calculate the date of the return of Christ and the rapture of the Church since the duration of the Great Tribulation is clearly defined in a number of

35 passages: Dan 9:27: **one year-week** = 7 years; half of this would be 3½ years. In Dan 7:25; 12:7-11; Rev 11:2-3; 12:6.14; 13:5 the following terms are used for the time of persecution by the Antichrist: (1) **'a time, times, and half a time'** (2) **42 months** (3) **1260 days**. In each case, this corresponds to a period of 3½ years. Dan 9:27 seems to indicate that peace¹⁵ will reign during the first 3½ years (the 70th year-week) as opposed to war, persecution and

40 destruction during the second 3½ years.

2. Mid-tribulationism

Mid-tribulationism is also based on arguments 1-5 above and possibly 9 as well. The final argument (Nr. 10) probably speaks most strongly for pre-tribulationism i.e. against mid- and post-tribulationism. In fact it is exclusively the pre-tribulation interpretation which guarantees

¹⁵ Cf. 1Th 5:1-3. Also compare the type of the Antichrist in the Old Testament, as found in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes in Dan 11:30ff. He first offered a peace agreement to apostate Jews but broke it later in order to proceed to a terrible persecution (cf. 1Ma 1-4).

the unexpectedness of the rapture (cf. Mat 24:37-44; 1Th 5:1-3). Here, however, are four arguments that representatives of mid-tribulationism put forward.

1. It says in Dan 9:27 that the 70th year-week is divided into two halves, i.e. $2 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ years = 7 years. The time of judgement, destruction and persecution of God's people relates primarily to the **second half of the latter (i.e. 70th) year-week in Dan 9:24-27**. For this reason, the Church will only be caught up before the beginning of the second half of the Great Tribulation, i.e. before the 42 months, during which the Antichrist will reign. The pre-tribulationists would say in reference to this, that according to Dan 9:24 all the 70 year-weeks concern Israel and not the Church of Jesus, i.e. that the Church will already be absent during the first half of the 70th year-week.
2. **Rev 11:15-17** has to do with the last (seventh) trumpet, which includes the judgement of the seven bowls of God's wrath i.e. the last of the judgements. At this point of time, the beginning of the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ is already being celebrated in heaven. Because of this, the mid-tribulationists say that the kingdom of Christ will begin during the judgement, i.e. in the middle of the Great Tribulation and so they set the rapture at this point of time (i.e. after the judgements of the seven seals and the first six trumpets). Here are some points to consider: the seventh seal includes (or triggers off) the judgements of the seven trumpets, in the same way the seventh trumpet includes the judgements of the seven bowls of the wrath of God. It cannot unequivocally be said that because, according to Rev 11:15-17, the beginning of the kingdom of our Lord is to be celebrated when the last trumpet sounds, that Christ's kingdom will actually begin before the judgement of the seven bowls. Many commentators explain this passage by saying that the seventh trumpet proclaims in advance the end of this period of judgement, because it triggers off the judgements of the seven bowls. Consequently, the kingdom will not necessarily begin before the judgements of the bowls of God's wrath.
3. **Rev 12:9-12** tells us that the devil, who according to Eph 2:1ff is the ruler of the kingdom of the air, will be hurled to the earth. At last, he will no longer have access to God. This passage isn't referring to the first fall of the devil (the original fall, to which the following passages probably refer: Isa 14:9ff and Eze 28:12ff), because at the moment, he is still our accuser (cf. Job 1; Zec 3:1-2; Mat 26:41; Luk 22:31-32; Jam 4:7; 1Pe 5:8; 1Jo 2:1 etc.). The context shows clearly that this is the end time, the time of the Antichrist, which will last $3\frac{1}{2}$ years (see Rev 12:6.14). The mid-tribulationists set the time for the rapture exactly here, i.e. in the middle of the 7 years of the 70th year-week. I feel that this argument carries considerable weight.
4. The context of **Mat 24** suggests that the rapture of the elect (Mat 24:31) takes place during the time of judgement.

3. Post-tribulationism

1. The chapters of Revelation that deal with the Great Tribulation (namely Rev 6–18 or 19) often speak of saints or ***holy ones*** who are still living on the earth at that time. Who are these *holy ones*, if not the Church of Christ? The post-tribulationists conclude from this that the Church in actual fact has to go through the Great Tribulation (some examples of such passages are Dan 7:21-25; Rev 7:13-14; 12:17; 13:7.10). The answer that the pre- and mid-tribulationists give to this is that these saints or *holy ones* (e.g. Rev 13:7), or *those who had not received the mark of the beast* (Rev 13:15; 20:4) or *those who hold to the testimony of Jesus* (Rev 12:17) are the *martyrs of the Great Tribulation* (cf. Rev 7:14). According to Rev 20:4 we need to differentiate between the holy ones who are already in heaven and sitting on their thrones (the glorified believers of the Church of Christ) and the

martyrs of the Great Tribulation, who will follow them at the end of the Great Tribulation. Rev 20:4 indicates on the strength of this that we have to distinguish between two groups of the redeemed: the Church on the one hand and the martyrs of the Great Tribulation on the other.

- 5 2. In **Mat 24:30-31** we read that at the time of the visible return of Christ (verse 30: *they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds*) the elect will be gathered together by the angels. This clearly contradicts the idea that the rapture of the Church will take place long (many years) before the visible return of Christ. This is without any doubt an important argument for post-tribulationism. Pre- and mid-tribulationists counter this by saying that these elect
10 are those who have come to faith during the time of the Great Tribulation (e.g. through the testimony of the two witnesses in Rev 11:3ff or through the preaching of the eternal gospel by an angel in Rev 14:6-7).
3. As the Book of Revelation deals primarily with the dramatic end of history (from chapter 4 or 6 onwards) it would – so the argument of the post-tribulationists – no longer be of
15 interest to the Church if she were taken up prior to the events described in these chapters. But now – that’s how their argument continues – the Book of Revelation has been written for the Church and therefore cannot only have to do with a time when she is no longer on earth. If the Church, persecuted at the time of the apostle John, would have been given a book which was only valid for the saints of the distant last days of the Great Tribulation, it
20 would have been of very little consolation to her. Pre- and mid-tribulationists would give the following answer to this objection: We also believe that the Book of Revelation has been written for Christians of every age. It happens however, that prophecies are often fulfilled in a cyclical way, in several stages and at different times. Believers of every
25 generation, going through hard times, have been able to find wonderful comfort and salutary warnings in the Book of Revelation. Furthermore of course, this does not hinder the ‘end time believers’ – living before the rapture or after it – from finding more strength and light in this book than previous generations did. The post-tribulationists in fact often
30 accuse the pre-tribulationists of trying to avoid suffering, although both Jesus and the apostles said that all believers must go through suffering and persecution (cf. Joh 15:20 and 2Ti 3:12). Pre-tribulationists, on the other hand, do not maintain that the Church doesn’t have to go through tribulation. They simply believe that she will not have to go through the Great Tribulation, since this is only ordained for Israel as a nation and for the nations of the world but not for the Church of Christ. See the following passages:

- 35 **Jer 30:7** *How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be **a time of trouble for Jacob**, but he will be saved out of it.*
- Dan 9:24** *Seventy ‘sevens’ [year-weeks: in Hebrew שָׁבִיעִים [Schābū^a’]) are decreed for your people [i.e. for Israel] and your holy city [i.e. concerning
40 Jerusalem].*
- Luk 21:22** *For this is the time of punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written.¹⁶*

¹⁶ Cf. Isa 61:1-2 and Luk 4:18-19, where Jesus quotes this passage from the Book of Isaiah. The fact that Jesus only quotes the first part of Isa 61:2 is significant. Why? Jesus was personally involved in preparing the dispensation of the Church, also called the dispensation of grace. When reading the passage from Isaiah he mentioned the part referring to grace only, leaving away the part referring to judgement, i.e. referring to vengeance (61:2b). This clearly points to the fact that this time of judgement has nothing to do with the dispensation of the Church, but with *Israel according to the flesh and the nations*.

Rev 6:16 *They called to the mountains and the rocks. Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!*

In fact, I would dare to ask the question as to whether the Church of Christ has anything to do with the Great Tribulation with regard to her salvation. I do not presume to be able to give a final answer. I do not belong to the commentators who seek to hide their personal opinions, and I do not want to hide it in respect to this particular teaching. I am inclined towards pre-tribulationism, but I would not swear by it... As indicated above it is only pre-tribulationism which does justice to the aspect of the unexpectedness of the rapture.

It is interesting to weigh up the pros and cons of the different positions. May each one draw his own conclusion! It is also ok not to reach to a conclusion at all. Let us not become dogmatic about one position and above all let us respect those who hold another one. As mentioned above we should in no way quarrel about these eschatological issues and certainly not become divisive about them. Hopefully the representatives of all three positions can work together in his service.

C. Who will be 'caught up'?

On the basis of God's Word we can say that all those who belong to the body of Christ will be caught up, i.e. the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ, those who have been born again out of every generation.

1Co 15:51 *Listen I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed...*

1Th 4:16 *...and the dead in Christ will rise first...* [thus all those who belong to Christ]

Col 3:4 *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

All those who are born again will be raised but there will be differences:

1. Some with joy: 2Co 4:17-18; 2Ti 4:8
2. Others with shame: 1Co 3:14-15; 5:5; 1Jo 2:28

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus..." [i.e. until the day of his return] (Phi 1:6)

"Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (2Co 5:5)

D. How will the world react to the rapture of the Church?

Postmillennialists of course don't ask this question; they are convinced that the rapture coincides with the visible return of Christ. This question is however of concern to pre- and mid-tribulationists. Pache says:

Scripture is mute on this point. At most it permits us to establish certain analogies. The taking-up of Enoch does not seem to have been seen by men. The Bible says simply, "Then he was no longer, because God took him" (Gen. 5:24). The departure of Elijah was beheld by no one except, by a special grace, Elisha alone (II Kings 2:10-12). And when Jesus went up into Heaven, His apostles were the only witnesses of it (Acts 1:6, 9). The ascension passed unseen by the entire people. It is allowable to ask whether the Rapture of the believers will not also be done surreptitiously.¹⁷

May I add to this however, that the words of Jesus in Mat 24:40-41 probably relate to this event and therefore many of those who are left behind, will be deeply shocked. We can well imagine that, for those who actually knew that the Lord would one day 'take up' his own but who didn't entrust their lives to him that will be a terrible day.

¹⁷ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 115.

III. Israel and the return of Christ

A. Israel's calling

5 In the beginning, God placed man in the Garden of Eden – Paradise. Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden. Then God raised up Seth. The descendants of Seth however became more and more corrupt and so God judged the earth through the flood. Noah and his family, the only God-fearing people, survived this judgement in the ark (see Gen 6–9). Another judgement, the confusion of languages, following the building of the tower of Babel, was unavoidable since Noah's descendants had also turned away from God (Gen 11). It is noticeable that the scene changes after Gen 11:10: God
10 apparently sets the nations aside for a time. They recede into the background until the day of Pentecost, when the Gospel of Jesus Christ reaches them as well (see Act 10–11: Cornelius and his household).

15 In order to achieve his purposes of salvation God chose a people, that it might convey to the world the Bible and the Messiah. God called Abram, Israel's patriarch: see **Gen 12:1ff**. This calling included in essence the following three promises:

1. **The gift of a country:** Canaan (later cynically called Palestine by the Romans¹⁸).
2. The promise to Abraham that he and his descendants would become **a great nation**.
- 20 3. **The blessing**, which God's chosen people were to pass on, would spread to the whole world.

God repeated this promise to Abraham a number of times (cf. Gen 15:18; 17:3-8 and 22:16-18) and then it was passed onto Isaac, Jacob and their descendants (cf. Gen 48:4; 2Sa 7:16; 25 Psa 89:36-38; Isa 11:11ff; Eze 37 and 47:13 to 48:35 and so on). When the Jews rejected their Messiah, they were temporarily put aside (Rom 9–11). Since Whitsun (Pentecost), there is no longer any difference: whoever believes in Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, is saved (Rom 1:16-17; 10:10-12 and so on). Only when the full number of the Gentiles (people of the nations) is gathered into the Church and Jesus Christ returns, will the promises to Abraham
30 (concerning the Promised Land etc.) be completely fulfilled. The Holy Scriptures say that the conversion of Israel as a nation will coincide with the visible return of Christ: Zec 12:10; Rev 1:7; Rom 11:25-27.

¹⁸ I.e. the country of the Philistines.

B. Has not Israel been rejected and replaced by the Church?

1. The temporary and partial rejection of Israel

5 Just as the Jews rejected their Messiah and crucified him with the consent of the Romans, so God has rejected them:

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” (Mar 12:9). “Therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who produce its fruit.” (Mat 21:43)

10 In the Book of Acts, we can see how the unbelieving Jews were set aside while the Gentiles who gave their lives to Christ were added to the Church. Unfortunately, not many Jews receive the message of the Gospel. Act 13:46 and 28:25-28 illustrate this sad state of affairs.

2. The new people of God

15 Through the coming of Christ, the old covenant was replaced by the new: cf. Heb 7:18-19; 8:6-7.13; 9:15.

a.) The unbelieving Jews don't belong to the true Israel

See for example Rom 2:28-29; 9:1-8.30-32; 10:1-3; 11:11.17-20.

b.) Those who believe in Christ are the spiritual descendants of Abraham

20 Rom 4:11-12.16; Gal 3:7.14.29; 4:25-26.30; Phi 3:3 (cf. Joh 8:39-45).

c.) Jews and Gentiles who have come to faith in Christ make up the people of the new covenant

1Co 10:32; 12:13; Gal 3:28-29; Eph 2:14-16; 3:6.

d.) What is the situation today regarding the Jewish nation?

25 Pache says regarding this:

30 If it is so, we can ask whether, on the one hand, in God's sight the ancient people of Israel (descending from Abraham according to the flesh) any longer has a reason for existence; and on the other hand, should we not take for the Church all of the promises formerly made to Israel in the Scripture, while “spiritualizing them” to our profit? This was often done in the time of the Reformation (and still is today in certain circles). According to this concept, whenever one meets the word *Zion* in the Old Testament, one always sees

there the Church and considers that in the Church are finally fulfilled all of the prophecies relating to Israel. Since the believers in Jesus Christ are from a spiritual point of view the “posterity of Abraham,” it is certain that a great number of the promises of the Old Testament are applicable to them. Although
 5 Paul was the first to reveal fully the mystery of the Church (Eph. 3:3–10), it is certain that the latter was now and then foreseen by the prophets. We have just seen, for example, what was symbolized by Sarah, the free wife of Abraham (Gal. 4:22–25). But it is certainly not acceptable to apply spiritually to the Church all of the blessings pronounced in the Old Testament on the people of
 10 God, *and to reserve for Israel the literal accomplishment of all of the curses*. Besides, when we take the trouble to study in detail *all of the predictions* of Scripture, we soon realize that many of the prophecies can refer only to Israel and not to the Church. It is, in fact, impossible to interpret all of them uniquely in a spiritual and Christian sense. We have seen the astonishingly literal way
 15 that Israel saw many of the ancient predictions fulfilled. We believe that others will be fulfilled in the same way and that the Jewish people has yet an extraordinary future before it.¹⁹

I fully agree with Pache and want to emphasise what he says by pointing out that even in the age of the Church, Scripture clearly distinguishes between Israel as a nation and the Church of
 20 Christ. In this regard cf. passages like 1Co 10:32 and probably also Gal 6:16.²⁰

3. God promises the restoration of his former people

See Luk 21:24 and Act 3:19-21: These passages speak of the end-time restoration of Israel (cf. Act 1:6; Rom 11:1-2.28-29).

25 We find the word ‘*until*’ in the following passages: Mat 23:39; Luk 21:24; Rom 11:25-27. ‘*Until*’ clearly speaks of a point of time after which a new era will begin for Israel and for the whole world.

Paul makes it very clear that even if God has set Israel aside, he has not done so entirely and
 30 certainly not forever.

a.) There is and always will be a ‘*remnant*’ among the Israelites

See Rom 9:28-29; 11:1-5.26; 1Co 10:32; Gal 6:16.

b.) All Israel will finally be saved

35 With reference to this cf. Rom 11:12.15.23-27.31. The covenant, which Paul speaks about in Rom 11, is of course the *New Covenant*, which Jeremiah proclaimed, and which became

¹⁹ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 302-303. In the original French edition there is a reference, in brackets, to the relevant passage in Rom 11:25-27.

²⁰ In my opinion Gal 6:16 should be translated as follows: “*And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God!*” and not: “*...Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God!*” The second translation will, of course, be preferred by the opponents of the doctrine of an end-time restoration for Israel as a nation i.e. the post- and amillennialists. They do not see any future for Israel as a nation because they maintain that the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the Church of Christ. But we must balance this against the words of the apostle Paul in Rom 11:16-31, where he holds out the prospect of a restoration of Israel at the time of the return of Christ.

effective nearly 2000 years ago (cf. Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:7-12). The Israelites will join this covenant as soon as they (finally) convert to Jesus Christ: cf. Zec 12:10 and Rev 1:7; Rom 11:26 (cf. Isa 59:20-21).

c.) The Jewish people will exist until the end of time

- 5 According to Rom 11:25ff, (all) Israel will be converted when Christ returns. At that time *the full number of the gentiles will have been gathered in*, i.e. the remnant of Israel as a nation will turn to the Lord when the Church has reached its full number. The prophets of the Old Testament refer to the same point of time. Here a few examples:
- 10 **Dan 11:41 to 12:1.7** regarding the time of the Antichrist
- Joe 3:1-2.16** regarding the time of the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev 16:16 and 19:11-21)
- 15 **Zec 14:1-5** regarding the moment when Christ appears on the Mount of Olives (cf. Act 1:9-12)

Look up also what Jeremiah prophesied in Jer 31:35-36; 33:24-26. Pache in conclusion makes the following comment:

- 20 As a conclusion to this chapter we can say this: although from the point of view of eternal salvation there shall no longer be Jew nor Greek, Israel exists, nevertheless, as an earthly people chosen by God. Jesus Christ came to establish the promises made to the fathers, and the advantage of the Jews remains “very great from every point of view,” for the unbelief of some has
- 25 not destroyed the faithfulness of God (Rom. 15:8; 3:1, 3). Also, the Lord declares, solemnly to Israel, “there is hope for thy future” (Jer. 31:17). The divine plan with reference to the Jews as it is revealed by Scripture shall not fail to be completed.²¹

- 30 I believe that as soon as the full number is gathered into the Church, God will work again in a special way on and with Israel as a nation. However, this refers only to the remnant of Israel who has believed on the Messiah, on Jesus Christ who died for the whole world. Rom 11:25-29 and several of the prophets of the Old Testament show clearly that this will come to pass when Christ visibly returns to earth (cf. Zec 12:10, also the whole of Zec 14 and Rev 1:7).

C. The worldwide dispersion of Israel

35 1. Why were they dispersed?

In Lev 26:14ff Yahweh warned his people of the consequences of disobedience:

²¹ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 306.

Lev 26:33 *I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins.*

5 In fact, it wasn't only a dispersion, but also a persecution:

Deu 28:65 *Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing and a despairing heart.*

10

See in this respect also Isa 6:11-13; Jer 29:16-19; 50:7; Zec 7:14. Idolatry (cf. Isa 27:9) and disobedience to Yahweh led to the judgement of the dispersion of Israel.

2. Where were they dispersed to?

15 The Northern Kingdom of Israel was led into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C approximately. Later the Southern Kingdom (Judah and Benjamin) suffered the same fate. Its inhabitants were deported to Babylon at three different times between 605 and 585 BC. From there they were allowed to return home in stages from the year 538 BC (cf. 2Ki 17:23-41 and 2Ch 36:18-23). In the year 70 AD²² practically the entire Jewish nation was scattered throughout the whole world. Hence the term '*a worldwide dispersion*'!

20

Apparently a million Jews lost their lives in the year 70 AD. Many Jews were also killed during the Crusades, which were instigated by the Roman Catholic Church. They were accused of being "*murderers of God*".²³ In the year 1298 about another million Jews were massacred. In 1348 yet another million suffered the same fate. The Nazis exterminated about 25 six million Jews during the Second World War (1939-1945).

3. How were they dispersed?

Hos 3:4 *For the Israelites will live for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.*

30 Hos 3:5 then speaks of the restoration of Israel.

During the dispersion the Jews had to forgo everything that they considered holy. That however isn't everything. **2Co 3:14-16** says that Israel is stricken with spiritual blindness (their minds were hardened). That means that the Israelites still persist in the rejection of their 35 Messiah, i.e. Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament it even says that the Israelites will be an object of cursing in the lands where they settle (cf. Jer 29:18-19; Zec 8:13a).

4. What is God's relationship to Israel today?

God has not forgotten his people, rather he is watching over them: cf. Lev 26:44-45; Jer 30:11; Eze 11:16-17.

²² Following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus.

²³ The Church of Rome accused them of having killed Christ, the Son of God. Hence the expression 'murderers of God'. By the way, Hitler and his followers used the same argument to justify their extermination of the Jews.

Zec 2:8 (12) *...for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.*

5 All nations who have persecuted the Jews (or who still persecute them), will be judged by God. This promise was given to Abraham their patriarch:

Gen 12:3 *...and whoever curses you I will curse (cf. Est 6:13)*

D. The return of Israel

1. Returning from where?

10 **Isa 11:11-12** *...from the four corners of the earth...*

Isa 43:5-6 *...I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north "Give them up!" and to the south "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth.*

15

Jer 29:14 *"...and I will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you", declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

20

Cf. Deu 30:4-5; Eze 34:11-13.

25 Israel's promised return was of course only partially fulfilled through the return from the Babylonian exile. The Jewish people are still waiting for the complete fulfilment of this promise. I am one of those commentators who see the present happenings in the Middle East as harbingers of the end time restoration of Israel.

2. Returning how?

30 God himself will bring Israel out of exile:

Jer 30:3 *The days are coming declares the Lord, when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave to their forefathers to possess, says the Lord.*

35 **Eze 39:25-27** *Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name...*

40 God will, however, make use of the nations to bring his people back into the Promised Land:

Isa 14:1-2

The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob. Nations will take them and bring them to their own place. And the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in the Lord's land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors.

Cf. Jer 50:4; Eze 37:15-22 and Hos 2:2.

3. Returning from where?

10 All the tribes of Israel will return to the Holy Land. At the end of this return, there will no longer be any Jews among the nations:

Eze 39:28

I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind.

15 **Amo 9:9**

For I will give the command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve and not a pebble will reach the ground.

20 They cannot all return at the same time because there isn't enough food for all of them in the country. They will rather come one after another. So there is much work to be done:

Isa 49:17-19

Your sons hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you. Lift up your eyes and look around: all your sons gather and come to you. As surely as I live, declares the Lord, you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on like a bride. Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away.

30 **Zec 10:10**

I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them.

There are unfortunately many commentators (also among the Evangelicals) who deny that Israel will be restored at the end of time: e.g. the Roman Catholic Church, which considers itself as the spiritual Israel. Those theologians, who deny that there will be a kingdom of Christ on earth after his return, usually also rule out the idea of a national restoration of Israel at the end of time. For them, the return of Christ will inaugurate the new creation (new heaven, new earth, New Jerusalem). There is no place for Israel as a nation in their doctrine of Eschatology. If one asks them how they interpret the passages in the Old Testament which speak of the final return of Israel to the Promised Land, some of them will give the answer that these promises were fulfilled when the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile in the 6th and 5th centuries before Christ. Others maintain that these prophetic passages are to be interpreted spiritually. They consider that these promises have been fulfilled through the conversion of Jews to Christ following Pentecost. Some of these commentators, because of Paul's assertions in Rom 11 (especially verses 25-29), concede that the prophecies indicate a fulfilment at the end of time. They have to face the following problem: refusing the idea of the millennium following the return of Christ, they have to teach that this massive conversion

of Jews will take place before the return of Christ (cf. Rom 11:26: πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ [*pas Israēl*] = *the whole of Israel*). The following objections have to be raised:

- 5 1. The above-mentioned passages (one could add others) say that it is a case of the return of the *whole of Israel* (Judah and Ephraim: cf. for instance Eze 37). Only a part of the Jewish people returned to the Promised Land from the Babylonian exile.
- 10 2. In several passages of Scripture it says that Israel will return to the Promised Land *for ever* and will never be driven from it again: cf. Jer 31:40; Eze 37:25; Amo 9:15. History shows however, that after the return from the Babylonian exile, the Jews were again driven out of their land by the Romans. This time they were dispersed throughout the world. For someone who is convinced that the prophetic Word will be fulfilled the following is clear: All the passages which speak of a final worldwide return of Israel to the Promised Land will be fulfilled when Christ returns to set up his kingdom on earth. These passages were not fulfilled at the time of the return from Babylon (cf. Rev 5:10: *on the earth*).²⁴
- 15 3. The events of our day also support this interpretation: does the continuous return of the Jews to their country not mean that these promises (1) weren't fulfilled through the return from the Babylonian exile (2) nor were they fulfilled in a spiritual sense through the Church of Christ, but rather that their fulfilment has begun through the re-establishment of Israel as a nation, at the end time, and that it will culminate in a complete fulfilment?
- 20 4. The words in Rom 11:25-27; Zec 12:10 and Rev 1:7 point without any doubt to the fact that the final restoration of Israel will coincide with the return of Christ (*the deliverer will come from Zion*).

4. Returning for how long?

25 This time *forever*: cf. Jer 31:40; Eze 37:25-26; Amo 9:15.

5. Returning to where?

The people of Israel will return to the land of their ancestors: Jer 16:15; 30:3; Eze 37:25.

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|---|
| 30 | To their own land: | Eze 36:24; 37:14.21; 39:28. |
| | To Zion: | Jer 3:14; cf. Isa 24:23; 27:13. |
| | To Jerusalem: | Joe 3:17.20 (some translations 4:17.20); Zec 8:8. |
| | New boundaries: | Eze 47:13–48:35. |

35 Many other passages speak of this. In short, the people of Israel will return to the country from which they were driven out (cf. Jer 29:14).

6. What is the present spiritual condition of Israel?

Eze 37 speaks of the present spiritual condition of the people of Israel as well as their regeneration and return to their own land in the last days. The dry bones are being brought together at the present time, but as Eze 37:8 says: *there was no breath in them*. It could be

²⁴ Compare with the discussion and arguments in the chapter '*The Millennium*'.

translated: *and there was no spirit in them*. In the Hebrew text there is no article before 'Spirit' (רוּחַ [Rū^ach]).²⁵ In Hebrew, the definite article is used fairly freely.

5 The Jewish nation (that is Israel according to the flesh) is spiritually blind until this day. A veil covers their hearts and their spiritual eyes are blind (cf. 2Co 3:12-16).

E. Israel's conversion

The purpose of all God's ways with the Israelites is that they will come to know and receive Jesus Christ, the Messiah. After the Great Tribulation, which will be a terrible time for Israel,²⁶ the Lord will come to redeem his people.

10 1. Israel will be converted

Zec 12:10 *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son.*

Joh 19:37 says that Zechariah's prophecy was fulfilled at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. Rev 1:7 shows however that this prophecy, and hence the final restoration of the remnant of Israel, will find its full and final fulfilment when Christ returns *on the clouds*.

20 *On that day* the whole of Israel (Rom 11:25-27; i.e. all those who have survived the judgement of the Great Tribulation, cf. Zec 13:7-9) will experience what previously only individual Jews (through their conversion to Christ) experienced – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ Israel, as a nation, will finally turn to the Messiah and be converted.

25 **Rom 11:26** *...and so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: the deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.*

Zec 3:9-10 *...and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day...*

30 Cf. also Eze 36:31 and Hos 3:4-5.

2. Israel will be forgiven

Jer 31:34 *...for I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.*

²⁵ The Hebrew is: רוּחַ אֵין בָּהֶם.

²⁶ Cf. Jer 30:7: *the tribulation of Jacob*. In Zec 13:7-9 we read that two thirds of the people of Israel will perish at that time.

²⁷ Cf. Joe 2:28-32 [other translations 3:1-5]. The events described in verses 30-31 (cosmic phenomena) seem to go beyond what happened at Pentecost and will probably only be completely fulfilled at the return of Christ.

Jer 50:20 *In those days, at that time, declares the Lord, search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare.*

5 **Zec 13:1** *On that day a fountain will be opened up to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.*

3. Israel will receive new life

At that time, Israel will at last experience that which every Christian experiences at conversion: the new birth.

10

Eze 37:14 *I will put my Spirit in you and will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.*

15 Verses 11-13 of the chapter show clearly that this prophecy concerns Israel as a nation.

Eze 36:26-27 *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh...*

20 The Israelites will finally succeed in living according to the Law, i.e. in what they have tried to do for hundreds of years. Until this day, they still believe they can do it in their own strength.

4. God will make a new covenant with Israel

25 **Jer 31:31-34** *Behold, the time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...*

Jer 32:39-40 *...and I will make an everlasting covenant with them...*

It will be the same covenant that the Lord has made with the Church of Christ!

5. Israel will experience liberation

- 30
1. Israel will begin to sing songs of triumph: Isa 12:4-6; 26:1-4; 35:10; Jer 30:19.
 2. Israel will at last be able to enjoy freedom: Isa 40:2; Jer 30:8.
 3. Israel will live in peace and security: Isa 32:18; Jer 30:10; Eze 34:27-28.
 4. Israel will be comforted: Isa 29:22; 61:7; 65:16; 66:10-14; Jer 31:12.
 - 35 5. Israel will be able to rejoice in the presence and love of the Lord: Hos 2:18.21; 14:4; Zep 3:14-17.

6. God will glorify himself through Israel

Jer 33:9 *Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise, and honour before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they*

will be in awe and tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.

Eze 36:22

5

Therefore say to the house of Israel: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.

10 The name and honour of God is all important. That also helps us to understand Paul's doxology after his discourse about Israel in Rom 9–11:

Rom 11:33-36

15

O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths past tracing out! . . . For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

IV. The nations and the return of Christ

A. The history of the nations

The judgements of the flood and tower of Babel (Gen 6–8 and 11) were not enough to persuade the human race (peoples and nations) to turn from the worship of idols. Hence, God put the nations aside and chose one man (Abram) from one of the peoples (from Ur of the Chaldeans) who worshipped other gods (cf. Jos 24:2). Abraham is the ancestor of Israel. Salvation comes from this people (Joh 4:22), because Jesus, the Son of God, was born as a Jew (cf. Gal 4:4–5). If the people of Israel had remained faithful, God would have been able to set up his kingdom through them. The nations stepped into the background from the time of Abraham until 586 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. The Jewish people were unfaithful and rejected a theocracy of Yahweh, and so they lost their independence and were driven into captivity. God let the heathen nations determine what happened in the world and they trampled **the Holy Land** under foot. Jesus called this period of time, which lasts from the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar until the return of Christ, *‘the times of the Gentiles’*.²⁸

“...Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” (Luk 21:24)

The throne of David has and will be vacant during this long period of time. This period will come to an end when Jesus Christ, the Son of David (cf. Rev 5:5) returns to finally set up his kingdom on earth (cf. Rev 5:10; 19:11ff; Zec 14:3ff etc.). The question, which the disciples put to Jesus in Act 1:6 was aimed at finding out when this time of the nations (gentiles) would come to an end.

Pache²⁹ gives us an interesting outline of the times of the nations. I will make a few additions to it:

1. ***The beginning of the nations:*** from Cain³⁰ until the Tower of Babel (Gen 4–11). Israel (from the time of Abraham) is a sort of parentheses in the *time of the nations*.
2. ***The culminating point of the time of the nations (gentiles):*** The four kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7, from Babylon until Rome, i.e. from about 600 BC until the return of Christ (cf. Dan 7:12–13.26–27). The Church of Christ is a sort of parenthesis in the time of the nations. Scripture calls it the *‘time of grace’* or *‘the day of salvation’*.
3. ***The end of the nations:*** The 3 ½ years of the reign of the Antichrist, the judgement of the great whore (prostitute) of Babylon, and Armageddon. The following passages show that the Antichrist will be able to entangle all nations in the battle of rebellion against God and

²⁸ Greek: καιροὶ ἐθνῶν (*kairoi ethnōn*).

²⁹ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 143.

³⁰ When Pache wrote *‘from Cain [onward]’* he may have remembered that Cain had moved to another place. From then on we hear about *‘Sethites’* and *‘Cainites’*.

- Christ: Dan 11:40-45; Rev 13; 16:12-16; 19:19. Christ will then, through his Parousia, put an end to the Antichrist as well as to the nations (2Th 2:8; Rev 19:19-21). The millennial reign of Christ will end the dominion of the nations (gentiles) and the restoration of Israel will take place (cf. Zec 14:8-16). On that day Christ will rule with *an iron sceptre* (cf. Rev 12:5; 2:26-27) to set up his earthly kingdom. We find the same expression in Rev 19:15; indicating that this kingdom begins with the return of Christ, therefore it cannot be applied to the dispensation of the Church of Christ. The chapter about the millennium will provide more information on this.
- 10 The fact that there is no racial distinction in the Church of Christ adds weight to the view that the dispensation of the Church is a special one (indeed): whoever believes will be saved whether he be Jew or Gentile: cf. Rom 1:16; 10:12-13 etc. Israel as a nation is put aside until the time when the fullness of the gentiles or nations has been gathered into the Church. May I repeat, this dispensation ends with the return of Christ because Israel as a nation will only then accept him as the Messiah: cf. Zec 12:10; Rev 1:7. During the millennium, Israel will again play a special role.

B. The Antichrist

1. Who is the Antichrist?

- The Antichrist is the last great ruler who will hold sway over mankind i.e. the nations. He will instigate them to a final rebellion against God and Christ. God sent his Son into the World to redeem fallen humanity. The Son is *the perfect Human Being*. The majority of mankind, in particular Israel, have rejected him (cf. Joh 1:5.10-11). Jesus predicted that if another were to come they (the Jews) would receive him (cf. Joh 5:43). This shows what *Antichrist* means. The Greek word ἀντίχριστος (*antíkhristos*) means '*he who is against Christ*' or rather '*he who puts himself in the place of Christ*' (cf. 1Jo 2:18; 2Th 2:3-4). Some think that the Antichrist merely represents *an evil system* or *a collective spirit of evil*, which will manifest itself more in the last days. I believe though that many biblical passages lead us to see the Antichrist as a real person.

2. Will the Antichrist be an actual person?

- 30 The **apostle John** sees the Antichrist as a person: cf. 1Jo 2:18-19. The end time Antichrist is foreshadowed in redemptive history by Antiochus Epiphanes (cf. Dan 8:9-26; 11:21-35), but also others: cf. 1Jo 2:18-19.22; Mat 24:5.24. In 2Jo 7 we read that the characteristic feature of the Antichrist is that he rejects the coming of Jesus Christ into the world in the flesh (cf. 1Jo 4:1ff). The **apostle Paul** gives the Antichrist names that can only be used for a person: cf. 35 2Th 2:3-4.8. Jesus gave Judas, his betrayer, also the name '*son of destruction*' [or *perdition*] (cf. Joh 17:12). A number of passages in **Daniel** suggest that he is a person: cf. Dan 7:24-26; 8:23-25. In Dan 9:26 we read of a *ruler* and *destroyer*: cf. also Dan 11:36.38.41.45. In **Revelation** he is called *the beast* (in Greek τὸ θηρίον [to thērion], cf. Rev 13:1ff; 17:8ff; 19:19-20; 20:10). This contrasts with Jesus Christ, *the Lamb* (cf. Rev 5:6ff; 6:16; 14:1; 17:14; 40 21:22-27). Rev 17 shows clearly that the beast is a king, i.e. a person (cf. verses 9-12).

3. Is it possible to speak of a satanic '*trinity*'?

It is better to use the expression 'trinity' exclusively for the union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one God. With reference to the three satanic persons, we prefer to use the expression '*satanic triplet*'.

5

1. Just as **God the Father** sent his Son (Joh 3:16), so **Satan, the father of lies** (Joh 8:44), will send the Antichrist (2Th 2:9; Rev 13:4), the **son of destruction** (2Th 2:3).
2. Just as **Christ** received his power from his heavenly Father (Joh 5:31ff; 14:10 etc.), so also will the **Antichrist** receive his power from the devil, the dragon (Rev 13:4; 2Th 2:9).
- 10 3. Just as **the Holy Spirit** glorified the Son (Joh 16:13-15), so also will the False Prophet glorify the Antichrist (Rev 13:11ff).

4. The Antichrist's deception

Through deception, Satan brought about the fall of Adam and Eve: cf. Gen 3; 2Co 11:3. He masqueraded as an angel of light and his servants, and messengers do the same (2Co 11:14-15). The Lord (Mat 7:21-23; 24:4-5.11.23-25), the apostle Paul (2Th 2:9-12; Act 20:29-30) and John (1Jo 4:1-3; Rev 13:3-4.11-15) warn us about these deceptions. There have been false prophets and false messiahs ('false christs') all through the ages. They deceive people through flattering words or even through miracles, but neither beautiful words nor miracles guarantee that someone is a messenger of God. The devil and his servants can also perform miracles. For this reason Jesus tells us that we will know them by their fruit (Mat 7:20) and Paul admonishes us to test everything (1Th 5:21).

15

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5. Where will the Antichrist come from?

Some commentators think that the Antichrist of the end time will be a Jew. Because of Gen 49:16-17, Irenaeus (180 AD) thought that he would come from the tribe of Dan because this tribe is not mentioned in the list of the 12 tribes in Rev 7:4-8. Jerome (i.e. Hieronymus, 350-420 AD) said that the Antichrist would be the only Jew to rule over the whole world. Some maintain that the Antichrist must be a Jew because otherwise the Jews would never make a covenant with him (cf. Dan 9:27). The example of the godless pagan monarch Antiochus Epiphanes of the Seleucid Dynasty shows the weakness of this argument. Many Jews made a bond with him in spite of his being a pagan (cf. Dan 11:30-33; 1Ma 1-4). Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin and many others were convinced that the Pope was the Antichrist. I personally do not agree with this hypothesis.³¹ Others thought of Nero, Hitler or other men who have shown themselves as especially anti-Jewish or anti-Christian. I see all these people, like Antiochus Epiphanes, as harbingers of the Antichrist of the end time.³²

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In my opinion, it is clear from the relevant Scriptures that the Antichrist will emerge from the kingdom, which is symbolised by the fourth beast in Daniel's vision: Dan 7:7-8 and 19-25. The passages in Dan 7:13.25-27 (together with the parallel ones in Dan 12:7-13 and Rev 13:1ff) clearly show that in this context, it is a case of the Antichrist of the end times. The fourth beast in Dan 7 represents without any doubt the Roman Empire. In Dan 7 and Rev 13 and 17 we read that the 10 horns (representing 10 kings) will rule together for a 'short time'

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³¹ For reasons, please, refer to the chapter '*The Whore of Babylon*' below.

³² Cf. my commentary on the book of Daniel (chapter 11 in particular).

i.e. for 3 ½ years. In this regard, it should also be clear that it is not a matter of the Rome of Jesus' time but rather that Rome will again make an appearance during the last days (*Roma Renata*). The following passages support such an interpretation:

- 5 1. **Dan 7:13.25-26:** This ruler will only be destroyed through the appearing of the Son of Man on the clouds, i.e. at the time of the return of Christ. The passages 2Th 2:8 and Rev 19:11-21 support this.
- 10 2. **Dan 2:** The fourth part of the statue (iron = Rome, similar to the fourth beast in Dan 7 with teeth of iron = Rome) is followed by a fifth section, the feet and the toes consist of a mixture of iron and clay. The ten toes refer to the end time, like the ten horns in Dan 7, Rev 13 and 17. In Dan 2 we read that the statue will be destroyed by a rock cut out of a mountain. This rock points to the returning Christ, who will destroy the Antichrist and his allies (cf. the kingdom of Christ **on earth** in Dan 2:35; Zec 14:9; Rev 5:10).
- 15 3. The fact, that Jesus quotes Dan 9:27 in **Mat 24:15** (i.e. in his discourse about the end time) indicates that the destructive ruler is yet to come.
4. **Rev 13:3-4** suggests likewise that the beast, the Antichrist, will emerge from a kingdom that existed previously (note the fatal wound on the head that had been healed).
5. **Rev 17:7-11** states, that the beast emerges from a kingdom which *was*, *which is no longer*, *but which is to reappear*.
- 20 6. *Last but not least:* **Dan 11:40-45** seems to indicate that the evil ruler, the Antichrist, will come from the West. The passage deals with the last battle, in which the Antichrist will be killed, and shows that armies are coming from the *South*, the *North* and the *East*. The evil ruler, the Antichrist, is a different one. In the end, we are left with the *West*.
- 25 These passages of Scripture let us assume that the Antichrist arises out of the Roman Empire, which is to re-emerge at the end of time. The small horn grows out of the forth beast (Dan 7:8.19-25), which can be identified with Rome because of the historical chronology.
- 30 Since we read in Rev 17:8-11 that the beast (the Antichrist) arises out of the abyss, (abyssos) there are speculations that the Antichrist will not be a normal human being. Some people think that he (also called the *son of perdition*) might be a satanic-demonic incarnation (an imitation of the incarnation of Jesus, the Son of Man). There is another detail which could be found to support this hypothesis: according to Rev 19:19-20 and 20:10 the Antichrist (together with the False Prophet) will be judged before the millennium begins, i.e. before the judgement of the White Throne (where the unbelievers will be judged: cf. Rev 20:11-15) and will be cast into the lake of fire. This could be taken as an indication that the Antichrist will not be an ordinary person. By the way, in Rev. 9:1ff we read indeed of demons (i.e. fallen angels) being released out of the abyss in order to plague unbelievers for a certain time (5 months). In verse 11 it says that the angel Apollyon (Greek, meaning *destroyer*) is their ruler.
- 35 40 This shows that these evil beings are demons, i.e. evil spirits (fallen angels). Hence, we could ask ourselves whether a fallen angel might appear as the Antichrist. But we have to ask ourselves also, whether Satan could have so much authority, (i.e. whether God would allow it) as to imitate the mystery of the incarnation. We have to realise that here we are moving in the realms of speculation and that we have to leave these questions open.

45 6. What does the number 666 mean?

It is the number of the beast, i.e. the Antichrist (cf. Rev 13:18). In bygone days, many suggestions and explanations have been put forward. Here are some of them:

1. If you add six of the seven Roman numerals, then you get 666! I = 1, V = 5, X = 10, L = 50, C = 100, D = 500: added up 666! This leads to the conclusion that the Roman system or its emperor is the Antichrist. Without doubt an interesting one.
2. A = 100, B = 101, C = 102... etc.: Adding the numeric value of the letters of the alphabet in this way **Hitler's name** comes to 666 as well:

	H	=	107	}	Therefore people said: Hitler is the Antichrist! Now we know that he too was only a precursor of the true Antichrist.
	I	=	108		
	T	=	119		
10	L	=	111		
	E	=	104		
	R	=	<u>117</u>		
			666		
			===		

3. In his commentary on Revelation, Alexander³³ points out that the *beast* (to *tērion*) is mentioned 36 times which has led to the following speculation: 36 is the mathematical square of 6, and when adding the numbers from 1 to 36 you get 666 as well: 1+2+3+4... + 36 = 666! We admit that this is very interesting – but can hardly say any more.

Regarding further hypotheses, please, refer to my commentary on Revelation. I wonder whether we can explain this mysterious number in the following way:

In Rev 13:18 we read that the **number 6 is man's number**. It underlines the limitation of man. **The number 7** on the other hand **is a divine number**. It speaks about the perfect nature of God. In his megalomania, the Antichrist will declare himself to be God (cf. 2Th 2:3-4). He will attempt to reach divine perfection but will not succeed. He will be very powerful, this number 6, but he will never be like God. He will never reach the number of perfection, i.e. 7: cf. the 7 horns and the 7 eyes of the Lamb in Rev 5:6 which symbolize the omnipotence and omniscience of Christ. Satan will raise the *man of sin* (the Antichrist) to the apex of his power. In Rev 13 we read six times the expression, '**was given to him**'. The beast was given the power to usurp the earthly throne of Christ. We may ask whether 666 (= 3 times the number 6) has to do with the three persons of the satanic triplet mentioned in Rev 16:13³⁴ which will oppose the thrice holy and perfect God (one 7 for God the Father, one for God the Son, and one for God the Holy Spirit)? **666 ≠ 777!**

7. How powerful will the Antichrist be?

a.) He will have supernatural diabolic power

Cf. Rev 13:2; 17:8; 2Th 2:9-10 (κατ' ἐνέργειαν τοῦ Σατανᾶ [*kat' enérgeian tou Satana*] = *by the power of Satan*).

³³ John H. Alexander, *L'Apocalypse verset par verset*, 4th ed. (Geneva: La Maison de la Bible, 1986), pp. 261-263.

³⁴ The satanic triplet: **one 6** for the **dragon**, the devil, wanting to be worshipped like God (cf. Mat 4:9); **another 6** for the **beast**, the Antichrist, who will, as a false messiah, oppose Christ, the Son of God, and the **third 6** for the False Prophet, who will promote the Antichrist, glorifying him before men so that they will worship him.

b.) God will allow him to establish his empire

Rev 13:2.5-7; 2Th 2:9-11; cf. Rev 12:12; 17:17 (cf. also Isa 10:5-7.12: God uses Assyria as a rod to discipline his unfaithful people).

c.) In the beginning he seems to derive his power from the fourth empire mentioned in the book of Daniel

As mentioned above, this empire will be the re-established Roman Empire of the end time: Dan 7:7-8.23-25; cf. Rev 13:1-3; 17:7ff. Whether this empire with the ten horns is to be identified with the *European Union* or with *NATO*, as some commentators suggest, I do not know. But I do know (on the basis of Holy Scripture) that it will consist of an alliance of ten empires (or kings: cf. Dan 7:7.24; Rev 17:12) which will arise out of the former Roman Empire.

d.) He will extend his power by brutal conquest

Cf. Dan 7:7; 11:36-45; Rev 13:4.

e.) His dominion will extend over the whole world

Cf. Dan 7:23; 2Th 2:4; Rev 13:3-8.15-17.

8. What is the attitude that the Antichrist will assume toward God?

Arrogance: Dan 7:25; 11:36-37; 2Th 2:4; Rev 13:5-6.

9. What is the attitude that the Antichrist will assume toward men?

He will persecute the Christians and Jews living at the time of the Great Tribulation: Dan 7:21.25; 9:27 (Israel); Rev 12:13-15 (the woman = Israel); Rev 12:17 (those who maintain the testimony of Jesus = Christians). With regard to the Christians, i.e. the martyrs of the Great Tribulation, please, read Rev 7:13-14; 13:7-10; 20:4.

10. What is the attitude that the Antichrist will assume toward the whore of Babylon?

Rev 17 indicates the following: the whore mentioned in verses 1-3 is seated on the beast. Later on, the beast destroys the whore (see verses 16-17). Pache³⁵ thinks that Rev 17 suggests that the beast uses the whore of Babylon in order to rise to power.³⁶ But when he has attained dominion over the whole world he will (after having persecuted the Jews and the Christians) proceed to eliminate the whore of Babylon, the false religion, to get rid of her so to say. Why? Presumably because he himself wants to be worshipped as God (cf. 2Th 2:4; Rev 13:8.12.15).

³⁵ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 220-221.

³⁶ I think that Rev 17:16-18 favours this interpretation.

11. How long will the regime of the Antichrist last?

In the Bible, we find four expressions, i.e. numbers that answer this question.

a.) 'A time, times and half a time'

5 Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14. Parallel expressions show that it means $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, i.e. *a time, two times³⁷ and half a time*.

b.) The half-week

10 In Dan 9:24-27 seventy 'weeks' (in Hebrew שבועות [*schābū^a*] = *week*) are mentioned. The majority of commentators say that these weeks mean *year-weeks*, i.e. 70 x 7 years (not weeks of seven days).³⁸ In Dan 9:24-27 the 70 year-weeks are divided into three parts: 7 + 62 + 1 = 70. Verse 27 shows that the last year-week is divided into two parts, one half corresponding to $3\frac{1}{2}$ years.³⁹

c.) 42 months

Rev 11:2 and 13:5: In the Jewish calendar, each month has 30 days, hence 42 months amount exactly to $3\frac{1}{2}$ years.

15 d.) 1260 days

Rev 11:3 and 12:6: when counting, as the Jews did, each year to have 360 days, then 1260 days correspond exactly to $3\frac{1}{2}$ years.

20 We may ask why God lets us know the precise length of the reign of the Antichrist. In any case, it is good to know that God limits the time of his reign. It may be that Jesus was referring to this when he said (in Mat 24:22), if those days were not shortened no one would survive. These words will be a special encouragement to those who will have to go through this terrible time, hoping in spite of everything for God to intervene.

25 12. What will be the end of the Antichrist and how will he be punished?

He will be destroyed and cast into hell (the lake of fire): 2Th 2:8; Rev 19:20 and 20:10.

³⁷ In Hebrew and Aramaic the (grammatical) dual form.

³⁸ Cf. the Sabbath and Jubilee Years in the Law of Moses.

³⁹ For more information, please, turn to the discussion of the 70 year-weeks of Daniel in my commentary on the Prophet Daniel, or in my master's thesis '*2 Thessaloniens 2:1-12 – Commentaire exégétique et théologique*', defended at the Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique, Vaux-sur-Seine (France), March 1990, pp. 62-85.

C. The False Prophet

1. The Person of the False Prophet

Pache says by way of introduction:

5 ALONGSIDE OF THE ANTICHRIST, Biblical prophecy places a person who
will serve him as a sort of religious prime minister (if we dare say it, as an
Aaron acting beside Moses). Jesus announced on several occasions the coming
of false prophets as well as false christs (Matt. 24:5, 11, 24, etc.). At the time
when the greatest and last of the Antichrists appears there will also arise the
10 worst of the false prophets. It seems certain that this person will indeed be a
man in flesh and bone even as the Antichrist.⁴⁰

2. The second beast of Rev 13 represents the False Prophet

It is primarily Rev 13:11-17 that speaks about the False Prophet of the end time:

- 15 1. The second beast with 2 horns. It is, as Rev 13:11 says, *like a lamb*, but in actual fact it is
the *False Prophet* mentioned by this name in Rev 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10.
2. The first beast (Rev 13:1-10) is simply called '*the beast*' (in Greek τὸ θηρίον [to thērion]).
This one of the two beasts mentioned in Rev 13 is the Antichrist. The other beast,
mentioned in Rev 13:11-17 represents the False Prophet.

20 3. What do we know about the origin of the False Prophet?

Here once more we have to differentiate between several hypotheses:

- 25 1. The beast, the Antichrist, mentioned in Rev 13:1-10, emerges *out of the sea* (Rev 13:1).
According to Rev 17:2.15, *the sea* (the waters) symbolises the nations of the world. The
second beast, the one mentioned in Rev 13:11-17, the False Prophet, comes *out of the*
earth (Rev 13:11). If the sea represents the nations of the world, what does *the earth*
represent? Some commentators say that it represents the Jews, from which the False
Prophet should arise, while the sea refers to the nations from whom the Antichrist is to
30 arise.
2. Others presume that the continuously restless sea represents the political world, which is
shaken repeatedly by revolutions, while the earth represents the religious world because it
is built on a more solid foundation.
3. Cf. IV.B.5 above. '*Where will the Antichrist come from?*' There I mention the hypothesis
35 of the Antichrist (and consequently also the False Prophet) being a demonic incarnation.

⁴⁰ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 207.

All these attempts of interpretation may be interesting, but they are merely hypotheses.

4. What is the meaning of the outward form of the beast, which has two horns, is in appearance like a lamb but speaks like a dragon?

5 The description of the False Prophet in Rev 13:11ff reminds us of the following words of Jesus:

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them.”
(Mat 7:15-16; cf. Act 20:29, where Paul also calls the enemies of the Church of Christ *wolves*.)

The great False Prophet will pretend to be an ‘innocent lamb’, but in reality, inwardly, he will be like a dragon. In Revelation we find that Jesus Christ is the Lamb (cf. Rev 5:6.12), while the dragon is identified with the devil (cf. Rev 12:9; see also 2Co 11:13-15 and Joh 8:44).

5. Analogies between the False Prophet and the Holy Spirit

15

1. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the divine Trinity (cf. Mat 28:19). The False Prophet is the third person of the satanic triplet (cf. Rev 16:13).
2. The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit (cf. Psa 51:13). Out of the mouth of the False Prophet proceeds an unclean spirit (cf. Rev 16:13).
- 20 3. The Holy Spirit does not speak of himself, but glorifies Jesus Christ, the Son of God (cf. Joh 16:13-14). The False Prophet acts on behalf of the Antichrist and exercises all his power in his presence (cf. Rev 13:12).
4. Jesus performed his miracles through the Spirit of God in order to demonstrate his divine origin: cf. Mat 12:28 and Joh 5:36. The False Prophet performs great miracles in order to display the supernatural authority of the Antichrist.⁴¹
- 25

6. What will the False Prophet do?

1. The False Prophet will be the right hand of the Antichrist: Rev 13:12; cf. 1Jo 2:18.
2. He will deceive the people by performing great miracles: Rev 13:12-13.15.
3. The False Prophet will instigate terrible persecution: Rev 13:16-17.
- 30 4. Pache suggests that the False Prophet might be the head of ‘Babylon the Great’ and that the two will have their seat in Rome,⁴² i.e. in the capital of the re-established Roman Empire. I am afraid I find it difficult to support this hypothesis, because we read in Rev 17:15-18 that the Antichrist will destroy the whore of Babylon. It would mean that the Antichrist would destroy the institution, which the False Prophet has set up. I find this
- 35 very unlikely. I would discard this hypothesis. Please, cf. the words of Jesus in Mat 12:25-26.

⁴¹ For further analogies, please, refer to René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 210-213.

⁴² Ibid., p. 215.

7. What will be the end of the False Prophet?

The same as that of the Antichrist because both will tow the same line right up to their end and will be cast into the lake of fire (hell) together: Rev 19:20; 20:10.

D. The whore of Babylon

5 1. What is the meaning of the word 'Babylon' in the Bible?

The name *Babel*, from which we get Babylon, is mentioned in Scripture for the first time in Gen 10:10, and then again in chapter 11. There we read that men, although they had grown numerous, rebelled against God's command to spread throughout the whole earth and started building a great city and a tower that should reach the heavens. God reacted to this rebellion by confusing the language of the people (Gen 11:1-9). Only then did men start to spread in all directions. Later on, the name of Babel became a synonym for man's rebellion against God.

2. What does the great prostitute, i.e. the whore of Babylon, represent?

There are many explanations. Pache makes the following suggestion:⁴³

1. The beast and his empire represent the political world at the end of time: Rev 13 and 16:10.
2. The whore of Babylon represents the unbelieving religious world: Rev 17:1.5.15.
3. The great city of Babylon represents the social and economic world as God sees it: cf. Rev 18:10.18-19.

Pache adds: "Summarized, these are the three aspects of the one and only Tower of Babel which constitutes all of civilization without God."⁴⁴ I personally prefer the view that the whore of Babylon represents a worldwide system of false religion.⁴⁵ Anyone reading the relevant passages in Revelation inevitably asks himself, who could the whore be?

Opinions differ widely. Here a list of the most common ones:

a.) The whore of Babylon is the Roman Church

Pache summarises the history of this view as follows:

In every age certain commentators have seen in Revelation 17 an allusion to the church whose center is at Rome. Among those who have so found it are not only Protestant writers but even Catholic authors before and after the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 218.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, revised by Vernon D. Doerksen, revised edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 361, thinks likewise.

Reformation (for example, the Jesuit Lacunza called Ben-Ezra, to cite only that one).⁴⁶

Pache reminds us that Rome was the capital of the world at the time when the apostle John lived. Perhaps John couldn't refer to Rome by name for reasons of precaution.⁴⁷ As mentioned above, Babylon symbolised from ancient times the *centre of man's rebellion against God*, the very opposite of Jerusalem the Holy City.

Pache⁴⁸ mentions eight interesting parallels between the Babylon in Rev 17-18 and the Roman Church. Here a summary of six of them:

1. The woman is seated on seven hills (Rev 17:9). At the time of the apostle, Rome was the capital city of the world. It is well known that Rome is built on seven hills. One of the imperial coins of the time shows Rome as a woman sitting on seven hills.
2. The woman is supported by the Roman Empire, represented here by the beast (Rev 17:3). It is again a well-known fact that, following the conversion of Emperor Constantine, the Roman Church was supported and influenced by the Roman state for centuries.
3. The woman is clothed in purple and scarlet (Rev 17:4). The garments of the highest Catholic dignitaries are of these colours.
4. The woman is seated on peoples, multitudes, nations and languages (Rev 17:15). Her influence is universal. The word *catholic* means *universal*.
5. The woman is adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls. In her hand, she holds a golden cup (Rev 17:4). The Pope does not wear a simple crown, but three crowns put on top of each other (the so-called Papal Tiara), which are inlaid with precious stones and pearls. The Vatican is known for its many lavishly furnished palaces, mansions and rooms.
6. The woman is drunk with the blood of the saints and of those who bore testimony to Jesus (Rev 17:6). Soon after Constantine, the Christian religion became the religion of the state. It is no secret that this Church, the so-called Catholic (universal) Church very soon persecuted the true Christians, i.e. those Christians that wanted to build their faith on the Scriptures only (*sola scriptura*). Here one or two examples of victims of the persecution by the Roman Church: the Waldenses (Peter Waldo [Pierre Valdo]), Jan Hus, Savonarola, the Huguenots etc. If you wanted to write a complete list, you would have to write several volumes. For the precursors of the reformation (Hus, Wycliffe, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin), the whore of Babylon was the Church of Rome without any doubt. Martin Luther was not the only one that openly said that the Pope was the Antichrist.

b.) The whore of Babylon is Islam

Islam has experienced renewal in recent times. It is spreading further and further. The wealth of some Arab states (due to oil) has given rise to a new Islamic offensive. Islam is growing faster than Christianity. The emergence of figures like Ayatollah Khomeini (in Iran) has led some commentators to say that the whore of Babylon is to be identified with Islam. I do not believe this. However, it could come about that Islam will form a sort of *syncretistic Super-Church* with other religions in the last days. This leads me to a third scenario that I consider to be the most likely one to come to pass.

⁴⁶ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 226.

⁴⁷ Compare this with the reference to Babylon at the end of the first epistle of Peter (1Pe 5:13).

⁴⁸ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 225-231.

c.) The whore of Babylon is a 'syncretistic Super-Church'

The whore of Babylon could be an **apocalyptic syncretistic Church or religion**, i.e. a mixture of all religions: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism etc. You could call it a **religion of compromise**.

5

Update: Is not the Ecumenical Council of Churches (ECC with its seat in Geneva) moving in this direction? Of course, the members of this organisation are so-called Christian churches and denominations. But it is no secret that this council has abandoned the belief years ago that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to inherit eternal life.⁴⁹ Things have progressed to the point where 'mission' is considered as sinful arrogance and pride. The Christian faith is no longer the only true religion. To win followers of other religions to Christ is regarded as intolerant and arrogant. The new motto is *inter-religious dialogue!* Henceforth it is not acceptable to win people of other faiths over to ours. According to this new concept (i.e. the new way of handling things), Christ is present in all religions. The Ecumenical Movement does not speak about *'the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ alone ...!'* No, they are mainly concerned about the social, economic and political problems of mankind. Unfortunately, there is a growing Neo-Marxist tendency in this council. Its new aim is the social and political liberation of the whole world (i.e. mankind), as well as the formation of a universal multi-cultural and pluralistic society. It is therefore not surprising that the council is ready to compromise on doctrinal matters. Delegates and observers of other religions take part regularly in the meetings of the ECC. The idea is to reach unity through inter-religious dialogue. Interestingly the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of this council up to this date. It has observer status in the ECC. We may ask *why* this is. The answer is a very simple one: The Church of Rome does not want to be a member of the council, because it is her declared aim to win back all other churches into her own bosom, into the so-called *una sancta*, so that she may at last be the truly Catholic, i.e. universal Church. Here an extract from a speech by Father C. Boyer, held at the University of Rome 22nd March 1947. He spoke as official representative of the organisation 'Unitas' whose president he was at that time:

30 "The Christian world is divided into two almost equal parts: on the other, three hundred different denominations. True union demands unity of doctrine, of faith, of head, of worship: this union is realizable only by accepting the authority of the Catholic church. That is the 'great mother' ready to welcome into the common fold all of the sheep still scattered. For that which concerns the 'dissidents' of the Orient [the Greek Orthodox Church] the divergences do not seem insurmountable. The difficulties begin with the 'Protestants' who are much less malleable. But there is a 'stirring' also on this side. . . . The essential thing is that the efforts tending to union in the camp of the 'separated brothers' shall not be realized in the last analysis in an anti-Roman bloc! *For it is only to Rome that they must of necessity come.*"⁵⁰

40 The speech by this Catholic Father reveals a lot. The intention of the Roman Church is in actual fact nothing less than the return of all other Christians to her fold. Outwardly, she is very open for any sort of dialogue. Evangelicals are quite acceptable as well, no problem... but the goal remains the same: the recognition of the Pope as the final authority, as Pontiff! In recent times it has been possible to see Catholic priests celebrate mass in Buddhist and Hindu

⁴⁹ Passages like Joh 14:6 and Act 4:12 are no longer taken seriously. The Bible no longer plays an important part in their decision-making (in contrast to the early days of the movement). The ECC increasingly proclaims a sort of 'Anthropocentrism' – a man-centred religion.

⁵⁰ Quoted by René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 235.

garments. The liberal wing of the Anglican Church has resumed the discussion about joining the Roman Church. This is also the case in some Lutheran circles. We see that these two denominations are leaning more and more towards Catholicism. Among Protestants in general it is those who are willing to forsake the 'a priori' of Protestantism (in particular the *sola scriptura* = [Holy] Scripture alone of the reformation) that are gaining influence. There is more and more talk about **unity in diversity**. But in actual fact it is a matter of **unity at the expense of truth!**

Will the apocalyptic whore of Babylon perhaps be **the great worldwide-ecumenical movement**, a universal religion characterised by total syncretism? And perhaps the Pope will be its head. Only the future will reveal it. In any case, Bible-believing Christians are called upon to be vigilant: cf. Mat 24:4-5.24; 1Th 5:6; 1Pe 4:7; 5:8; Rev 22:18-19.

3. What are the features of the whore of Babylon?

1. She is rich: Rev 17:4; 18:11.17.19.
2. She is corrupt and immoral: Rev 17:2-5; 14:8; 19:2.
3. She is occult: Rev 18:2.23.
4. She encompasses the world, is universal: Rev 17:2.15; 18:9.
5. She persecutes and kills the true believers: Rev 17:6; 18:24; 19:2-3.
6. She is supported by the state: Rev 17:3.7 (i.e. by the beast, the Antichrist, the head of the re-established Roman Empire of the end time).
7. She is involved in business (trade): Rev 18:3.11.

4. What will be the end of the whore of Babylon?

She will be judged, completely destroyed: Rev 18:8.10.17-20; 19:2. How will she be judged? By the Antichrist, because God will put his idea in his mind: Rev 17:16-17! It seems that the Antichrist will want to be worshipped by all men as God as soon as he has reached the climax of his power and realises that he does not any longer need the support of the whore of Babylon (cf. 2Th 2:4). It seems quite possible that he will decide to get rid of the whore of Babylon.

5. What conclusions should we draw from this?

Rev 18:4 *Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her (i.e. out of Babylon), my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues!"*

Pache draws some interesting parallels:

God never strikes, it should be said, without giving men time to repent and to take shelter. Before the Deluge He caused the ark to be built in order to save the believers. Before the destruction of Sodom the angels led Lot and his family out of the city. At the moment of the judgment of Nineveh God addressed a pressing appeal to all of its inhabitants. Here likewise the Lord

exhorts His people to go out in haste from Babylon. One can make two applications of this exhortation...⁵¹

To come out of Babylon means avoiding places and situations where people are openly against God and his Word. Do we take heed of this warning? Have we already come out of Babylon?

- 5 We should not put this decision off to another day. That day may never come. Tomorrow could be too late (cf. Heb 3:7-8: “*Today, when you hear his voice...* ”).

E. The battle of Armageddon

1. What does the word ‘Armageddon’ mean?

- 10 It only occurs in Rev 16:16. The word ‘*Armageddon*’ is a combination of two Hebrew words: ‘*har*’ (meaning ‘*mountain*’) and ‘*megiddo*’ (probably meaning ‘*exaltation*’).⁵² Megiddo is the name of a place at the foot of Mount Carmel, at the edge of the plain of Jezreel.⁵³ This plain is about 35 km in length and 25 km in width. In ancient times it was often a place where armies engaged in battle. Today the Israeli army (the Tsahal) uses the place as an air base.

2. What will happen at Armageddon?

- 15 We could say that the battle of Armageddon is the climax of the Great Tribulation. It will be reached during the second half (3½ years) of the time of Great Tribulation, i.e. the 70th year-week of Daniel. There the prophecies concerning the *Day of the Lord* (יְוִם יְהוָה [Yom Yahweh]) will be fulfilled.

3. What passages of Scripture relate to this battle?

- 20 Here are some of the important ones: Isa 63:1-4; Joe 3:12; probably also Eze 38:8.18.22; Dan 11:40-45; Zec 14:1ff; Rev 16:12-16; 19:11-21.

4. All the nations will be gathered at Armageddon

Cf. Rev 16:14.16; Zec 12:3 and 14:2-3:

- 25 1. The Roman alliance (the federation of the 10), Dan 11:40-45: I tend to think that this text means that the Antichrist will be involved in a battle against Israel in the last days (against armies from the south, north, and east). When Jesus returns to redeem his people Israel and to judge the nations, the Antichrist will attempt to fight against him. Dan 11:45 tells

⁵¹ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 245.

⁵² Cf. Abraham Meister, *Biblisches Namen-Lexikon* (Pfäffikon ZH, Switzerland: Verlag Mitternachtsruf, 1970), p. 235.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. Jos 12:21; 17:11; Jud 4:14-16; 5:19-22. It is also called *Valley of Jehoshaphat*: cf. Joe 3:12 (in translations with a different numbering 4:12).

us that he will come to his end at this time. We read the same in the following passages:
2Th 2:8 and Rev 19:19.

2. He will also conquer Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia.
3. Peoples of the east (*from the rising of the sun*) will also come there to do battle: cf. Dan 11:44; Rev 16:12-16 (cf. Rev 9:13-16).
- 5 4. The northern block, Dan 11:44: these armies are probably identical with those of Gog and Magog, mentioned in Eze 38–39.⁵⁴

5. Who will gather the nations together at Armageddon?

- God himself will gather the nations for the battle of Armageddon in order to judge them there:
10 Eze 38:4-16; 39:2; Mic 4:11-12; Zec 12:3-9. Cf. Joe 3:1-2.12.14 (other translations 4:1-2.12.14); Zep 3:8. On the other hand, we read that the satanic triplet will deceive the nations to join the battle (cf. Rev 16:12-16). As we know, the devil's purpose is the self-destruction of men and mankind. He is the one who incites to war. On that day, determined and known only
15 God's patience changes to anger: the day of judgement for the nations!

6. What means will God use to execute this judgement?

1. Through fire from heaven, as at the time of Sodom and Gomorrah, and a spectacular hailstorm: Rev 16:21; Eze 38:22.
- 20 2. Through a terrible plague (plague and bloodshed): Eze 38:22; Zec 14:12 (nuclear war? cf. Joe 2:30 [other translations 3:3]).
3. The enemies will kill each other: Eze 38:21; Zec 14:13.

7. How will the final victory be won?

Through the appearing of the Lord in glory: Zec 14:3-5; Rev 19:11-21; cf. 2Th 2:8.

8. What will be Israel's fate at the battle of Armageddon?

- 25 1. Jerusalem will be besieged: Zec 14:2.
2. At least two thirds of the Jewish people will perish before Christ returns: Zec 13:8-9.
3. At that time the Lord will step in to save his people, otherwise there would be no survivors among them: Joe 3:14-16 (other translations 4:14-16); Zec 14:3-5.

⁵⁴ But not Gog and Magog of Rev 20:7ff, because it says there that their armies will come from the four ends of the earth, those in Eze 38–39 only from the utmost North. (from the point of view of Israel). It is well possible that Gog and Magog in Eze 38–39 have to be identified with Russia of today and its allies. *Gog and Magog* in Rev 20:7-9 are probably to be understood as a collective synonym for all the nations that are hostile to Israel, because in that battle the armies will come from the four ends of the earth, not only from the far North.

9. What judgement will be meted out to the satanic triplet?

In Rev 16:12-14, we read that Satan (the dragon), the Antichrist (the beast) and the False Prophet will gather the nations together for the battle of Armageddon. It is only right and normal that a judgement of a special nature should be meted out to them.

1. Satan will be bound for 1000 years: Rev 20:1-3 (cf. Isa 24:21-22). After a thousand years, he will be released. He will again succeed in leading most of mankind into battle with the holy city. Only then will God cause the devil to be finally cast into the lake of fire.
2. The Antichrist and the False Prophet will be cast into the lake of fire before the millennium: Rev 19:20; 20:10.

F. The judgement of the nations

The judgement of the nations comes at the end of the Great Tribulation. The battle of Armageddon will possibly usher in this judgement. God will gather all nations for the judgement:

Joe 3:2 *I will gather all nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.⁵⁵ There I will enter into judgement against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land (other translations Joel 4:2).*

Joe 3:12 *Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side (other translations Joel 4:12).*

Mat 25:31-32 *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him...*

The Old Testament shows clearly that the peoples of the earth have a so-called corporate responsibility. Just as nations were judged in Old Testament times, so they will also be judged when Christ returns.

I presume that it is at this judgement that it will be decided who is allowed to go into the millennium.⁵⁶ I don't know how many there will be. But as mentioned above we can see from Zec 13:7-9 that in that terrible time at least two thirds of the Jewish people will perish. From the book of Revelation, we see that the whole world population will meet a similar fate. Rev 6:8 speaks of a quarter and Rev 9:15-18 of a third of mankind who will perish through the judgements. Altogether, this is more than half the population of the world.

⁵⁵ This valley is identical with the plain of Jezreel i.e. the valley next to Armageddon.

⁵⁶ In any case, it will be people who have survived the judgements of the *Great Tribulation* and the battle of Armageddon.

V. The Great Tribulation

A. What is the significance of the Great Tribulation in the New Testament?

- 5 It is a short period of terrible judgements which come to pass just before the return of Christ. It coincides with the rule of the Antichrist (cf. the words of Jesus in Mat 24:15.19-21; Luk 21:25-36). The expression '*Great Tribulation*'⁵⁷ appears in the following passages: Mat 24:21; Rev 7:14.

B. It is the day of the Lord (Yahweh) in the Old Testament

- 10 Apart from Revelation, the New Testament Apocalypse, there are a number of Old Testament prophets who describe the time of judgement in much detail, calling it the '*Day of the Lord*'.

- 15 **Isaiah:** 13:6.9.11.13 etc.
Jeremiah: 30:23-24
Ezekiel: 30:2-3
Joel: 1:15; 2:1-2.11
Amos: 5:18.20
Zephaniah: 1:14-18
Malachi: 4:1 (other translations 3:19)

20 C. The Judgements of the *Great Tribulation*

1. War

Cf. Rev 6:1-4; 9:13-18; 16:12-16.

2. Famine

Cf. Rev 6:5-6.

⁵⁷ In Greek: ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης [ek tēs thlipseōs tēs megálēs]: *out of the Great Tribulation*.

3. Plagues

Cf. Rev 6:6.8.

4. Natural disasters

1. Great earthquakes: Mat 24:7; Rev 6:12-14; 11:19; 16:17-20.
- 5 2. Cosmic signs: Isa 34:4; Luk 21:25-26.
3. The earth and its vegetation will be struck: Rev 8:7.
4. The sea and other water sources will also be struck: Rev 8:8-11.
5. There will be terrible plagues: Rev 9:1-3.5-11: probably torments by demonic powers and modern warfare.
- 10 6. Physical torment through sickness and disease: Rev 6:8; 9:5-6; 16:1-2.10-11.

5. A famine of the Word of God

Amo 8:11-12.

D. For whom are the judgements of the *Great Tribulation* intended?

- 15 The Holy Scripture gives two clear answers to this question:

1. The tribulation is the '*time of the nations*'

See Jer 25:15-17.29-33; Eze 30:3 and so on.

2. The tribulation is a time of '*trouble for Jacob*'

- 20 This means the tribulation is a time of trouble for Israel: Jer 30:5-7 (see also the chapter above '*Israel and the return of Christ*').

E. The effects of the judgements of the *Great Tribulation*

1. A large part of mankind will be destroyed

Rev 6:8; 9:18; 14:19-20; cf. Isa 13:9.12; 24:6; 66:15-16; Zec 13:8.

2. Instead of repenting the rest of mankind will harden their hearts even more

Rev 9:20-21; 16:9.11.21.

F. In spite of this it is still possible to receive grace even during the *Great Tribulation*

1. God protects and purifies the remnant of Israel

Cf. with the 144'000 in Rev 7:2-8.⁵⁸ For a more detailed discussion concerning the question '*who are the 144'000?*' see my commentary on the *Revelations to St. John* or the Dallas Commentary.⁵⁹

2. The woman in Rev 12:1-2.5-6.13.17

She represents the Jews who will find refuge in the desert (of Judah) during the second 3½ years of the Great Tribulation (when the devil and his Antichrist persecute them). Thanks to God's intervention, the dragon (Satan) won't be able to exterminate the remnant of Israel. The woman symbolises Israel, definitely not the Church of Christ. The Christians of this period (i.e. the Great Tribulation) are mentioned as a separate group: Rev 12:17: "*those who hold to the testimony of Jesus*". These are not Jews but Christians who follow Jesus during the Great Tribulation. The Jews, Israel according to the flesh, reject Jesus as their Messiah until this day.

3. A great multitude of martyrs

They come out of the Great Tribulation (Rev 7:9.14-15). Those from the nations who, during the Great Tribulation, want to follow Jesus Christ have risked their lives because they refuse to worship the beast (the Antichrist, cf. Rev 13:8.15; 20:4). The post-tribulationists identify these with the Church of Christ. The pre- and mid-tribulationists speak of them as the *martyrs of the Great Tribulation*, i.e. those who are converted during the Great Tribulation and are then ready to die for their faith.

⁵⁸ The 144'000 in Rev 14:1-5 are probably those, who are mentioned in Rev 7:11ff as coming out of the *Great Tribulation*.

⁵⁹ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, publishers, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*. New Testament ([Wheaton, Illinois]: Victor Books; Scripture Press Publications, 1983), pp. 949-950, 963-964.)

4. God will appoint two witnesses during the *Great Tribulation*

The supernatural deeds of these two witnesses will attract the attention of the whole world: Rev 11:2-4. Many commentators think that these two witnesses symbolise the Church of Christ during the Great Tribulation. I am not able to share their view for the following reasons: (1) Their deeds remind us much more of Israel's exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses or the miracles performed by Elijah. God will give them authority to judge, i.e. to take vengeance. This does not really fit into the dispensation of grace of the Church of Christ. It rather makes you think of another time (2) The Church of Christ is universal; it is found everywhere. These two witnesses, however, perform their miracles in Jerusalem. Verse 8 clearly shows this: "...where their Lord was crucified..." (3) The time during which they perform the miracles is limited to 3½ years (Rev 11:3). This does not make sense for the Church of Christ. I prefer to relate this to two prophets whom God will raise up during the Great Tribulation and to whom he will give the authority to perform miracles, just as he did with Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament.

5. *An eternal gospel will be proclaimed during the Great Tribulation*

During this time of judgement, an angel will proclaim an eternal gospel (Rev 14:6-7). One would expect that the whole world will have the opportunity to hear the truth during this time (cf. Mat 24:14). The fact that an angel proclaims this gospel during the Great Tribulation leads to the conclusion that this is not the dispensation of the Church.

G. The length of the *Great Tribulation*

See above in the chapter about the Antichrist: *'How long will the regime of the Antichrist last?'*

The 70th year-week of Dan 9:24-27 is divided into two halves, each of 3½ years (cf. v. 27). The time of the Great Tribulation corresponds to the time of the reign of the Antichrist: the eight passages, speaking of the 3½ years of this reign, confirm this: Dan 7:25; 9:27; 12:6-7; Rev 11:2-3 (twice); 12:6.14 (twice); 13:5.

Mat 24:22 *If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.*

H. How will the *Great Tribulation* end?

The end will come when Christ returns at the time of the battle Armageddon. This event has already been spoken of in the chapter *'The Nations and the return of Christ'* because this battle in the first place affects the nations.

What a comfort it is for true believers to know the following promise given by the Lord:

Rev 3:10

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Greek: ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ (*ek tēs hōras tou peirasmou*), literally translated: “out of the hour of temptation.” Many commentators think that ἐκ really means that the Church will not have to go through the time of the Great Tribulation (cf. the above arguments for pre-tribulationism).

VI. THE PAROUSIA OF CHRIST

'Parousia' (derived from Greek) means the second coming of Christ. The manner of the return of Christ has been treated in the first chapter. The **Person** of the returning Son of God will now have to be considered.

5 **A. He will appear as sovereign Judge**

1. Judgement has been committed to Christ

a.) God alone has the right to judge

Psa 82:8; 94:1-2; 98:8-9; Isa 26:20-21; 35:4; 40:10.

b.) But judgement will be carried out by the Son of Man

10 See Joh 5:22,27; Act 10:42; 17:31; Rom 2:16; 2Co 5:10; 2Ti 4:1. Why will judgement be committed to the Son of Man? For two reasons:

- Jesus, through his incarnation, humbled himself and came down into our situation. Because he became man, he understands our weaknesses, problems and temptations (though he himself never committed a single sin): cf. 2Co 5:21; Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-16).
15 Therefore, he will be able to judge man justly.
- By taking on flesh and blood and becoming man (cf. Joh 1:14) in order to die in our place on the cross, Jesus Christ has demonstrated the unlimited love of God (cf. Joh 3:16). The greatest transgression of man was, is and remains the rejection of this supreme offer of
20 God's grace. On the day of judgement, the redeemer will become the inexorable judge for all those who have rejected the love of God in Christ (cf. Rev 6:16: *the wrath of the Lamb* – what a paradox!).

2. How is the Judge described?

25 **O.T.:** Psa 2:7-12; Isa 35:4; 40:11; 61:1-2; 62:11; **N.T.:** Mat 3:11-12; 7:22-23; 13:41-42; 25:11-12; Luk 13:25-27.

3. Which judgements will Christ carry out?

a.) The judgement of believers

5 Believers will escape eternal damnation. They will not have to appear at the judgement of the great *white throne*. This judgement is reserved for those whose names are not written in the book of life (cf. Joh 5:24; Rom 8:1 and Rev 20:11-15). The believer's works will however be tested, and each individual will receive the due reward (cf. 1Co 3:13-15; 4:4-5; 2Co 5:10).

b.) The judgement of Armageddon

10 The clearest description of this is to be found in Rev 19:11.15.21. Probably the following passages in the Old Testament refer to this judgement: Isa 63:1-6; Dan 2:34-35.44-45; Zec 14:3-4.

c.) The judgement of the Antichrist and the False Prophet

2Th 2:8; Rev 17:14; 19:19-20.

d.) The judgement of the nations

15 Mat 25:31-32: This judgement will probably coincide with the battle of Armageddon as mentioned above.

e.) The judgement of Satan

The final judgement of Satan comes after the millennium. He will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:3.7-10). Probably the other fallen angels will be judged at the same time (cf. Isa 24:21-22; 2Pe 2:4; Jud 6).

20 f.) The last judgement

The judgement of the great white throne will follow the millennium. This is the judgement of all unbelievers of all times: Rev 20:11-15; cf. Rev 14:10-11.

B. He will appear as *King of kings*

1. Christ's right to this title

25 We have seen that Jesus Christ is judge because he is both Son of God and Son of Man. He is the *King of kings* because he is both *Lord* and the *Son of David*.

a.) Jesus Christ, Lord and King

Psa 10:16; 24:1-2.10; 47:7-8; Jer 10:7: He is **King of the Nations** and the whole World. He is **King of Israel**: Isa 33:22; 44:6. He is **the Redeemer**, Christ, the Lord. In this respect cf. Mat

22:41-45, where Jesus is quoting from Psalm 110 to prove that he himself is Lord (cf. Act 2:36).

b.) The Son of David

5 Cf. Mat 12:23; 22:42; Luk 1:31-32.68-69; Zec 9:9 (cf. Mat 21:5.9; Rom 1:3; Rev 5:5). See also 2Sa 7:11-13.16; Psa 89:21.30.37-38; Gen 49:10.

2. Jesus the King

a.) Jesus is proclaimed King in heaven

Mar 16:19; Act 2:33-35; Eph 1:20-22; Phi 2:9-11.

b.) Jesus takes possession of his kingdom

10 Psa 2:6-9; 96:7.10; 98:6.9; Dan 7:13-14; Rev 11:15-18; 20:4-6.

3. The description of the Great King

Cf. for example: Psa 45:2-10; Isa 9:5-6; 11:1-2; 33:17.22; 42:1.4; 49:6; Jer 23:5-6; 33:17; Mic 5:1-4; Zec 6:12-13; 9:9-10; 12:8; Mal 4:2 (other translations 3:20).

VII. THE MILLENNIUM

A. The Millennium: reality or only a depiction or symbol?

5 *The millennium* is such a controversial subject that many commentators (even Evangelicals) have gone as far as questioning the inspiration of the book of Revelation,⁶¹ because the length of the Messianic kingdom (1000 years) is only explicitly mentioned there (namely in chapter 20 and that six times). Other commentators, who, because of their conservative convictions, wouldn't consider questioning the inspiration of the book of Revelation, choose another way of looking at it. They dispute the duration of 1000 years for the earthly kingdom of Christ and attempt to interpret Rev 20 and the relevant passages in the Old Testament allegorically by saying that all God's promises to the people of God are for the Church of Christ. In my opinion, the millennium is only explicitly mentioned in Revelation because God reveals the truth progressively to his servants.⁶² It is surely no accident that *Revelation* is the last book of the biblical canon (cf. Rev 22:18-19).

15

The following are the three most common interpretations of the *1000 years*:

1. Pre-millennialism

Pre-millennialism teaches that Christ will return **before** (Latin: *prae*) the millennium, i.e. he will appear to inaugurate his thousand-year reign on earth. In section B (see below), I will seek to explain why I personally prefer this interpretation.

20

2. Post-millennialism

Postmillennialism teaches that mankind will experience a **golden age** thanks to a steady growth in moral, social and technical progress. This will be an age of peace and universal brotherhood. Following on from this the Lord will return to bring the believers into his everlasting kingdom. In other words, the Lord returns **after** (Latin: *post*) the millennium. Postmillennialism was widely propagated until 1914..., i.e. until the outbreak of the First World War. However after two World Wars, the gas chambers of the Nazis and the first atom bomb, postmillennialism has only been propagated by a few commentators. Pache expresses it this way: "Discouraged, they became Amillennialists like the Catholics."⁶³

25

⁶¹ This was the case with Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and many others. Calvin, e.g., has written commentaries on all books of the Bible... except Revelation!

⁶² For more about this, please, refer to my commentary on Revelation.

⁶³ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 385.

3. A-millennialism

'A-millennialism' = *no millennium*. In Greek the letter *Alpha* can have a 'depriving' meaning, it means negation, absence, distance etc. In other words, there will be **no** millennium. By the way, there are **several kinds of a-millennialism**.

- The millennium relates to the spirits of the righteous who are already in the presence of the Lord. In other words, the spirits of the righteous dead are already ruling today together with the Lord in heaven.
- Christ is already ruling today through his Church (on earth). Augustine, the Church father held this position and afterwards it was adopted by the Catholic Church lock stock and barrel.
- The millennium relates to the eternal state i.e. to the new creation (Rev 21:1ff).

For a short summary of the arguments that the amillennialists use to back up their case together with an answer from the point of view of the premillennialists see Pache.⁶⁴

I recommend the book: '*The meaning of the MILLENNIUM: four views*'⁶⁵ to anyone who wants to objectively weigh up the pros and cons of the above-mentioned views. '*Le règne de 1000 ANS sur la terre*'⁶⁶ is a book that I can recommend for a detailed study of the premillennial position. The book '*Dispensationalism Today*' is a good exposition of dispensational Premillennialism.⁶⁷ The most well-known exposition of the amillennialist position (by an evangelical author) is without any doubt Grier's book.⁶⁸ He is quite controversial as is also Lamorte in the book mentioned above '*Le règne de 1000 ANS sur la terre*'.⁶⁹

Amillennialists have always rejected the idea of an eschatological restoration of Israel as a nation. They maintain that the Son of God will actively reign first of all with the Church in heaven⁷⁰ and then in the new creation mentioned in Rev 21:1–22:5. Therefore, Israel has no more future on earth rather the Church of Christ is the sole heir of the promises which were given to the people of Israel. Furthermore, Satan has already been bound through the first coming of Jesus (that is through his death) and today we are benefiting from the limitation of

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 385-389.

⁶⁵ Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The meaning of the MILLENNIUM: four views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1977), 223 pages. The case of the historic premillennialism is explained and defended by George Eldon Ladd, dispensationalist millennialism by Herman A. Hoyt, postmillennialism by Loraine Boettner and amillennialism by Anthony A. Hoekema. Each author explains and defends his own position and the other three reply. This book is very objective because each case is presented by a well-known representative of the respective position.

⁶⁶ *Le règne de 1000 ANS sur la terre*, Pr. André Lamorte et al. 2nd ed. ([Burlington, USA]: Para Resources Foundation, 2005). 1st edition published by Centre d'Information et de Formation à l'Évangélisation et la Mission, Grenoble, 1982. In this book the following four authors defend the premillennialist view: P. André Lamorte, E. Sauer, F. A. Tatford and Ralph Shallis.

⁶⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965). Amillennialist Henri Blocher, *la doctrine du péché et de la rédemption*, collection Fac Études, nouv. éd. rév. et augm. (Vaux-sur-Seine, France: EDIFAC, 1997), I: 99, says with regard to this book: "...it is by far the best presentation for theologians by a respected dispensationalist." (French original text: "de loin la meilleure présentation pour théologiens, par un dispensationaliste autorisé.")

⁶⁸ By W. J. Grier, *The Momentous Event: A Discussion of Scripture Teaching on The Second Advent and Questions related thereto* (Belfast: The Evangelical Book Shop, 1945).

⁶⁹ Pr. André Lamorte 'L'Autorité de la Bible et l'exégèse allégorique à propos du Millénium' [sic] in *Le règne de 1000 ANS sur la terre*, 2nd ed. ([Burlington, USA]: Para Resources Foundation, 2005), pp. 11-19.

⁷⁰ Or even already here on earth: the so-called Augustinian-Catholic interpretation.

his power. According to this view, Rev 20:1-3 alludes to the victory of Christ over his enemies on the cross. Consequently Christ's Parousia would directly herald in the eternal state.

4. The a-millennialist schedule of the last days appears to be 'simpler'

Amillennialism suggests the following chronology for the events of the last days:

1. The Great Tribulation with the Antichrist.
2. The return of Christ (the Parousia) with the simultaneous resurrection of all mankind i.e. both believers (through the rapture) and also unbelievers.
3. The last judgement.
4. The eternal state (new creation for believers, hell for unbelievers).

5. The pre-millennial schedule for the last days appears to be more 'complicated'

Premillennialism suggests the following chronology for the events of the last days:

1. **The resurrection** of believers who have already died and the **transformation** of believers who are actually living at that time. The Lord shall 'take them up' together (cf. 1Th 4:13-17; 1Co 15:51-53), then follows the **judgement seat of Christ** and the **wedding feast of the Lamb** (cf. Rev 19:7ff). Be careful though, this chronology applies only to pre- and mid-tribulationist Premillennialism. Classical or historical Premillennialism places the rapture at the end of the Great Tribulation (as does also Amillennialism to a large extent), i.e. at the time of the Antichrist.
2. The Great Tribulation and the rule of the Antichrist.
3. The return of Christ, in his glory, with the believers and angels (cf. 1Th 3:13; Zec 14:5; 2Th 1:7).
4. Satan will be bound for 1000 years, so that he can no longer tempt those who are still living on the earth (following the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, cf. Rev 20:1-3).
5. Christ, with His people, rules on the earth for a thousand years (Rev 5:10; cf. 20:4-6; Zec 14:9; Dan 2:35).
6. Satan released again, his last revolt, followed by the judgement in the lake of fire (Rev 20:7-10).
7. The resurrection of unbelievers and their judgement before the great white throne (Rev 20:5-6.11-15).
8. The eternal state: new heaven, new earth, New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5). According to 1Co 15:24 the eternal kingdom will be the '*the kingdom of God the Father*' while the millennium (thousand-year kingdom) is '*the kingdom of Christ*'.

One of the most common arguments of the amillennialists against an earthly thousand-year kingdom is this: the New Testament often speaks of the glorious return of Christ and the beginning of eternity without any indication of discontinuity or of an intermediate kingdom (the millennium). Here are some examples:

- The resurrection of the just and the unjust are mentioned together: Joh 5:28-29; Act 24:15; Dan 12:2. However, this assertion contradicts passages like 1Co 15:23-28 and Rev 20:4-6 (an explanation follows in the excursus).
 - *The Day of the Lord* and the destruction of the earth are mentioned together: 2Pe 3:10.
- 5 This assertion contradicts such passages as Isa 24:21-23; Rev 20:1-10 (an explanation follows in the excursus).

B. Excursus: arguments for Premillennialism versus Amillennialism

1. Introduction

10 The millennium is one of the most controversial issues in theology. Chiliasm was, in the first generations after the apostle John, continually advocated by famous Church fathers such as Papias, Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian. In regard to the millennium, Augustine took on the view of Clement of Alexandria and of Origin who interpreted it spiritually. Roman Catholic theologians followed Augustine virtually *en bloc*. The great reformers Luther and Calvin

15 contradicted the Roman Church (insisting on the *sola scriptura*) in many *anthropological and soteriological doctrines*, but in the case of *Eschatology*, the amillennialist line of Augustine was continued.⁷¹ Both the Lutheran and the Reformed churches officially rejected an earthly millennium, which was frequently referred to as a ‘Jewish absurdity’. But it is probably characteristic that great theologians such as Luther and Calvin simply did not know what to

20 do with the book of Revelation. Furthermore, they not only considered this book unimportant but also neglected the whole subject of the return of Christ and the events surrounding it. 2000 years of Church History show that we often go from one extreme to the other. This was the case with regard to Eschatology: hundreds of years of neglect of the subject were followed by a ‘*wave of Eschatology*’ in the 19th century. Not only sects⁷² attracted the interest of large

25 numbers of people through their focus on the return of Christ and his kingdom, but in evangelical circles and in free churches the topic gained unprecedented attention. The diverging opinions led to controversy and even to Church splits, which is most regrettable. It is a known fact that at the time of the Reformation theological differences were often debated in a very polemic way.⁷³ We need to learn from these mistakes and avoid destructive-polemic

30 controversies because they are usually counterproductive. Lamorte⁷⁴ legitimately complains about the amillennialist Grier’s lack of objectiveness and polemic way of presenting his case.⁷⁵ He unfortunately reacts in just the same way, accusing the amillennialists of having liberal and anti-Semitic tendencies.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Calvin cf. his *Institutio*, III, chapter 25, section 5. F. Buhler, for example draws attention to this in *Retour de Christ et Millénium: Schémas des principaux systèmes prophétiques* (Mulhouse: Centre de Culture Chrétienne, 1976), p. 12 and W. J. Grier, op. cit., pp. 24-26.

⁷² E.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventists and New Apostolic Church.

⁷³ Luther called Zwingli “a stupid Swiss babler” because of his different view regarding the Lord’s supper. For Calvin, Chiliasm was childish (“puérile et badine”).

⁷⁴ Pr. André Lamorte, ‘L’Autorité de la Bible et l’Exégèse allégorique à propos du Millénium’ in *Le règne de 1000 ANS sur la terre*, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁵ In his original publication ‘The Momentous Event’.

⁷⁶ Pr. André Lamorte, op. cit., pp. 14-18.

I want to try to present my position with as little polemic as possible. I have already mentioned that in my opinion salvation does **not** depend on being in the *a-mill*, *post-mill*, or *pre-mill* camp! I am also convinced that a hermeneutic problem is the main source of the controversy. Someone who is convinced that the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation must be partly or fully understood in a spiritual or allegorical sense will come to a quite different conclusion regarding the millennium to someone who interprets the Bible literally, if the Scriptures concerned do not indicate otherwise. I take the latter view. I find it easiest to explain the reasons for my choice by way of a rebuke of those who take the opposite view. This should not be considered as polemic but as a preventive measure against objections to my position: *It is inconsistent to interpret the Old Testament literally in matters relating to Anthropology and Soteriology but allegorically in matters relating to Eschatology.* It is this inconsistency, which seems to be the main reason for Lamorte's obstinate reaction to Amillennialism. He summarises in a controversial way the unfortunate consequences of an exclusively spiritualised method of interpretation as follows:

The allegorical and anti-Semitic theology of the a-millennialists is perplexing. Their assertion that they adhere to the authority of the Holy Scriptures seems very doubtful. We ask ourselves what there is to hinder them from following Origin (completely) all the way, i.e. from making a mere symbol out of the drama of Calvary.⁷⁷

I do not dispute that in both Old and New Testaments there are symbolic and typological names, designations, objects and actions. These are normally easy to recognise and explain and it certainly does not mean that any text whatsoever can be allegorised. We will return to this problem later.

The fact that the first great Church fathers were Chiliasts is an argument against those who denounce Premillennialism as a fabrication of the 19th and 20th centuries, but I will not use this argument to defend the premillennial position as such. I want to base my argument exclusively on the Holy Scriptures whose total infallibility is assumed. The following biblical statement is therefore also important as far as the millennium is concerned: "*What God has promised, that will He also do.*" (cf. e.g. Num 23:19; Rom 11:29)

2. The restoration of Israel and the land promised to it

God promised Abraham that he would make him the father of many nations (Gen 12:1ff). He also promised him and his descendants (through the line of Isaac) a country with defined borders (Gen 13:14-18; 15:16-21; Deu 11:24 etc.), namely the land of Canaan, from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates. God told Israel through Moses that if his people forsook him and his commandments that he would disperse them among the nations. But He also promised their return to their country if they repented (cf. Lev 26:33.40ff). Both the warning and the promise were fulfilled: from around 607 until 538 BC: Judah was in the Babylonian captivity but was allowed to return at the time of Cyrus. That return could not be the final fulfilment of the prophecies because a number of them say, that Israel will never again be driven from the Promised Land (Amo 9:15; Jer 31:40 and Eze 37:25). Israel was again sent into exile in 70 AD by the Romans, this time it was a worldwide exile and so it is clear **to me** that this

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 18. The original French text is: "La théologie allégorisante et antisémitisante des amilléaristes nous laisse rêveur. Leur protestation d'attachement à l'autorité souveraine des Ecritures nous apparaît fort sujette à caution, et nous nous demandons ce qui, en fin de compte, pourrait leur interdire de suivre Origène jusqu'au bout, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à faire un symbole du drame du Calvaire."

prophecy still awaits fulfilment. What God has promised, He will also do. The time therefore will come when Israel will be able to live permanently and untouched within the promised borders. By the way, Israel's borders promised in the Pentateuch, *from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates*, were repeatedly mentioned by the prophets (Eze 47:13ff, cf. Isa 27:12-13).

The Jewish people have, since their return from the Babylonian captivity, never lived within these borders (let alone controlled them), hence it is clear that this promise has not been fulfilled. It is not important for us now to know if the beginning of this fulfilment began in 1948. What really matters in my opinion is that Israel will be restored within the promised borders.

Those who, like myself, hold fast to the infallibility of Scripture, but who do not see the necessity of the literal restoration of Israel in her own land, are forced to spiritualise all the Old Testament texts that refer to this restoration in the last days. They either have to relate them to the time of the Church of Christ or to eternity. This means that dozens of chapters and passages have to be allegorized. To illustrate this, here are just a few of these texts, the list would be too long to include them all: Isa 2; 11; 35; Eze 37–39 and 40–48; Oba 17-21; Mic 4:1ff; Zec 14.

I find the assertion that these promises have been completely fulfilled through the Church of Christ (which our opponents see as the *new or spiritual Israel*) quite unacceptable. I do not dispute the possibility that such illustrations as *the lion eating straw* or *the infant playing near the hole of the cobra* (Isa 11) could be considered as figures of speech for peace in Christ or for his kingdom. For the Antichiliast all such assertions must be interpreted spiritually. In other words, they consider that where the land of Israel and its specific borders is mentioned, it is in fact the Church of Christ or eternity that is being referred to in an allegoric way. Where Zion is mentioned, they think only of the heavenly Jerusalem. I am however convinced that many of these promises will only be fulfilled after the return of Christ, but before eternity begins i.e. in a so-called *intermediate kingdom*, which according to Rev 20:1-7 will last a thousand years. The Antichiliast on the other hand has to place the fulfilment of these prophecies either in the time before the return of Christ, or in eternity. I believe that it is simply a case of showing by means of these texts that neither of these interpretations is possible. If it is possible to show this, then in my opinion there is only one option left that is **an intermediate kingdom**, which of course would be the millennium. Here are some arguments that support this:

a.) Granted, Jesus not only told his disciples before his death, that the kingdom of God was near, he also stressed that it was already among them. Where Christ is, there is the kingdom. Therefore, he taught his disciples to pray to the heavenly Father: "Your kingdom come." It is clear from the Gospels that the disciples hoped that Jesus would establish the kingdom of God at that time. This expectation of the disciples **must be seen in the light of the Old Testament**, where the restoration and reunification of Israel is promised (cf. Eze 37 and other references; more about this below). The disciples believed this. We can therefore understand the depths of their disappointment as their Lord died on the cross (cf. Luk 24:21). It should surprise us even less that, when our risen Lord appeared to the disciples, they asked him if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time (cf. Act 1:6). The amillennialists would have told the disciples that this kingdom would never be restored to Israel. Jesus did not give them this answer but said simply that it was not for them to know the times or dates set by the Father. Most Antichiliasts would immediately add that this *unrevealed point of time (kairos)* actually came some days later, at Pentecost: i.e. the era of the Church whose birth came about when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Both Old and New Testaments show that this assumption is false:

In the New Testament: Act 3:20-21 and Heb 2:8 show clearly that the age (dispensation) of the Church is not in its fullest sense the period of the kingdom of Christ. I do not dispute that, when an individual repents, receives Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, and is born again (cf. Eph 2:1-6), that he receives eternal life (cf. 1Jo 5:12-13), and that therefore, Christ, in a spiritual sense, is living within him and reigning in him. This does not alter the fact that this is not the kingdom of Christ *per se*. In the face of our continual weakness in the battle between our sinful nature and the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:17; Rom 7; 8:23ff) this would be a 'pitiful kingdom of Christ'. Quite apart from this, there is the fact that in Christ's kingdom, according to Rev 5:10 and 20:4-6, believers will reign with Him. Jesus used parables to indicate the same thing. Pache⁷⁸ also rightly insists on this. During their time on earth, as members of the Church of Christ, believers do not rule. For the time of their earthly life, Jesus has promised them primarily conflict, persecution and humiliation rather than reigning in glory and honour. The apostle Paul also explicitly testifies to this out of his own experience, in 1Co 4:8 and the following verses. Act 3:19-20 indicates also that this time of refreshing, the time of the fullness of the kingdom, will only come when Christ returns.

In the Old Testament: Isa 24 speaks of the judgement of the world, the Great Tribulation, after which the Lord, Yahweh, will rule from Zion (Isa 24:21-23). Joe 3:17ff (other translations 4:17) describes things in a very similar way. Zec 14 is particularly explicit: the kingdom of God will only begin when the Lord visibly returns, namely when he stands on the Mount of Olives (Zec 14:4). Anyone trying to allegorise this should read the appropriate passage in the New Testament, Act 1:9-12. One thing is clear Act 1:6 will not be fulfilled during the time of the Church of Jesus Christ, i.e. between Pentecost and the return of Christ, but **after** his return. The analogy between Zec 14:4ff and Act 1:9-12 make this especially clear.

One of the most important passages regarding Eschatology is, in my opinion, Rev 1:7, a New Testament verse which alludes to two Old Testament verses and in so doing this merges them. Why is this verse so important? Not all Antichiliasts⁷⁹ go as far as denying altogether a restoration of Israel. The weight of the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 9 to 11 causes them (e.g. the well-known French Neo-Calvinist Henri Blocher⁸⁰ or Hendricus Berkhof in his book on Dogmatics *Christian Faith*) to make allowance for a massive repentance of Israel in the last days. Both avoid an important issue, i.e. the time of this massive repentance of Israel. Hendricus Berkhof, e.g. frequently quotes Romans 11, but the fact that he does not comment on verses 25-27 is probably indicative. In these it is stated plainly that the massive repentance of Israel coincides with the return of Jesus Christ, i.e. it is his visible return which will cause Israel to repent. Exactly the same is confirmed by **Rev 1:7**, which is, as mentioned above, a combination of Dan 7:13 and Zec 12:10. In Zec 12:10 we read that (in the latter days) the house of David will behold him whom they have pierced. For us today it is clear that "him whom they have pierced" is a reference to our crucified Lord. But what point of time is referred to in Zec 12:10? Amillennialists are in a hurry to point out that the apostle confirms in Joh 19:37 that this prophecy was fulfilled in the death of Christ. They seem satisfied with this explanation because they are set in their theological view – or, in order to avoid *their problem*, they leave out the issue of the return of Christ in their exposition of Zec 12 to 14. Higginson is a point in case: he avoids the question of the point of time both in Zec 12:10 and in Zec 14:4. The editor of the French edition makes a pertinent point in brackets concerning

⁷⁸ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 412-416.

⁷⁹ I.e. the opponents of the doctrine of an earthly reign of the Messiah.

⁸⁰ Henri Blocher, *la doctrine du péché et de la rédemption*, 2 volumes (Vaux-sur-Seine, France: Collection Fac Études, EDIFAC, 1997), passim.

Higginson's commentary: "Is Act 1:11.12 not a reference to the triumphal descent of Christ to the Mount of Olives?⁸¹" This is a typical example of the lack of objectivity of so many commentators.⁸² Rev 1:7 shows clearly that the events of Calvary (cf. Joh 19:37) were not the final fulfilment of Zec 12:10, but that it will only be fulfilled when Jesus Christ returns i.e. when the Son of Man comes on the clouds (cf. Mat 24:30). The mass conversion of Israel and its restoration as a nation will only come to pass when Jesus Christ returns. Careful reading and exposition of Rom 9–11 make this plain. Rom 11:25-27 and Rev 1:7 also make it abundantly clear.

I do not maintain, as many dispensationalists do, that God is preparing two separate peoples (i.e. Israel and the Church), who will remain distinct through all eternity.⁸³ There is only one way of salvation and that is redemption through Jesus Christ (cf. Joh 14:6 and Act 4:12). The believers of the Old Testament trusted in the coming of the Redeemer. We believe that he has come and that whether we are Jews or Gentiles we have been saved by our faith in him (cf. Rom 1:16-17 etc.). The Jew today, who does not believe in Jesus Christ, is lost. Paul says this unequivocally (cf. Rom 9:1ff etc.) The illustration of the olive tree in Rom 11:17ff shows clearly that there will finally only be one redeemed people of God. Those Jews who come to faith in Christ are as it were the natural branches of the olive tree. Those however, who as Gentiles come to Christ, are branches that have been grafted into the olive tree. Both will be saved on the basis of their faith. Paul says however that the time will come when the fullness of the Gentiles will be gathered in. At that time, Christ will return and then, says Paul, all Israel who are living at that time⁸⁴ will be saved. Their faith will have the same basis as ours, that is in our crucified and risen Lord (cf. Zec 12:10 and Act 1:7). In this way, they will belong to one and the same people, to those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. But whatever interpretation we insist on, the fact is Scripture teaches that the restoration of Israel as a nation through Jesus Christ will only come about when he returns. In other words, this is clear proof that the visible kingdom of Christ will only begin when he returns.

Hence, the amillennialists are left with only one option to circumvent the necessity for an earthly intermediate millennial kingdom, namely, to assert that if the kingdom of Christ only begins with his return, then this must of necessity coincide with the beginning of eternity. There are several problems with this hypothesis:

b.) Several passages in the Old Testament show that the Messianic kingdom cannot be equated with the eternal state. In the new creation, everything will be perfect. There will be no

⁸¹ R. E. Higginson, 'Zacharie' in *Nouveau Commentaire Biblique*, translated from English (St-Légier: Editions Emmaüs, 1978), p. 838. The original text is as follows: "Ac. 1:11,12 ne font-ils pas allusion à la descente du Christ triomphant sur la Montagne des Oliviers? Ed." Please, compare this with the translation into German, 'Sacharja' in *Brockhaus Kommentar zur Bibel II*, 1. Paperback-Ausgabe, (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1987), pp. 986-988, where this remark regarding chapter 14 is omitted.

⁸² Fortunately the reader of the New Bible Commentary is reminded in the commentary on the Book of Revelation (by G. R. Beasley-Murray) in the interpretation of Rev 1:7 that this prophecy will be completely fulfilled when Christ returns. And Beasley rightly points out that Rev 19:11-21 speaks about the same thing, himself being of chiliast persuasion, contrary to Higginson. The commentary on Micah by Gl. L. Archer in *The New Bible Commentary* is also Chiliast in nature, but the commentaries on the other prophetic books are not. How fortunate it is for the general reader to be confronted with contradictory views in the same series of commentaries is another matter.

⁸³ George Eldon Ladd, 'Historic Premillennialism' in *The meaning of the MILLENNIUM: four views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 18ff, is certainly not wrong in criticising this extreme dispensationalist position.

⁸⁴ This must be underlined. According to Rev 12:13-16, Israel will be exposed to particular persecution during the time of the Great Tribulation. Jeremajah calls this time 'a time of trouble for Jacob' (cf. Jer 30:7). According to Zec 13:7ff, two thirds of the Jewish population will perish. It will be another holocaust.

more death, no more sin, no more sorrow, no more war (cf. especially Rev 21:1-4). Various passages in the Old Testament indicate that in the Messianic kingdom there will still be things like the curse, sin and death:

- 5 • The best example of this is probably **Zec 14:16-19**. The context speaks, as mentioned above, unmistakably about the kingdom of Christ (in 14:4: *Yahweh places his feet on the Mount of Olives!*) following his return. Verses 16-19 show that there will still be people who refuse to worship Yahweh (cf. Rev 20:7-9). They will be people who have survived the judgements of the Great Tribulation and will enter the millennium (cf. Rev 20:1-3). This passage causes amillennialists problems, e.g. Higginson in the commentary mentioned above. These statements cause Higginson embarrassment, so he dodges them. At the end of his article, however, he shows his colours and points to the eternal state in a roundabout way. But he does not say how verses 16-19 are to be reconciled with the eternal state.
- 10
- 15 • In my opinion, **Isa 65:17-25** is a point in case as well. In the book of Isaiah itself, there is a striking parallel. In 65:17 the prophet speaks about the coming new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev 21:1ff). But in the same passage we read about death and punishment for sin (verse 20). Since this cannot apply to the eternal state, there has to be a period of time prior to the eternal state⁸⁵ in which the predictions of Isa 65:18-23 will be fulfilled. Is it not
- 20 indicative that in this passage of Scripture the adjective 'new' (חָדָשׁ [*khādāš*]) is only being used for the new heaven and the new earth, not for Jerusalem?⁸⁶ If the passage were describing the eternal state, one would expect the prophet to use the predicate 'new' for Jerusalem as well, as is the case in Rev 21:1-2. It seems impossible to apply the contents of Isa 65:20 to the eternal state. Nor is it possible to apply this verse to the post-exilic time, or
- 25 any other period of history up to the present time. If you want to do this, you have to allegorise Isa 65:20.⁸⁷ There are many commentators, however, who apply this passage to the millennium. Brandenburg says with regard to Isa 65:17-23:

30 These words regarding the new heavens and the new earth were revealed to John. They do not refer to the new creation described in Revelation 21. Rather, they refer to that time of salvation history on earth during which God's peace will reign, namely the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20,1-6.⁸⁸

Brandenburg is not the only one who says that Isa 65:20 refers to the millennium. Unger, Vine, Payne⁸⁹, Pache⁹⁰, Sauer⁹¹ and many others do the same. Cheyne points out: "It is not eternal life which he here anticipates, but patriarchal longevity."⁹²

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⁸⁵ This period of time is often called the 'intermediate kingdom' (in French 'règne intermédiaire'). Helge Stadelmann calls it "messianisches Zwischenreich" in 'Das Zeugnis de Johannesoffenbarung vom tausendjährigen Königreich Christi auf Erden' in *Zukunftserwartung in biblischer Sicht*, published by Gerhard Maier, 2nd edition (Wuppertal and Giessen: TVG, R. Brockhaus Verlag und Brunnen Verlag, 1986), p. 146.

⁸⁶ Noticed by Robert Martin-Achard, 'Esaïe LXV et la Nouvelle Jérusalem' in *Congress Volume*, published by J. A. Emerton (Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1981), pp. 238-239.

⁸⁷ Just as in Zec 14:16-19 and Isa 54:13-17 (which refer to glorified Zion as well).

⁸⁸ Hans Brandenburg, 'Die Propheten oder das Reden Gottes, JESAJA II. Teil, Das Buch von der Erlösung' in *Das lebendige Wort* (Giessen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1961), Band 5/II: p. 203.

⁸⁹ Homer Lemuel Payne, *Amillennial Theology as a system*, dissertation, presented at Dallas Theological Seminary (1948), p. 316.

⁹⁰ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 428-430.

⁹¹ Erich Sauer, *Der Triumph des Gekreuzigten*, 8th ed. (Gütersloh: DER RUFER, Evangelischer Verlag, 1948), p. 182.

⁹² T. K. Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 4th rev. edition (London: Kegan & Paul, Trench, 1886), vol. II, p. 120.

- There is another similar passage in Scripture: **Eze 39**. Hardly anyone denies that this passage has to do with the end of time. Only an amillennialist would maintain that the end of this chapter has to do with the eternal state and not with an earthly kingdom. And he would refer to Rev 20:7-10 (Gog and Magog) in order to claim that Eze 39:25ff refer to the eternal state. But what sort of eternal state would this be, in which the saved have to first of all bury the corpses of the hordes of Gog and Magog for seven months (cf. Eze 39:11-16)? No, that would hardly be conceivable! I believe that this passage also refers to an intermediate kingdom on earth.⁹³
- The context of **Eze 47:22** indicates an intermediate kingdom or state. In my opinion, Eze 40–48 is the longest passage of Scripture describing the conditions in the intermediate kingdom. I believe that it refers to the millennium. Neither the description of the temple nor the services nor the geography of the country can be applied to Solomon's temple nor the second temple built after the return from the Babylonian exile. For this reason, many commentators (especially liberal ones) do not know what to do with these chapters. For Wellhausen e.g. these chapters are mere fiction, i.e. eschatological wishful thinking of a charismatic.⁹⁴ Such conclusions should not surprise us. The contents of these chapters do not fit into the '*eschatological concept*' of these commentators. If the contents refer neither to the first temple, nor to the second one, to which one do they refer? The contents have not been fulfilled at all so far. When will they be fulfilled? A liberal theologian can find an easy way out by saying that these passages are *not genuine*. An evangelical amillennialist (who like us believes in the inspiration of Eze 40–48) will spiritualise the contents of these chapters and apply them to the Church of Christ or to the eternal state. To him the contents of these nine chapters are to be understood spiritually or allegorically. Reference is made to the word '*like*' in Eze 40:2 saying that this is an indication that the following text does not necessarily have to be understood literally. It should rather be seen as a symbolic figure of speech concerning the blessings of the Church of Christ or the perfection of the eternal kingdom of God. The ironical answer to this would be to say that God has caused the prophet unnecessary trouble by getting him to write down chapter after chapter of building measurements and construction details. In fact the words in 43:10ff indicate clearly that the information should be understood literally, after all the prophet was told to clearly record this for the people of Israel because they must faithfully follow the given designs. Therefore, I doubt whether the '*like*' in 40:2 is an authorisation for a completely allegoric interpretation of all the details in these nine chapters. All the information about the details of how to build, the various geographical and topographical descriptions (e.g. in chap. 47–48) as well as the frequent mention of animal sacrifice hardly allow us to imagine it referring to the time of the Church of Christ. The Church of Christ remembers the substitutionary death of Christ through the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion), not through animal offerings.⁹⁵ These chapters cannot refer to the eternal state because they speak of sin, death, and reproduction. Jesus says that we will no longer marry in heaven, whereas **Eze 47:22** speaks about having children. You need a lot of imagination to attribute these things and many others to the eternal state. On the other hand, these descriptions would be appropriate for an intermediate kingdom. In fact the fountain of Eze 47:1ff is also mentioned by Joe in 3:18 (other translations 4:18) and by Zec in 14:8. I have already tried to show that the descriptions in Zec 14 can only apply to an intermediate

⁹³ And not to the eternal state. It is obvious that the apostle John uses the names Gog and Magog taken from Eze 38 and 39 as a general reference to the host of enemies of God's people appearing after the millennium because Rev 20:7-9 clearly states that Gog and Magog will come from the four corners of the earth, i.e. from all directions, while in the book of Ezekiel Gog and Magog come from the far north (seen from Israel): Eze 38:6.15; 39:2.

⁹⁴ Cf. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von G. Reimer, 1883), pp. 62-63, 126-127, 429, 447.

⁹⁵ The '*problem*' of sacrifices in the millennium will be dealt with later.

kingdom. The fact that there is also a river in Rev 22:1ff does not consequently mean that Eze 47 also presents a picture of the eternal state. The fountain in Eze 47 flows out of the temple in Jerusalem. In eternity, there will no longer be a temple (Rev 21:22). Eze 47 also says that the river flows into the Dead Sea (as does Zec 14:8). In eternity, there will be no more sea (Rev 21:1). In Rev 22:3, it says that there will be no curse anymore. The passage in Ezekiel speaks of sin. The mention of *swamps* and *marshes* being left for *salt* in Eze 47:11 does not make sense in terms of the eternal state. What more can be said? To what period of time can the descriptions in these nine chapters be applied otherwise, if they do neither apply to the first nor to the second temple nor to the Church of Christ as a spiritual temple, nor indeed to the eternal state? To be precise: they can only be applied to the temple in the intermediate kingdom, i.e. in a real earthly (millennial) kingdom. In my opinion, this fits in very well and creates fewer problems. The division of the land, described in detail in Eze 47:13 up to chapter 48, indicates the final fulfilment of all the earthly promises of God to the people of Israel since the time of Abraham (see above).

To a proponent of Chiliasm like me it is difficult to see how some commentators can apply passages of the Old Testament to the eternal state, when they definitely do not describe a perfect final state. It makes me return to the introduction, where I said that in the end it is a matter of someone's hermeneutic position. That is where a commentator's view is determined. As I said before, when it comes to *lions eating grass* or *swords being beaten into ploughshares*, I would not insist on a literal interpretation, I would agree to a figurative one, i.e. that these expressions might be figures of speech regarding the future kingdom of peace. But if it comes to *death* and *sin* (Isa 65:17ff) I can no longer do this. I can in no way support an allegoric interpretation. If death no longer means death and sin no longer sin, how can we rely on Scripture at all? Here, Lamorte's objection is to be fully upheld: then also the death of the servant in Isa 53 could mean something other than his actual death! His death could be interpreted in a different way, i.e. not as a reference to the substitutionary death of Jesus, the Servant of God. What Alford says regarding the amillennial interpretation of Rev 20 (discussed later on), must also be said here concerning the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament: "...then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything."⁹⁶ I would like to say the same with reference to such a radical allegorised interpretation of the Old Testament. Hardly anyone denies that there is symbolism, typology and figurative speech in the Old Testament, neither do I. I believe that the Lamb mentioned in Isa 53 and in Joh 1:29 is a figure of speech referring to Jesus, but the *death* of the servant in Isa 53 means his *death* and nothing else. The *sins* that he bore for many, are real *sins* and not something else (cf. 2Co 5:21). In exactly the same way, *death* and *sin* in Isa 65:20 refer to real *death* and real *sin* and to nothing else. But neither will be found in the new heavens and the new earth according to Rev 21:1ff. Hence, Isa 65:20 cannot be interpreted in terms of the eternal state. What is the essence of it all? Most of the eschatological controversies are not theological-eschatological problems but hermeneutic ones. It is there, in hermeneutics, that the decision-making regarding a-mill, post-mill or pre-mill actually takes place.

c.) So far, I have mentioned Scripture passages, which demonstrate that the restoration of Israel (1) cannot be applied to the Church of Christ and that it will not happen before the return of Christ and (2) that it cannot be applied to the eternal state. I now want to move on to passages which speak about the **unification of Israel (Ephraim or Northern Kingdom) and Judah (Southern Kingdom) at the end of time: cf. Eze 37:15ff; Jer 3:18; 31:4-5.27; Zec 10:6ff; Isa 11:13** as well as others. I do not believe that we can spiritualise Ephraim and

⁹⁶ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872), IV: p. 732 (also quoted by G. E. Ladd, op. cit., pp. 37-38).

Judah. They refer to the earthly Israel. Their unification and restoration are yet to come to pass. They will come about when Christ returns and establishes his kingdom (cf. e.g. Eze 37:24-28). Are we also going to spiritualise *Ephraim* and *Judah* and apply them to the Church of Christ? I have previously attempted to show that these passages cannot be applied to the eternal state.

3. Old Testament passages which imply a millennium

Apart from the passages mentioned above which suggest an earthly kingdom of peace, there are statements in the Old Testament that definitely allude to an interval of time, to an intermediate kingdom. **Isa 24:21-23** tells us that at the time when Yahweh has already established his reign on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (cf. 24:23; 25:10a; 27:13; 65:18ff with Zec 14:8.16-17), his enemies,⁹⁷ who have been kept in prison (pit, abyss: in the N. T. called *Tartarus* or *Abyssos*) will be judged **after many days** (אַחֲרֵי יָמִים [wumerob yāmīm]). Up to the time of their judgement, they will be kept in prison. How can this come to pass if, according to Amillennialism, the eternal state begins immediately after the appearance of Yahweh, i.e. after the return of Jesus Christ? **How are we to imagine a judgement after many days in the eternal state?** In the eternal state there is no more passing of time, so how can there be a judgement following it? The idea of 'after' does not exist in eternity; otherwise it is not real eternity. In my opinion this passage implies a state or kingdom between the return of Christ and the beginning of eternity.⁹⁸ This is exactly what Revelation confirms, defining the duration of **many days** (in Isa 24:22) as a **thousand years**. In Rev 20:1-3, John describes the binding of Satan, so that he cannot deceive the nations anymore.⁹⁹ John says that the devil will only be judged and cast into hell **after** the 1000 years. Satan is the head of the fallen angels: cf. Rev 9:11, where he is called Abaddon, the king of the demons (I will return to this subject in more detail later on). Hence, Rev 20:5 clearly says that it is only believers (in Christ) who will be raised at the beginning of the 1000 years. The other members of mankind will remain in the abode of the dead until the 1000 years are over. They will be judged¹⁰⁰ following the 1000 years (together with the demons and Satan). The expression '**after many days**' found in Isa 24:21-22 precisely implies this. I am not the only one who maintains that Isa 24:21-22 corresponds with Rev 20:1ff. Brandenburg, Pache,¹⁰¹ Pentecost¹⁰² and Unger see

⁹⁷ 'The heavenly armies' (no doubt a reference to the fallen angels, cf. 2Pe 2:4; Jud 6; Rev 12:7-9) and the rulers on earth (compare with רָפְאִים (*Rēph'āim*) in Isa 26:14).

⁹⁸ Furthermore, the millennial interpretation of Isa 24:21-23 refutes the objection of commentators who maintain that the passages Isa 24:1-6 and 24:16b-20 contradict each other and have therefore been written by different authors. In my dissertation '*Restauratio and Resurrectio in der Jesaja-Apokalypse*' (Evangelisch Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgien, 2001), I try to show that the centristic and contrasting structure of Isa 24 clearly supports one single authorship. I believe that the following interpretation explains the alleged contradiction: the section 24:1-6, where a small remnant of survivors is mentioned (verse 6), has to do with the time of judgement preceding the millennium (the Great Tribulation), while the section 24:16b-20 refers to the end of the world, which marks the end of the millennium. Between these two events Christ will reign on Zion. (24:23: passages such as Gen 19:24 and Isa 6 show that not only God the Father is Yahwe, but also Christ. Joh 12:37-41 suggests that Jesus is Yahwe, whom Isaiah saw on the throne). During this reign the evil angelic powers and the godless rulers on earth will be imprisoned and be judged later (cf. Isa 24:21-22). The doctrine of an intermediate kingdom proves that the contradiction between Isa 24:6 (a remnant survives; cf. also with verse 13) and 24:20 (end of the world) is only an apparent one.

⁹⁹ These words also show that normal life on the earth will continue, while the physically raised believers will reign with Christ on earth for 1000 years.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Rev 20:5 with 20:12-15: The θάνατος (*thánatos*) and the ἥδης (*hadēs*) will give up their dead after 1000 years, in order for them to be judged and thrown into the lake of fire.

¹⁰¹ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 168-169.

¹⁰² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to come - a study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publ. Co., 1958), p. 497.

it the same way. The list could be extended. Heußner summarises the contents of this verse very aptly by saying:

This strange verse clearly points to the events taking place at the beginning of the millennium and those following it (“after many days”). Before the thousand years Rev. 19,17 - 20:3, after: 20:7ff.¹⁰³

So we are given another argument for a literal interpretation of the millennium. These particular verses of Scripture imply very clearly that there is an *interval of time* between the inauguration of the reign of Christ and the beginning of eternity. But there is more to come. The Apocalypse of Isaiah (Ch. 24–27) provides another indication: For someone knowing only the Old Testament, the statements in **Isa 26:14.19** could be offensive, i.e. they could be contradictory. In verse 19, it says that the dead will live again. But the dead in verse 14 should not become alive. For liberal theologians this is no problem in any case. For many of them verse 19 is simply a later annotation (gloss); e.g. for Duhm. Wildberger suggests the same. Rudolph¹⁰⁴ is of a similar opinion. For Isa 25:8, he suggests a *universal* interpretation, for Isa 26:19 a *particular* one. In Isaiah 25:8, death is eliminated completely, in 26:19 only those who belong to Yahweh are resurrected. Rudolph sees a contradiction in these statements. It is therefore not surprising that he thinks there are different authors, who are contradicting each other. What reply can we as evangelical Christians give Rudolf? **We believe that Chiasm alone can give a satisfactory reply!** The dead, who are not being raised to life according to Isa 26:14 are identical with the *rulers* mentioned in Isa 24:21-22, who are awaiting their judgement together with the angels in the pit, i.e. in the realm of the dead. They will not be raised to life with the believers, mentioned in Isa 26:19. A much better insight is gained from a literal exposition of Rev 20. There it is explicitly stated that unbelievers will not be raised at the beginning of the millennium, in contrast to the believers (20:5); they will only be raised after the reign of Christ, after the 1000 years, cf. *after many days* in Isa 24:22. I will return to a detailed exposition of Rev 20 in the following section. They will be raised to life (otherwise there would be a contradiction to Dan 12:2; Joh 5:29 and 1Co 15:22ff), but Rev 20:14-15 states that they will be cast into the lake of fire following their resurrection. The resurrection to damnation is called *the second death*. Unbelievers will, like believers, be raised physically, but since they are dead spiritually, not having eternal life, their resurrection and eternal state are called *the second death* (Rev 20:14) – in contrast to *the first resurrection* (Rev 20:5). This shows that the contradiction between Isa 26:14 and 19 is (again) only an apparent one. Premillennialism, in other words, has a plausible reply to the criticism of Rudolf and of many others. Evangelical Amillennialism on the other hand cannot give a satisfactory reply.

4. The New Testament predicts an earthly millennium

I could have started with this point, referring to the well-known passage in **Rev 20** (being the only passage in Scripture which mentions six times the duration of the reign of Christ being a thousand years), but for reasons of chronology, I wanted to start with the Old Testament. Another reason is because the millennium is an earthly kingdom and the earthly promises for Israel begin in the book of Genesis. With regard to Rev 20, I could simply refer to the interpretation of Ladd, with which I agree completely. However, for the reasons stated above,

¹⁰³ [Theodor] Heußner, *Erklärungen zu Jesaja und einigen Psalmen* (Basel: Pilgermissionsdruckerei auf St. Chrischona, 1895), p. 109. Remark: The Christian name of the author is not mentioned in the book. I assume that it is Theodor Heußner, who wrote a commentary on Romans in 1898.

¹⁰⁴ Wilhelm Rudolph, ‘JESAJA 24 – 27’ in *Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament*, 4. Folge, Heft 10 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1933), pp. 48-49.

I cannot agree with Ladd, when he says, “*a millennial doctrine cannot be based on Old Testament prophecies but should be based on the New Testament alone.*”¹⁰⁵ I take exception to the word ‘*alone*’. In the first two chapters, I have attempted to show that the Old Testament already implies the necessity of an intermediate kingdom although its duration is not specified there. Ladd is convinced that Premillennialism is mandatory on the basis of Rev 20 alone. He shows¹⁰⁶ that Rev 20:4-6 speaks about a physical resurrection. For those who are raised to life before the thousand years the same expression is used as for those who are not raised at that time but only a thousand years later, i.e. at the time of the second death (cf. *supra*). In this text, the first resurrection is just as much a physical one as the second death is (i.e. the resurrection of unbelievers after the 1000 years). It is not just a spiritual resurrection (like for example repentance and new birth, mentioned in Eph 2:1-6¹⁰⁷) nor is it a resurrection in order to reign with Christ in heaven, while the others are still involved in their fight of faith, as some amillennialists maintain.¹⁰⁸ In order to justify his position, Hoekema maintains that Rev 20:4ff does not say that those who will reign with Christ will do so on earth. He says with regard to the contents of Rev 20:4ff that it will make better sense if it takes place in heaven. Grier¹⁰⁹ gives the same interpretation. The parallel passage Rev 5:10 shows the weakness of what Hoekema and Grier say, because there it is explicitly stated that Christ will reign *on earth* (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς [epi tēs gēs]) and not in heaven.¹¹⁰ Is it not symptomatic that in his list of relevant passages Grier omits Rev 5:10? Ladd quotes Alford (cf. *supra*), who pertinently says with regard to the amillennial exposition of the resurrection mentioned in Rev 20:4-6:

If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *psychai ezēsan* at the first, and the rest of the *nekroi ezēsan* only at the end of a specified period after the first,—if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave;—then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.¹¹¹

In **Rev 20:1-10** there is something else pointing to the necessity of the millennium: in **verses 1-3** it says that Satan will be bound for a thousand years *that he may no longer tempt those who dwell on earth*.¹¹² We have to note first of all that this statement points to something else as well, namely that the millennium cannot be the same as the eternal state. It is the *earth*, where the devil is not allowed to be active during that time. It is not heaven because there will be no more temptation in heaven. The amillennialists, for whom there is no earthly kingdom of Christ, are compelled to maintain that Satan has been bound since the death and resurrection of Christ and that in consequence Rev 20:1-3 must have been fulfilled at the time of the crucifixion. They plead such passages as Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1Jo 3:8 and Joh 12:31.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ G. E. Ladd, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ W. J. Grier refers to this, op. cit., pp. 90-92 in order to find a basis for his amillennial interpretation of Rev 20:4-6.

¹⁰⁸ So for example B. Anthony A. Hoekema, ‘A-millennialism’ in *The meaning of the MILLENNIUM: four views* (Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 167-169.

¹⁰⁹ So also W. J. Grier, op. cit., pp. 82-85.

¹¹⁰ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 382-383, reminds us rightly of the great rock in Dan 2:35, which *filled the whole earth* (not the heavens!). Zec 14:9 shows that the *kingdom of the Messiah* will be on this earth.

¹¹¹ G. E. Ladd, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

¹¹² This refers to those who will survive the judgements of the Great Tribulation. In Revelation chapters 6 to 18 a third is mentioned (9:15), at another time a quarter (6:8) as well as other members of the human race, that will perish through these judgements. It doesn’t say that all will perish. Even at the time of the battle of Armageddon in 19:11-21, when Christ returns, there will be survivors.

¹¹³ So e.g. W. J. Grier, op. cit., pp. 88-90. Grier gives an amusing illustration about Al Capone who is said to have ruled Chicago from his prison cell (p. 88).

I do not dispute the testimony of Scripture concerning the defeat of Satan through the cross but that does not mean that he was actually bound at that time. If he is already bound and therefore unable to tempt those living on earth, including us today (see Rev 20:3), why does the New Testament call him our *tempter*? Why does Paul describe him as the *prince of this world*, the *ruler of the kingdom of the air*, even the *God of this world*, who darkens the hearts of men and blinds them (cf. Eph 2:1ff; 2Co 4:4ff)? Yes, and he seeks day and night to trip us up, to cause us to stumble. If the devil were bound now in this Church era why does the apostle Paul warn us that he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8-9)? I hope I will be forgiven if I have trouble here avoiding an ironical way of writing. New Testament demonology does show us though that that some of the fallen angels are already imprisoned (cf. 2Pe 2:4; Jud 6). I have already mentioned Rev 9:1ff where we read that in the coming time of judgement the abyss will be opened and many of these demons will be set free to torment the unrepentant people. Their king is Abaddon, an angel (Rev 9:11), probably meaning Satan. The story of the healing of the possessed Gerasene in Mar 5:8ff shows that demons freely operate on the earth and are therefore not all imprisoned in the abyss. The devil and many of his angels have, since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, not been imprisoned, but operate within God-permitted boundaries and times. (cf. Rev 12:12; 2Th 2:9ff). The Chiliasts answer the amillennialists rightly with the following words: “*Then the chain with which the devil is bound must really be a long one.*”¹¹⁴ It is apparently long enough to make it possible for him, as a roaring lion, to destroy people. That this assertion is untenable can also be shown exegetically from Rev 20. Rev 19:11-21 speaks of the visible return of Jesus Christ and of the fact that at that time the Antichrist and the False Prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire.¹¹⁵ How objective is it to place the following event of Rev 20:1-3, the binding of Satan, back at the time of the crucifixion rather than at the time of the return of Christ? Those expositors who maintain that the devil, the Antichrist and the False Prophet will all be thrown into the lake of fire at the same time, i.e. who say that there is no need of an interval of 1000 years between their respective condemnation, are not doing justice to Rev 19 and 20. The expressions μὴ ἔτι (*mē eti = not yet*), ἄχρι (*akhri = until*) and especially μετὰ (*meta = after*) in Rev 20:3 do not allow for such an interpretation. Apart from this, Rev 20:10 indicates that the Antichrist and the False Prophet are already in the lake of fire when Satan is thrown in, because the ‘omitted’ verb following ὅπου (*hopu = where*) is obviously the copula¹¹⁶ εἰσίν (*eisín = they are*) and not an Aorist passive, as the amillennialists are obliged to maintain, to make the text say: ‘*There, where also the beast and the False Prophet [with him, i.e. the devil] have been cast.*’ Since they are dogmatically prejudiced, the amillennialists have to ignore the text (the natural meaning) as well as the context (the end time, the return of Christ and not the beginning of the dispensation of the Church). Since Rev 20:7-9 states, that the devil will be released again after one thousand years and that there will again be rebellion and war on earth, it is obvious that the thousand years cannot be identical with eternity, for there will be no more war in eternity (cf. Rev 21:4). Hence, the amillennialist is compelled to maintain firstly that the devil is bound during the dispensation of the Church and therefore can no longer tempt mankind, and secondly that he will be cast into hell together with the Antichrist and the False Prophet. But as I have shown above, the Biblical text does not say that. If we look at it like this, we have to agree with Ladd who says that Rev 20 is sufficient to make someone a convinced premillennialist. Clear-minded people like Luther and Calvin understood this. That is why they avoided the

¹¹⁴ In the same way René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 384: “If it were thus, it would be necessary to confess that the messianic reign would indeed be lamentable, for Satan indeed gives little indication of being bound and prevented from seducing the nations. Or else, as someone has said, his chain is terribly long!”

¹¹⁵ 2Th 2:7-8 also shows us that the condemnation of the Antichrist will occur at the time of the return of Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁶ Which, as we know, is often omitted in Greek, as also in Hebrew.

book of Revelation.¹¹⁷ For us this does not change the fact that the Old Testament alone gives sufficient evidence to warrant an intermediate kingdom. By the way, Pache¹¹⁸ points out that the Jewish Rabbis (teaching of the Talmud), prior to John's writing the book of Revelation, spoke about a millennial kingdom on the basis of the Old Testament taking the Sabbath as the background for their argument. Pache adds rightly:

One should not, therefore, claim (as some have done) that without the famous passage of Revelation 20:1-10 the doctrine of the Millennium would not exist.¹¹⁹

By the way, Paul's explanations in **1Co 15:22-28** also imply an intermediate kingdom! In verses 23 and 24 a 'two-stage' resurrection is intimated¹²⁰ (as is the case in Rev 20:4-6): first Christ, then we the believers **at his return** and (only) then 'the end', obviously a clear reference to unbelievers (similar to Rev 20:5.14-15). These verses also suggest the following facts: (1) There is a definite interval of time between the resurrection of believers and unbelievers. (2) The Son reigns first of all, and at last everything will be subject to him. It is obvious that this kingdom is only inaugurated at his return, which is referred to explicitly in verse 23 as *terminus a quo*. This is clearly confirmed by several other passages (e.g. Rev 20:6), namely that the believers will rule with him, and according to Rev 2:26-27 this will only be fulfilled after their consummation.¹²¹ Only after the Son has reigned (with his own) will he hand over the kingdom to the Father and submit himself to him. Herewith is inaugurated the eternal state. In other words, 1Co 15 already indicates various stages or intervals and in particular an intermediate kingdom. The duration of this intermediate kingdom of the Son and his own is given explicitly in the book of Revelation.

The following fifth (short) sub-chapter fits well with Pache's words quoted above. It is an argument (underlining the necessity of an *earthly intermediate kingdom*) that is supported by both Old and New Testament passages (which confirm and complement each other).

5. 'Ruling with an iron sceptre'

In **Psa 2:9**, it says that the Lord will rule *with an iron sceptre*. The Lord certainly did not act or rule in this way during his time on earth; in fact the opposite was the case: cf. Mat 11:29; Joh 18:22ff. The dispensation of the Church also does not present itself as a kingdom in which the Lord rules with an iron sceptre, again the opposite is the case. "*Let him who desires take*", "*Let him who believes in me follow me*" and so on. But whoever does not want to go this way won't be hindered or forced. His servants, the believers, are called upon to urge unbelievers to go through the narrow door but not to force anyone because membership in the kingdom of God depends on exercising one's own free will. No one is forced to enter the

¹¹⁷ Likewise Heinrich Heppe in his *Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, revised and published by Ernst Bizer, 1958). He merely says that there will not be a millennium but does not give a reason for saying this. Nor does he mention any of the relevant Bible verses in his references. Even when discussing the resurrection, the judgement and the eternal state, he makes no mention of Rev 19 to 22. However he quotes the Book of Revelation, namely 15:4 'inconsequently' on page 566, in the 20th reference.

¹¹⁸ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, pp. 380, 390.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 380.

¹²⁰ In fact, 'Three-stage' if the resurrection of Christ is counted as well.

¹²¹ By the way, this reference is a fatal argument against the interpretation by the amillennialists of the resurrection mentioned in Rev 20:4. Here, in 1Co 15, it says clearly that the resurrection for reigning coincides with the return of Christ. Contrary to this, amillennialists maintain that the resurrection for reigning refers to the new birth of the believers. Rev 20:4-6 and 1Co 15:22-28 together show clearly that the time of the return of Christ is meant, thus enabling us to confound the amillennialist way of argumentation.

kingdom (cf. e.g. Mat 23:37 and Luk 7:30). Rev 2:26-27 makes it plain that the Church of Christ is not the same as this kingdom. It is stated there that glorified believers will, with the Lord, rule with an iron sceptre. We have not been glorified though, that will only happen when we are resurrected. The assertion of an amillennialist that Rev 12:5 could indicate that this ruling with an iron sceptre applies to the Church of Christ, is refuted by the parallel verse in Rev 19:15. There it is clear to see that this kingdom or this *ruling with an iron sceptre* only begins when Christ returns. This helps us to understand better such verses as Isa 65:20; Zec 14:18 or Mic 5:4-6. This is the dispensation of the *Messianic intermediate kingdom*, the time when, according to 1Co 15:25-27, all must finally bow the knee to our Lord Jesus. This *iron kingdom* will remain until the Son passes it on to the Father. Only then will the *eternal kingdom of the Father* begin.

I consider it worthwhile to give attention to some of the objections to the chiliastic interpretation.

6. Answering objections

a.) How are we to understand the descriptions of the eternal state, which we attribute to the '*thousand-year intermediate kingdom*'?

Here are a few examples to clarify the question:

- **Isa 65:17** speaks of *new heavens* and a *new earth*. In verse 20, however, sin and death is still mentioned (or mentioned again, cf. *supra*).
- **Zec 14** speaks, in my opinion (as explained above) of the kingdom of Christ on earth (verse 9 is explicit). As I said, verses 16-19 do not allow us to think of the state of perfection. The words in verses 6-7, however, do allow us to think of the eternal state (cf. Rev 21:23-25).¹²²
- **Isa 24–27** (the so-called Apocalypse of Isaiah) has millennial tendencies. We have already considered 24:21-23 and 26:19. Furthermore, there is the whole of chapter 27 as well as 25:6ff. **Isa 25:8** causes us without any doubt to think of the eternal state (cf. Rev 21:4). How is it possible in spite of this to maintain that these chapters speak of the millennium where sin and death will still be a reality?¹²³ **The answer** to this objection is actually a simple one: it is not necessary to try to water down what Isa 25:8 says with the aim of showing that it does not a priori speak of the eternal state. Hans Brandenburg for example does this with Isa 65:17 when he says: “...*this is not yet the new creation as we see it in Revelation 21*”,¹²⁴ or we have Cheyne who maintains that Isa 25:8 and 65:20 are not written by the same authors. No, there is a quite different and plausible answer to this problem, which seems to irritate some scholars:

¹²² I do not share the opinion of the commentators who, like me, say that the passage in Rev 21:1-8 speaks of the eternal state, but who feel that 21:9 to 22:5 refer to the millennium. So for example G. R. Beasley-Murray in *THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY Revised*, ed. by D. Guthrie et al. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 1304-1309.

¹²³ Cf. Isa 54:14-17 or Eze 39:11.

¹²⁴ Hans Brandenburg, *op. cit.*, vol. 5/II: p. 214. I am rather of the opinion that Isa 65:17 actually speaks of the eternal state, while 65:18ff refers to the millennial intermediate kingdom.

No one doubts that certain happenings, which the prophets announced in one sentence, have taken place or will finally take place in various stages or epochs. The following four examples illustrate this:

- 5 • **Isa 7:14-16:** I think that the statement in verse 14 was fulfilled when Jesus was born (cf. Mat 1:23), while the things which were prophesied in verses 15-16, found their fulfilment in the so called 'Assyrian period', i.e. at the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic wars.
- **Isa 52:13 to 53:12:** In this text, the death, resurrection and return of Jesus Christ (i.e. his reign) are all prophesied together.
- 10 • **Isa 61:1-2:** The prophecy of Jesus coming to save us (grace!) and the day of his vengeance (judgement) are found in one and the same sentence. Jesus himself, at least indirectly, indicated that the fulfilment of this prophecy takes place in two stages (or epochs) when he read this passage in the synagogue and stopped in the middle of a sentence (cf. **Luk 4:18-19**). He stopped before the reference to the day of vengeance of our God (cf. Isa 61:2b).
- 15 The time of grace, the day of salvation, that is today, but the judgement only comes when Jesus returns (cf. 2Th 1:6-10 and 2Ti 4:1).
- **Dan 12:2:** Daniel saw the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous at the same time. Jesus does not say in Joh 5:28-29 that these will not take place together. This is only said later through the apostle John (cf. Rev 20:4-5.12-15, also see above). Paul had already
- 20 indicated this in 1Co 15:22ff.

It is exactly the same with the thousand-year kingdom and eternity. What the prophets of the Old Testament saw as one happening was separated up by John the Apostle, after he had received the last revelation from Christ. The fact that the prophets did not always realise (or could not realise) the time of the fulfilment of prophecy is suggested by passages like Dan 12:8-9 and 1Pe 1:11. This is the so-called **phenomenon of progressive revelation**. It does not mean that there is a discrepancy between the sayings of the prophets, Jesus and the apostle. Sauer explains this correctly:

30 So the prophets see the end time of this world and the eternal hereafter as one continuous line but described in terms of this world. They portray the *new* creation at the time of the consummation using the colours of the glories of the *old* creation. (e.g. Isa 54, 11; 12 = Rev 21, 18–21). But here 'spiritualizing' of the highest and most noble degree is appropriate. Only the New Testament draws a clear line between the two, separating eternity and time from each other (Rev. 20, 7–21, 1).¹²⁵

Pache has a similar comment:

40 Let us note again that sometimes the prophets of the Old Testament confuse in a single vision the messianic kingdom which is on earth and that in Heaven. From their distance they did not always distinguish the Millennium from eternity.¹²⁶

August Dächsel says with reference to Isa 24:22:

¹²⁵ Erich Sauer, *Der Triumph des Gekreuzigten*, p. 182.

¹²⁶ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 390. In this regard he mentions Psa 72:5-7; Dan 7:14.27 and adds the following, very interesting sentence: "...but it is obvious that the final end of this kingdom is Heaven and that the thousand years are only the vestibule of the palace of the king."

What the New Testament seer John separates in Rev 20 and 21, is seen here by the Old Testament prophet as a unity.¹²⁷

The illustration of the **telescope** is often used to explain this phenomenon. Stadelmann says in relation to Isa 65:17-25:

5 That which Rev 20;21 later functionally separates (namely: messianic
intermediate kingdom and eternal kingdom in the new creation), **is seen by**
Isaiah telescopically combined. In the first place it is clear that this passage
speaks throughout of a fully earthly kingdom. . . . Israel of the Old Testament
could, on the basis of these verses, only think of a future earthly kingdom of
10 peace, existing on a changed and renewed earth. **According to the revelation**
received at that point of time, it was not yet clear that the 'new heavens' and
the 'new earth' would be a totally new creation, a world of resurrection. Only
in the course of progressive revelation would the earthly kingdom of peace
(**seen as the future world reaching over into the present world**) and the
15 following new creation be clearly separated. Israel's Old Testament hope of
the kingdom remained on the level of a blessed earthly kingdom. [My
emphasis is indicated by bold script].¹²⁸

It is not only the premillennialists, but also the amillennialists who use the illustration of the
telescope to explain apparent contradictions. In Isa 60:21, it says that there will only be
20 righteous people at that time, whereas we read in 65:20 that there will still be sin around. The
amillennialists explain this by saying that here, so to say, two levels are superimposed – '*inter-*
linking' or '*confluence*' of the two is happening. Up to this point, the premillennialists and the
amillennialists agree. Problems begin when the question arises about what the two levels i.e.
epochs are which are interlinked i.e. superimposed. The amillennialist who rejects the idea of
25 an intermediate kingdom between the return of Christ and the beginning of the eternal state, is
compelled to place the events described in such passages as Isa 54:14ff; 65:20; Zec 14:16ff
etc. before the return of Christ. This means that he has to allegorise many passages
extensively if he wants to position these events in this present dispensation. The
eschatological restoration of Israel and their return to their own country (cf. supra sub-chapter
30 *2. The restoration of Israel and the land promised to it*) is the theme of most of these
passages. But the restoration of Israel will only come to pass when Christ visibly returns, as I
have attempted to show by means of several passages (e.g. Rev 1:7). **My conclusion is that**
the illustration of the telescope enables premillennialists to explain the phenomenon of
prophets describing the intermediate kingdom (millennium) and eternal state together.
35 The amillennialist, on the other hand, cannot solve this problem by using the illustration of
the telescope, because he is compelled to place certain events before the return of Christ; this,
in spite of the fact that the context shows clearly that they will take place during or after the
return of Christ. Conversely, he has to attribute passages that mention the presence of sin and
death to the eternal state. This, however, cannot be done, as explained above. **Here again**
40 **Premillennialism offers a more plausible solution.**

¹²⁷ August Dächsel, 'Das Alte Testament, Zweite Hälfte: Lehr- und prophetische Bücher' in *Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift Alten und Neuen Testaments* (Leipzig: U. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf., n. d.), vol. IV: p. 81.

¹²⁸ Helge Stadelmann, op. cit., pp. 147-148.

b.) Sacrifices in the kingdom of Christ?

I have indicated above that I would deal with this subject. In several of the passages, which a premillennialist normally attributes to the millennial reign of Christ, sacrifices are still offered: cf. Isa 60:7; Jer 33:18; Zec 14:21 and especially Eze 40–48. How is it possible that sacrifices are still being offered after Christ's death and resurrection? Is this not a contradiction to what the letter to the Hebrews says (cf. e.g. 7:18; 8:13; 9:24–28; 10:10.14.26), which amillennialists use as an argument against Chiliasm.¹²⁹ The reply is quite simple, I believe. The people of Israel have sacrificed since Moses' time. All these sacrifices point to the last and perfect sacrifice of Christ. Holy Scripture says that animal sacrifices cannot take away the sin of the one who offers the sacrifice (Heb 10:4). They only cover (temporarily) the guilt, until the true sacrifice would be offered (cf. Rom 3:25). The believing Israelites testified to their faith through these sacrifices. This was also the case at the time of Abel. Just as the Old Testament believer testified to his faith in the coming redeemer through the sacrifices (cf. Gen 3:15), so, in the millennium Israelites will presumably offer sacrifices in a similar way. This does not mean that these sacrifices can bring about the forgiveness of sins. No, the sins of all time were and will be atoned for only through the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 3:25 and Heb 9:15). As the sacrifices of the old covenant pointed to the coming of the redeemer, so will the sacrifices offered in the millennium point back symbolically and visibly to the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. If the sacrifices offered under the old covenant could not bring about the forgiveness of sins nor can those offered in the millennium, then they are purely of symbolic or commemorative character: in memory of, *in memoriam Christi*. Erich Sauer places the sacrifices offered during the millennium on the same level as we place baptism and the Lord's supper, namely that of signs of remembrance.¹³⁰ Tatford summarises this fittingly:

The sacrifice of animals in the millennium will not be a ritual ignoring the work of Christ on the cross. The sacrifices of the Old Testament point to the future, those of the millennium back to the past, as does Holy Communion.¹³¹

In actual fact a Chiliast could, when confronted with this objection, pose a critical question: “Do you believe in trans- or consubstantiation with regard to holy communion?”¹³² The question of sacrifices is a problematic one for sacramentalists as it is also for reformed theologians. Most of them see the offering of animals and circumcision as sacraments in the Old Testament (cf. the Ecclesiology in the Dogmatics by Heinrich Heppe). This is no problem to me because I do not believe that circumcision or the sacrifices of animals are sacraments. Such sacraments in my view do not exist. For confirmation, please, refer to Heb 10:4, Rom 3:25; Gen 15:6 together with Rom 4:9ff. Sacrifices are pointing typologically to Christ. Since *ex opere operato* does not apply, the sacrifices offered during the millennium are not problematic. In this matter, I fully agree with Sauer and Tatford.

¹²⁹ F. A. Tatford, ‘Réponse au livre le Grand Dénouement - pouvons-nous prendre au mot les prophéties bibliques?’ in *Le règne de 1000 ANS sur la terre*, refutes the arguments of the amillennialist W. J. Grier in his book *The momentous Event*. On p. 128 he discusses, among other things, the problem of sacrifices in the millennium, referring to the relevant passages in the Book of Ezekiel.

¹³⁰ Erich Sauer, *Der Triumph des Gekreuzigten*, p. 180.

¹³¹ F. A. Tatford, op. cit., p. 129. (translated from French into English) In the footnote Tatford explains the sacrifices in the millennial temple Eze 40–48 in a very plausible way and points to their commemorative character on p. 130.

¹³² I follow the same lines as Ulrich Zwingli and the Anabaptists, who (in contrast to Rome, Luther and Calvin) regarded holy communion as a meal of commemoration.

The issue of the sacrifices is merely the tip of the iceberg, i.e. part of a much wider issue. Will there be an earthly-material intermediate kingdom prior the eternal new creation, or will everything be spiritual, non-material? This controversy is being carried on with weighty mutual insinuations. Calvin and many others of his time (and with him many amillennialists of our time, so e.g. Grier often mentioned above) called the Chiliasts, materialists or Neo-Judaists, Montanists, or simply unreasonable people. Chiliasts on the other hand accuse amillennialists of being Marcionists,¹³³ anti-materialists or Neo-Platonists. Surely, amillennialists are right when they criticise the '*excessive materialism*' of Papias or the '*fanatics of Münster*'. However, Scripture shows that these excesses do not warrant the extreme opposite position of those who radically spiritualise every aspect of the promised Messianic kingdom. In order to explain my concern, I would like to ask a few questions and make a few observations. When Jesus said before dying that he would not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day when he would drink it anew in his Father's kingdom, did he mean the real juice of the grapes or not? Do these words of Jesus also need spiritualising? If we say YES, we will have to face right away another question arising from Scripture: Jesus promised that we would sit at table with him in his kingdom (together with Abraham and the other patriarchs, cf. Mat 8:11; Luk 13:29; cf. also Isa 25:6). Do these promises need spiritualising as well? Will they not be *fulfilled in a material way*? How do we explain that Jesus was not just a spiritual being after his resurrection, but one having a body which his disciples could touch, which showed the wounds of the cross (cf. Joh 20:24ff.), and passages which show that Jesus could eat in his eternally perfect body: Luk 24:42-43 and cf. Act 10:41 with Joh 21:12-13?

c.) The expression '*forever*'

There are numerous passages, where it says that God will restore his people '*forever*' (לְעֹלָם [l^e 'ōlām]), e.g. in Eze 37:25; Amo 9:15 and in Jer 31:40 (cf. supra). We may object and say that this cannot be realised in a kingdom that will only last 1000 years. 1000 years is not forever. There is no need to argue that the Hebrew word עוֹלָם ('ōlām) in the Old Testament does not always mean for ever, but can be limited to a certain length of time in some passages. On the other hand, there are many passages where it really relates to a final situation. The matter can be sorted out very simply by saying that the millennium is the '*threshold of eternity*'. As Stadelman (cf. supra) puts it: '*a reaching over of the future world into the present one*' – and I would like to add, vice versa. I have quoted Pache (cf. supra) who calls the millennium "*the vestibule of the palace of the king*."¹³⁴ In other words the millennium is a sort of *prolepsis* (an anticipation) or (perhaps said in an even better way) a *foretaste* of eternity. Rev 20:7ff clearly says that at the end of the millennium, the devil and his minions will be judged once and for all and will not be able to overcome the people of God anymore. This implies that the millennial kingdom is in actual fact an eternal kingdom because it will no longer be interrupted by the enemies of God. According to 1Co 15:28, the Son will then submit himself to the Father. Hence, the expression '*forever*' does not pose a problem for the premillennial position.

7. Conclusion

As is the case with most controversies, none of the positions is completely *free of problems*. By the way, if there are no problems, there aren't any controversies. This is also the case regarding the issue of Amillennialism, Postmillennialism and Premillennialism. None of the

¹³³ So Pr. André Lamorte, op. cit., p. 16.

¹³⁴ René Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, p. 390.

positions is *completely* free of problems. **But I feel that when one or more compelling arguments speak against one of the possibilities, it should *definitely* be dropped.** This is the case with the amillennial position and (even more so) with the postmillennial position. I prefer the premillennial position because I believe there are no insoluble problems connected with it.

C. The necessity of the millennium

I would like to mention three things that point to the necessity of an earthly kingdom of Christ. I have discussed this above and want to limit myself to a summary here.

1. The promises of God

10 **Rom 11:29** *For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.*

We should remind ourselves that the context i.e. Rom 11:17-29 deals with the restoration of Israel as a nation at the end of time.

15 God promised Abraham the following:

1. A country
2. A numerous people
3. Blessing for all those nations that respect the descendants of Abraham. (cf. Gen 12:1ff).

20 These promises of God to Abraham were unconditional ones (cf. Gen 12:1-3 and 15:4-18). God made this covenant with Abraham long before he made the one regarding the law with Moses on Mount Sinai. Therefore, the promises given previously to Abraham could not be revoked. Rather they remain in force, to the glory and faithfulness of God and his Word (cf. 25 Eze 36:22-23). The unchanging nature of these promises is emphasised through various illustrations in the Holy Scripture: cf. Jer 31:35-37; 33:20; Isa 54:10 (cf. also Rom 11:25-27).

2. The Messianic prophecy

30 We know many prophecies with regard to the first coming of Jesus (his incarnation), which have been literally fulfilled. Therefore, I believe, the promises regarding his second coming will also be fulfilled (the ones concerning his return, i.e. his Parousia).

Luk 1:31-33 *You will be with child and give birth to a son, he will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end.*

If we take the first half of this passage of Scripture literally, then we should logically do the same with the second half. Jesus confirmed that this prophecy referred to himself (cf. Mat 23:37-39). Rom 11: 25-29 confirms this.

3. Salvation history

The victory of Christ on the cross still has to be made visible on this earth (cf. Act 3:21). In spite of other interpretations of prophecy (spiritualising or allegorising ones), the reality of the visible kingdom of Christ on earth remains certain.

Dan 2:34-35

*While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the **whole earth**.*

Just as the previous kingdoms (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome) were real earthly kingdoms, so also will the new kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, the millennium, be an earthly kingdom. It will take the place of the previous ones, the difference being that it will be a worldwide kingdom, because the rock became a huge mountain filling '**the whole earth**':

Luk 1:32

...and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David...

Rev 5:10

*...you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve out God and they will reign **on the earth**.*

This throne of David was in Jerusalem, where Israel is today, i.e. on this earth, and Christ will reign on this throne for 1000 years... **on this earth** (cf. Isa 25:6-8: '*on this mountain*').

D. The establishment of the millennium

The millennium will be heralded in by a number of important events:

1. Satan will be bound

Rev 20:1-3 (cf. Isa 24:21-22). The time will come when the tempter will no longer be able to deceive those living on earth. During this dispensation, men should realise at last that they are inclined to sin (since the fall of Adam) through their evil desires even if the devil is not around to tempt them. Mankind should realise the depths of its depravity (i.e. sinfulness) which came about as a result of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3; Psa 51:7; Rom 5:12; 8:21-25; Jam 1:13-15 etc.). Any person committing sin during the millennium is liable to be judged severely: cf. Isa 65:20. During that time, the sinner cannot blame the devil for his transgressions anymore, i.e. 'pass the buck' as Eve did in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3:13: "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*"), since *the old serpent* will be bound at that time (and therefore not able to cause harm).

2. The first resurrection

More about this see the following chapter about the resurrection. According to Rev 20:4-6, believers will be raised before or at the beginning of the millennium in order to reign with Christ (cf. Rev 5:10). Unbelievers on the other hand will only be raised after one thousand years (Rev 20:5.11-15; cf. 1Co 15:22-24), in order to be cast into the lake of fire, i.e. hell. The resurrection of unbelievers is called the *second death* (cf. Rev 20:6.14).

E. Characteristics of the millennium

Here is a list of well-known and typical passages of Scripture relating to the Messianic kingdom, i.e. the millennium:

10	Isaiah:	4; 11-12; 24:21-26:6; 27; 35; 60; 65:17-25; 66:7-24.
	Jeremiah:	23:5.
	Ezekiel:	37; 39:25-29; 40-48.
	Daniel:	2:34-35.43-44.
15	Joel:	3:17-21 (other translations 4:17-21).
	Amos:	9:7-15 (first fulfilment through the Church: cf. Act 15:16-18 together with Amos 9:11-12).
	Obadiah:	Verses 16-21.
	Micah:	4:1-8; 7:7-20.
20	Zephaniah:	3:12-20.
	Haggai:	2:6-7.
	Zechariah:	14.
	Malachi:	4:1-6 (other translations 3:19-24).
	Acts:	1:6; 3:20-21.
25	Hebrews:	2:8.
	Revelation:	2:26-27; 5:10; 20:1-6.

1. Righteousness

Psa 45:7-8; 72:2.4.7.12-14; Isa 2:4; 11:3-5; 32:16-18; 60:11 etc.

2. Peace

30 Psa 72:3.7; Isa 2:4; 9:5-6; 32:17-18; Mic 4:4:

1. Peace in Israel: Isa 12:1-3; Mic 5:4.
2. Peace between Judah and Ephraim: Eze 37:16-22.
3. Peace in the animal world: Isa 11:6-8.
- 35 4. Men will live in safety from wild beasts: Eze 34:25-28.

3. Topographical changes

Isa 32:15; 41:18-19; 55:13; Zec 14:4-5.10 etc.

4. Health and longevity

Isa 33:24; 35:5-6; 65:20-23; Zec 8:4.

5. Material prosperity

Psa 72:16; Isa 30:23-25; 65:21-22; Joe 3:18; Amo 9:13-14.

5 6. The new temple

Isa 60:7; Eze 40–48; Joe 3:17 (other translations 4:17); Hag 2:7; Zec 14:20-21.

7. The Messiah will reign

Isa 11:1-5; Eze 48:35; Dan 7:13-15; Mic 5:1-4.

8. Satan will be bound

10 Rev 20:1-3; cf. Isa 24:21-22.

9. Sin and death will still be reality

Isa 11:4; 27:3-5; 65:20; Zec 14:16-19.

F. Jesus Christ and the millennium

15 The kingdom of God is a mystery until this day. As far as the world is concerned, Jesus remains hidden from sight. Evil is apparently reigning. But the day is approaching, when the world will behold the glorified King of kings, the one it utterly despised (Jesus on the cross: cf. Isa 53:3). Pilate rightly had the inscription **'INRI'** (abbreviation meaning: *Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum* = *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*) fixed to the cross. But the majority of the people mocked him. When Jesus returns in glory it will be different (cf. Zec 14:13ff; Rev 1:7; 19:11-21 etc.). At last, his victory will be manifest forever. For a description of the glory of the new temple, please refer to Eze 43–44.¹³⁵

Eze 43:2 *...and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east... and the land was radiant with his glory.*

25 Jesus Christ will return visibly, in order to judge and to reign: Rev 1:7; Mat 24:30 etc. His residence will be in Jerusalem: Isa 24:23; 27:13; 60:1.13; Zec 14:4.16. The Lord will be worshipped even by the nations: Zec 14:16; Isa 66:18-19. However, it should not be forgotten

¹³⁵ I.e. the millennial temple. In the eternal state, i.e. in the new creation, there will no longer be a temple (cf. Rev 21:22).

that during the millennium Christ will reign with an '*iron sceptre*'; the rebellious will be punished: cf. Psa 2:8-9; Isa 11:4; Mic 5:3ff; Rev 12:5; 19:15.

- 5 The millennium will make the glory and triumph of Christ clearly visible. At that time, the devil will no longer be the prince and god of this world (cf. Joh 12:31; Rom 16:20; 2Co 4:4), but Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things (cf. Zec 14:9).

G. The Church and the millennium

- 10 The Church will be consummated through the rapture and the wedding feast of the Lamb. During the millennium the glorified Church (already 'clothed' with the spiritual body) will reign with Christ over the nations and Israel (both still living in this earthly body). From the moment of the rapture, the Church will always be there, where Christ her bridegroom is (cf. 1Th 4:17). The promise of Rom 16:20 will at last be fulfilled.

- 15 **2Ti 2:12** *If we endure, we will also reign with him...*

Cf. Rev 1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21. The following references show that believers will reign with Christ on earth: Rev 5:10; 20:4-6; cf. Dan 2:35; Zec 14:9.

- 20 Our co-regency with Christ begins then when we appear with him at his glorious return: cf. 1Th 3:13; Rev 19:14 (following the wedding feast of the Lamb mentioned in Rev 19:1-10).

Probably the judgement of the nations will coincide with the beginning of this reign. According to 1Co 6:2-3, the Church is called to participate in this judgement (cf. Rev 20:4).

- 25 Holy Scripture reveals little about the responsibility of the Church during the millennium. It merely says that believers will **reign with Christ** and fulfil a priestly office (Rev 5:10; 20:6; cf. Luk 19:15-19).

H. Israel and the millennium

1. Israel will return to its country

- 30 Isa 11:11-12; 27:12-13; Eze 37:25; 39:27-28 etc.

2. The nations will lead Israel back to its country and Israel will rule over them

Isa 14:2-3.

3. The remainder of the people of Israel will then turn to the Lord

Isa 4:3; 59:20-21 (quoted in Rom 11:26); Eze 36:31; Zec 12:10.

4. Israel will praise God and offer thanksgiving

5 Isa 12:1-6; Zec 14:21.

5. Israel will be a blessing to the other nations

Zec 8:13 (cf. Zec 8:23; Isa 66:18-20).

6. The country of Israel will be beautiful and once again divided according to its tribes

10 Eze 36:35-38; 47:13-48:29; Amo 9:11-15.

7. The temple will be the centre of worship in the midst of the country

Isa 60:13-14; Eze 43:7; Mic 4:1-2.

8. Sacrifices of remembrance will be presented

15 Cf. Isa 66:20; Eze 43-44; Zec 14:20-21. I mentioned above that these sacrifices would be of a commemorative nature. They will be a reminder of the work of Christ on the cross (of retrospective nature) in the same way that the Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to (of prospective nature) the coming perfect sacrifice.

I. The nations and the millennium

20 1. Israel will evangelise the nations

Isa 66:19.

2. The Lord will reveal himself to the nations

Isa 25:7; Zec 14:9.

3. The nations will come to know the Lord through God's dealings with Israel

Psa 126:2; Eze 36:36-38; 39:27-28.

4. The nations will serve the Lord and worship him

5 Isa 2:3; 19:23-24; 66:2-3; Zep 3:9; Zec 14:16.

5. The Lord will judge the nations and rule over them

Isa 2:4; Rev 12:5.

6. But not all nations will come to worship the Lord

10 Even at that time there will unfortunately be rebellious people. Therefore, there will be nations that will be punished: Zec 14:19 (cf. Isa 11:4; 65:20).

7. The root of rebellion will continue to exist in the heart of many people during the millennium

15 Hence, we have to understand the grievous fact that at the end of the millennium many people will be deceived by the devil into rebelling against the Lord. According to Rev 20:7-9 the devil will, after the 1000 years, be released again for a short while.

J. Creation and the millennium

The earth was cursed following the fall of man: Gen 3:17-19; cf. Rom 8:20. The whole of creation longs for the day of redemption from this curse:

20 **Rom 8:21** *...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

The day is coming when creation will also be liberated from the curse: Hos 2:23-24 (cf. Act 3:19-21 that probably relates to this event).

25 1. Nature will blossom during the millennium

Isa 27:2-6; 35:1-7; 51:3; 55:12-13 etc.

2. The fields will bear much fruit

Isa 65:21; Amo 9:13.

3. Even the stars will shine more brightly

Isa 30:26.

5 4. The animals will no longer be wild and fearful

Isa 11:6-8; 65:25.

5. Much of this will be possible because the tempter, the devil, will be bound during this time

Rev 20:2.

10

In spite of this, the millennium will only be a 'foretaste' of eternity (i.e. the new creation, which will begin immediately after the millennium and the judgement of the unbelievers before the great white throne).

VIII. THE RESURRECTION

A. The dead

The dead, both believers and unbelievers, retain their personality after their physical death. Their **memory** and their **conscience** continue to function beyond the grave. Cf. Isa 14:9-10; Eze 32:21; Luk 16:19-31; Rev 6:9-11. Physical death brings about the separation of spirit (and/or soul) and body: see e.g. Luk 8:55; 23:46; 1Ki 17:21; cf. Gen 35:18; Ecc 12:7; Jon 4:3.

Since the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the spirits of deceased believers are with the Lord in heaven: see Phi 1:23; Rev 6:10-11; Luk 16:22; 23:43 (possibly cf. Eph 4:8). Until the resurrection of the body, the spirits of deceased believers remain, so to say, 'at rest' (or in a state of rest): cf. 1Sa 28:15; Rev 6:10-11; 14:13.

If the text of Luk 16:19-31 (the parable of Lazarus and the rich man) describes the present state of the dead, it means that the spirit of a deceased unbeliever suffers physical pain before the resurrection of the body. This issue is a controversial one. I personally think that we cannot interpret this parable in this way. In general, a parable teaches one central truth. And in this parable the eternal truth is without any doubt that of man having to put his life in order before death, afterwards it is too late (cf. Heb 9:27 and the 'today' in Heb 3:7). It is our attitude regarding the prophetic word that is the deciding factor with regard to our life in the hereafter (cf. Luk 16:29-31). In this parable, the rich man asks for someone from among the dead to go and warn his family. I understand this to mean that the judgement of the great white throne (the resurrection and judgement of unbelievers) had not yet taken place.

The Bible prohibits contact between the living and the (spirits of the) dead (cf. Deu 18:11ff). People who get in touch with the dead are called *spiritualists*. Such practices are commonplace in countries where animism is (still) rampant. Animists believe they can communicate with the spirits of the dead. They go to a medium or witch doctor and ask him to contact the spirit of the desired person (usually for remuneration). Animists believe that the spirits of departed relatives are close by. They often bring them gifts or sacrifices.¹³⁶ It would be wrong to believe that this is merely an imaginary and harmless practice. In fact, it is an occult practice. In the final analysis, it is a devilish deception. Why? Scripture teaches that the spirit of a dead person is no longer here on earth among the living. It has departed to its place¹³⁷ to await the day of resurrection and judgement. In that place it can no longer act or intervene on earth (cf. Isa 14:9.20-21; 26:14; 38:11; Psa 30:10; 88:11-13; Luk 16:19-31). In Heb 9:27, it says that man has to die once. Waiting for the judgement is all that remains. Man does not live twice or more times on the earth. The teaching of **reincarnation** is a false teaching propagated by various religions and certain esoteric sects.¹³⁸ The Bible prohibits

¹³⁶ This is not only prevalent in Africa and South America but also in many Asian countries like China or Japan.

¹³⁷ I.e. to the place of the (departed) dead. In the O. T., this is usually called *Sheol* (שְׁאוֹל), in the N. T. *Hades* (ᾗδης).

¹³⁸ E.g. in Brahmanism and Hinduism.

contacting the dead and so it should in fact be clear that such practices as praying for the dead or veneration of the dead (the so-called saints¹³⁹) are unbiblical. The Catholic teaching regarding the celebration of mass for the dead or prayer for them to free them from purgatory is contrary to Holy Scripture. Prayer to the saints in order to get them to mediate for us with the Lord is also wrong:

- This is a transgression against the second commandment (cf. Exo 20:4-6).
- The New Testament clearly rejects this. There is only one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (cf. 1Ti 2:5). Hence, neither the saints, nor Mary, nor anyone else apart from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can mediate for us: cf. Rom 8:34; 1Jo 2:1-2.

The Roman Catholic Church bases this false teaching of prayer for the dead as well as the prayers of the dead for the living and the veneration of the saints on apocryphal books (i.e. books which are not part of the Canon of Scripture): cf. e.g. 2Ma 12:39-46; 15:11-16 and Sir 46:20.¹⁴⁰

B. The resurrection of Jesus Christ

Joh 11:25 *Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life."*

1Co 15:20 *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, **the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is **the cause** of the resurrection of all mankind.

1Co 15:22 *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Christ's resurrection teaches us the following truths:

1. There is death.
2. There is a resurrection.
3. There is a new imperishable body.

The Holy Scriptures teach us that the resurrection body of Christ is the model (or prototype) for the resurrection body of all believers.

Phi 3:21 *...who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

¹³⁹ The New Testament teaches that all believers are saints (it would actually be more correct to say that they are 'sanctified ones' for they are not saints in themselves (*per se*). They are saints because the righteousness and the holiness of Christ are imputed to them: cf. 1Co 1:30; Heb 10:10.14 etc.), not just a 'few' as the Roman Catholic Church teaches.

¹⁴⁰ In order to justify these false teachings, the Roman Catholic Church declared them to be part of the canon of Scripture. This took place at the Council of Trent in 1546 (at the council that started the Counter Reformation). In Catholic circles, these books are referred to as deuterocanonical books. Compare e.g. the TOB, *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible: Ancien Testament*, édition intégrale (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF et Les Bergers et les Mages, 1977), pp. 1889ff.

1Jo 3:2

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be, has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

C. The resurrection of man: two different resurrections

The Bible speaks of the following two different resurrections:

1. The resurrection of believers (also known as *the resurrection of the righteous*).
2. The resurrection of unbelievers (also known as *the resurrection of the unrighteous*).

Dan 12:2

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

Joh 5:28-29

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

The Bible shows us the difference by means of the following three aspects:

1. The ethical aspect of the two different resurrections

1. There will be a resurrection to (eternal) life for those **who have done the good**.
2. There will be a resurrection to condemnation for those **who have done evil** (see Joh 5:29).

Act 24:15

and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

2. The chronological aspect of the two different resurrections

1Co 15:22-24

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominions, authority and power.

Paul clearly indicates the chronology of the different resurrections:

1. First Christ as the first fruits.
2. Then those who belong to him (i.e. believers).
3. And only then the end (i.e. the unbelievers).

Rev 20:4-6 confirms this resurrection in various stages: 'The first resurrection' (cf. Rev 20:5: ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη [*anástasis hē prōtē*]) is the resurrection of believers (before the 1000

years). In 1Co 15:51-53 and in 1Th 4:14-17, it says that all the believing dead will be raised and at the same time the living believers will be changed. That is they will all receive a new body: a resurrection or glorious body.

- 5 Rev 20:5 says that unbelievers (in the text: *“the rest of the dead”*) will not be raised with those who are the Lord’s (i.e. with the believers). They will not be raised before or at the beginning of the 1000 years. This is because they cannot be a part of the kingdom of Christ. They will remain among the dead in Hades until the end of the 1000 years. They will only be raised after the kingdom of Christ and that in order to be judged and cast into the lake of fire, i.e. hell (cf. Rev 20:11-15). Their resurrection is called *‘the second death’* (see Rev 20:6.14: ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερός [*ho thánatos ho déuterós*]). This is the spiritual death, because they will not be partakers of eternal joy but will rather suffer eternal punishment (cf. Dan 12:2; Joh 5:29; Rev 14:9-11; 20:15).
- 10
- 15 We could summarise this in the following way:

1. **The resurrection of Jesus Christ:** He rose on the third day after his death. After 40 days, he ascended to heaven. From there he will return to take his Church to himself, to judge the world (the nations and Israel) and to establish his thousand-year kingdom (cf. Zec 14:3ff; Act 1:6.9-12; Rev 19:11-21). After the 1000 years, he will finally destroy the devil, casting him into the lake of fire (hell), judge unbelievers and also cast them into the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15).
2. **The resurrection of believers:** When a believer dies, his body decays in the ground but his spirit is immediately in the presence of the Lord. When Christ returns to take up his Church (through the rapture), the body of the dead believer will be raised and that of the believer who is still living, will be changed. They will both receive an immortal imperishable body, which will instantly be united with their spirit. Until then the spirit of the dead believer will have been with the Lord, in anticipation of the resurrection. Only then will believers reign with Christ on earth for 1000 years after which they will go into eternity, the new creation, with him. It should be clear that during these 1000 years, the devil will not be able to tempt the resurrected ones, i.e. those who have already received their glorious body.¹⁴¹
3. **The resurrection of unbelievers:** When an unbeliever dies, his body also decays in the earth (or wherever). His Spirit (and/or soul) will be kept in Hades, the place of the dead, until the judgement. He will be raised after the 1000 years to appear before the great white throne. Then he will be cast into the lake of fire. This will be the so called *‘second death’*, eternal death, everlasting separation from God (cf. Rev 20:13-15).

3. Two different resurrections in respect of eternal destiny

We have already seen:

40

Joh 5:29 *...those who have done good will rise **to live**, and those who have done evil will rise to be **condemned**.*

¹⁴¹ For unregenerate man, still living in this earthly body during the millennium, this will still be possible when the devil is freed for a short time at the end of the 1000 years. Satan will be bound before the 1000 years so that he cannot tempt those who enter the millennium in their unregenerate state. But after these 1000 years he will be freed again. In Rev 20:7-9, it says that he will be able to deceive those in this millennial kingdom so that they rebel against the Lord. This of course does not apply to those who will have already been glorified and who will have reigned 1000 years with Christ.

Dan 12:2 *...some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*

D. The resurrection body

5 God created man with body, soul and spirit, (cf. 1Th 5:23). He also redeems body, soul and spirit. For this reason, the new body (the resurrection body) is indispensable:

10 **Rom 8:23** *...but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Our present body is called '*a natural body*' (in Greek literally: '*psychikón*' [ψυχικόν], i. e. '*psychic body*')

15 **1Co 15:46a** *The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual (in Greek: psychic)*

But at the consummation of all things (i.e. in the eternal state), we will have a **spiritual body**:

20 **1Co 15:46b** *...after that the spiritual.*

The resurrection of Christ was the work of the trinity:

25 **Act 2:24.32** *But God raised him from the dead. . . . God has raised this Jesus to life...*

Joh 11:25 *I am the resurrection and the life (cf. Joh 2:19).*

30 **Rom 8:11** *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you.*

So also our resurrection:

35 **1Co 6:14** *Now God has not only raised the Lord but will also raise us up through his power.*

Joh 6:40 *For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I (i.e. Jesus Christ) will raise him up at the last day.*

40 **Rom 8:11** *And if the **Spirit** of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies **through his Spirit who lives in you.***

45 *"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: «Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where O death, is your victory? Where O death is your sting?»" (1Co 15:54-55)*

The resurrection body, which those who have already died will receive, will, without any doubt, be the same as that which those who are still living at the time of the rapture will be clothed with (i.e. those who will be changed).

5

The earthly body (of both believers and unbelievers) rests in the grave, decays and returns to dust... It returns to the state that it originally came from:

10 **Gen 3:19** *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken: for dust you are and to dust you will return!*

But this earthly dust is **the seed** of the resurrection body:

15 **1Co 15:38** *But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.*

There is then a connection between the earthly body and the resurrection body:

20 **Gal 6:7** *Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*

The earthly body of the believer is *a temple of the Holy Spirit* (cf. 1Co 6:19), which when we are glorified, will become a glorious body (cf. Phi 3:21). The body of the unbeliever will become a body of shame (cf. Dan 12:2).

25

During our life in the body here on earth we ourselves finally decide with which body we will go into eternity!

30 Today that seed is developing, out of which one day the eternal body will come. This shows us that the time of grace is also a time of decision. We should have a responsible attitude to our bodies. See also 2Co 5:10 in this respect.

IX. Hell

Jesus speaks more frequently in the gospels about hell than about heaven, but in spite of this many Bible expositors and theologians deny the existence of an actual eternal hell. People are happy to believe in the existence of heaven, the life to come, everlasting life, but many reject the idea of everlasting condemnation in hell. Modern man is infected by a perverse 'pseudo humanism' and finds it difficult to believe in the existence of hell and eternal judgement. It is therefore all the more important for us as Evangelicals to remain faithful to the Scriptures on the subject of eternal punishment.

A. What is 'Hell'?

10 We find a number of expressions for the underworld in the Bible:

1. Abyss (the pit)

We believe, along with many commentators that the evil beings coming out of the abyss (ἄβυσσος [*abussos*]) in Rev 9:1-2 are demons. In Rev 9:11, it says that Apollyon¹⁴² the king of these evil powers comes out of the abyss. Since we know that natural locusts do not have a 'king' at their head, these dark creatures in Rev 9 can hardly be real locusts but rather demonic powers. Verse 11 seems to confirm this because it says that an angel is the king of these beings. This probably means Satan. In Rev 11:7, it also says that the beast (i.e. the Antichrist: cf. Rev 13:1-3 and 17:8) will come up out of the abyss.

2. Hades (in O. T.: Sheol)

20 Hades is the realm of the dead. The quotation from Psa 16:10 in Act 2:27 shows that Hades in the N. T. is the same as Sheol in the O. T. According to the *Nouveau Dictionnaire Biblique*,¹⁴³ Hades means "invisible". The Jews call the place where all the dead go, *Sheol*, this both for the blessed and the accursed. On the cross Jesus told the repentant criminal that he would be in Paradise with him on that same day (Luk 23:43). That indicates that since the death of Jesus the spirits of believing dead no longer go to the realm of the dead (Hades) but direct to Paradise, i.e. into the presence of the Lord in the heavenly realms (cf. Rev 6:9-11: "the souls under the altar"). It seems that, from the time of Jesus' death onward, the spirits of the believing dead of all times have been freed from Hades and are in Paradise where they await the resurrection of the body. It could be that Eph 4:8-10 alludes to the release of the spirits of the redeemed. Col 2:14-15 also confirms that the death of Jesus on the cross is the manifestation of the victory over condemnation, and with that over death, sin and the devil (cf. 1Jo 3:8; Heb 2:14-15).

¹⁴² Ἀπολλύων (*Apollūōn*), which corresponds to the Hebrew אַבְדֹּן (*'abaddōn* = destruction, hell, underworld, cf. Job 28:22; Psa 88:12), derived from the root (i.e. the verb) אָבַד (*'ābed*) meaning *destroy* in the Piel.

¹⁴³ René Pache, sous dir., *Le Nouveau Dictionnaire Biblique* (Saint-Légier, Suisse: Editions Emmaüs, 1992).

Hades represents a sort of 'hell's waiting room' where the spirits of the unbelieving dead of all times await the judgement of the great white throne (cf. Rev 20:11-15). In Rev 20:13-14, it says that when the judgement of unbelievers takes place before the great white throne, Hades will give up its dead in order for them to be judged and cast into the lake of fire. Only then will Hades no longer have a reason to exist because at that time those who were there will have been cast into the lake of fire, i.e. hell, the destination of all the condemned.

3. Katoteros

The only place in the New Testament where this word is found is Eph 4:9: κατώτερος (*katōteros*) meaning without any doubt 'the underworld'. The Greek word κάτω (*kátō*) means *under, downwards*: cf. Mat 4:6; Mar 14:66; 15:38; Act 2:19. *Katōteros* is probably the comparative form of the word *kátō*. I take the view, along with other commentators, that *katōteros* is simply a synonym for *Hades* or *Sheol*.

4. Tartarus

In Greek mythology, *Tartarus* is the place where Zeus cast the people that he dammed. 2Pe 2:4 is the only passage in the N. T., where this word root is found. In Peter's letter the participle ταρταρώσας (*tartarōsas*: from the verb ταρταρόω [*tartarōō*]) is used, in order to say that God cast the fallen angels into the dark pit and imprisoned them there to await their judgement. The parallel passage in Jud 6 speaks of a *dark place* (ζόφος [*zōphos*] = *darkness*). There is every reason to believe that this place is identical to the abyss where the demons are imprisoned in Rev 9:1.

5. Gehenna

Many scholars believe that the word *Gehenna* comes from the expression 'Valley of the sons of Hinnom'. Therefore, *Gehenna* means the place of judgement.¹⁴⁴ The valley of Hinnom was the place where children were sacrificed to the god Molech (they were burnt, i.e. sent through the fire): cf. 2Ki 23:10; 2Ch 28:3; Jer 7:32 (cf. also Mat 27:7-8). The word *Gehenna* causes you therefore to think of torment in fire. *Gehenna* is the place of everlasting punishment: cf. Mat 5:22,29; Mar 9:43; Luk 12:5; Jam 3:6 etc. The lake of fire and *Gehenna* are therefore identical. In English we use the word 'hell'. Hell is the final destination of the damned.

B. Images used for Hell in the Bible

Pache¹⁴⁵ counts 28 examples. Here is a list of 20 (with Bible references):

1. Everlasting burning: Isa 33:14; cf. Luk 16:24.
2. The worm that does not die: Isa 66:24, quoted in Mar 9:48.
3. Shame and everlasting contempt: Dan 12:2.

¹⁴⁴ So e.g. Maurice Carrez et François Morel, *Dictionnaire grec-français du Nouveau Testament*, 4^{ème} éd. revue et corrigée (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1988), p. 60.

¹⁴⁵ René Pache, *L'enfer existe-t-il?* (Saint-Légier, Suisse: Editions Emmaüs, 1992), pp. 28-35.

4. Unquenchable fire or eternal fire: Mat 3:12; 18:8; 25:41; Mar 9:43.45.48; Heb 10:26-27.
5. Gehenna (NIV *hell*) or Gehenna fire (NIV *hell fire*): Mat 5:29; 10:28; 18:9.
6. Destruction: Mat 7:13; Rom 9:22; Phi 3:19; 2Th 2:8.
7. The fiery furnace Mat 13:41-42.50.
- 5 8. Place of weeping and gnashing of teeth: Mat 13:42.50; 22:13.
9. Eternal punishment: Mat 25:46.
10. The darkness: Mat 8:12; 22:13.
11. The coming wrath: Luk 3:7.
12. A place of torment or agony: Luk 16:23-28; Rev 14:11; 20:10.
- 10 13. Everlasting destruction: 2Th 1:9.
14. Eternal judgement: Heb 6:2.
15. Condemnation: Rom 5:16.18; 8:1.
16. The punishment of eternal fire: Jud 7.
17. Retribution: 2Co 11:15; Col 3:25; 1Th 4:6; 2Th 1:6-7.
- 15 18. Burning sulphur, fiery lake of burning sulphur: Rev 14:10; 19:20; 20:10.14-15.
19. The second death: Rev 2:11; 20:6.14; 21:8.
20. 'Outside': Luk 13:25.28; Rev 22:15.

C. Who will be cast into Hell?

- 20 Hell, according to Mat 25:41, has been prepared for the devil and his angels, who fell with him (cf. Rev 12:4.9). It was probably created after the fall of Satan and 'his' angels. There is therefore no person who has been predestined to hell before the foundation of the world.¹⁴⁶

The ones who will be cast into hell are:

- 25 1. Satan (Rev 20:10) and all his angels, i.e. the demons (cf. Mat 25:41; Jud 6).
2. The Antichrist and the False Prophet (Rev 19:20; 20:10).
3. Death and Hades (Rev 20:13-14), i.e. all those who are in Hades on the day of judgement, unbelievers whose names are not written in the book of life (cf. Rev 20:12.15).

¹⁴⁶ The so-called *Supralapsarianism* maintains that God decided from eternity (cf. God's decrees) who would be predestined to eternal life and who would be predestined to eternal damnation. Only then did he decree creation. This 'hyper-Calvinistic' teaching is known as the dogma of 'double predestination'. Many famous theologians have taught this, for example: Theodore Beza (a pupil of Jean Calvin the reformer) and Franciscus Gomarus (a Dutch professor of the famous university of Leiden, around 1600; his main opponent in these questions was the young Jacob Hermans, better known as Arminius, his followers are still known as Arminians). The followers of the double predestination dogma are often called *Calvinists*. It should however be said that the scholars disagree as to whether Calvin himself was a *Supra-* or (only) an *Infralapsarian*. *Infralapsarianism* teaches that God first decreed creation; secondly, he decreed that the fall of man (lapsus) should be allowed and thirdly that he would predestine certain people to salvation through grace and leave the rest in their sins, which would result in their suffering eternal damnation as the (righteous) judgement for this. Calvin seems to tend towards double predestination in his *Institutio Christiana*. There are scholars however, who are of the opinion that the way (chronology) in which Calvin handled the themes connected with this subject rather points to his advocating Infra- and not Supralapsarianism. One of these scholars is the French Neo-Calvinist Henri Blocher (I had the privilege of being one of Henri Blocher's students for two years). I personally have the impression that Calvin expressed himself unclearly or ambiguously in this matter. I believe that passages such as 1Ti 2:3-4; 2Pe 3:9; 1Jo 2:1-2 etc., speak against this (Calvinistic) interpretation (of the so-called decrees of God) (cf. my brochure *Biblical Anthropology*). The Christian author C. S. Lewis, in *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 69 (cf. supra), says: "All that are in hell choose it."

On the day of the last judgement, all those who are not saved through Jesus Christ will be cast into hell, the lake of fire, i.e. Gehenna: cf. Joh 3:16-18.36; 5:24; 14:6.

D. How long will Hell exist?

The Bible says clearly that hell will have no end. Many people (also Christians) are influenced by false sentimentalism and modern humanism. They cannot believe that a God of love could expose his creatures (whom, even if they rebelled are his creation) to eternal torment. He who thinks and argues in this way however is forgetful of the fact that Holy Scripture does not teach that God himself will torment those concerned. God does not compel people to go to the place of torment. Those there, will have made that decision themselves because they have willingly hardened their hearts and rejected God's offer of grace in Jesus Christ (*whoever will... let him come; whoever thirsts, let him drink... without cost*). Those who go to hell are those who have willingly rejected the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their torment will be separation from the happiness and joy found through forgiveness and peace with God... privileges that only the Saviour Jesus Christ can give.

Here some Bible passages which emphasise that damnation will be eternal, i.e. never ending:¹⁴⁷

1. Isaiah speaks of *everlasting burning, of fire that does not go out and of the worm that will not die* (Isa 33:14; 66:24; cf. Mar 9:43-48). If this fire cannot be put out, then it means that the damnation will never end.
2. Daniel says that some will awake to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan 12:2).
3. John the Baptist and Jesus both speak of unquenchable fire (cf. Mat 3:12; Mar 9:43).
4. The Lord will say: "*Depart from me . . . into the eternal fire...*"; "*Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*" (cf. Mat 25:41.46)
5. "*But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven: he is guilty of an eternal sin.*" (Mar 3:29; cf. Mat 12:32)
6. "*They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.*" (cf. 2Th 1:9)
7. "*Eternal judgement*" is, according to Heb 6:2, one of the elementary teachings!
8. "*...these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the great day...; Sodom and Gomorrah . . . serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire . . . wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved for ever.*" (Jud 6.7.13; cf. also with the following [hard and dreadful] passages in the book of Revelation: 14:11; 19:3 and 20:10).

Pache says concerning these passages:

Anyone reading these texts, just as they are, gets the inescapable impression from them that the torment of hell will never end. Still, such a thought seems

¹⁴⁷ Many of the following arguments (up to the end of this forth sub-chapter 'D') are based on the book *The Future Life*, by René Pache (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), pp. 290-295. The title of the original edition: *L'au-delà*, 5th ed. (Saint-Légier, Switzerland: Editions Emmaüs, 1982), pp. 227-231.

to our minds so ghastly that many objections have been brought up in an attempt to overcome any such conviction.¹⁴⁸

It is amazing that there are also evangelical commentators who reject every notion of eternal judgement. They are influenced by false sentimentality (and probably modern humanism). In order to substantiate their opinions they often expound Bible passages arbitrarily. This (false) teaching is known as **Universalism**. It is to be noted that there are various forms of Universalism:

1. Some maintain that those who are not saved will be annihilated on the judgement day.
 2. Others, such as the Seventh Day Adventists or the Adventists maintain that this annihilation only takes place after the 1000 years, i.e. after the millennium.¹⁴⁹
 3. Some others, such as the Roman-Catholic Church, believe in the existence of purgatory where certain people will be 'purged' from their sins and finally get to heaven (see above).
 4. There are also many who simply believe that no one will finally go to hell; for them rather all will be saved, even the devil and his angels! This (false) teaching is called '*apokatastasis*', meaning the (complete and final) *restoration* (in Greek: ἀποκατάστασις [*apokatástasis*]).
- We have already mentioned *purgatory* above and will come back to it again in the following chapter '*The Judgement*'.¹⁵⁰ Those who maintain that unbelievers and the devil with his angels will simply be obliterated (i.e. total *annihilation* or *extinction*), i.e. that they will cease to exist (physically and/or spiritually) base their view on such Bible verses as: Psa 9:6; 92:7 or 2Th 1:8-9, where it says that the wicked will be destroyed forever. It should however be clear that this destruction is connected with life on this earth (cf. Isa 14:20-21). This of course does not mean that they will not exist beyond the grave. Noah's generation (Gen 6-7; Luk 17:27) and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19; Luk 17:29) were destroyed but Holy Scripture says explicitly that these people must appear before God for judgement. Mat 11:24 is only one of the verses that show that it cannot be extinction because it speaks of different degrees of punishment in the judgement. The body will be destroyed but not the inner man (cf. 2Co 4:16; Isa 66:24; Mar 9:47-48). Death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Many Bible passages show clearly that the soul continues to exist after death. The spirits of the dead seem to be aware of their (wasted) earthly life (cf. Rev 6:9-11; Luk 16:19-31).
- Those who maintain that all will be saved eventually, even the devil and his angels, point to such Bible verses as Col 1:19-20, where Paul says that God, through Christ, reconciled to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Some conclude that the devil and his angels must be included in this. Those representing this view base their arguments on Rom 5:18, where Paul says that the one act of righteousness resulted in justification for all. But this interpretation of the text is arbitrary. This one verse is taken out of the context as a whole. It is surely clear that Paul showed time and time again that reconciliation with God is only for those who receive the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Some examples are found in Romans: 1:16-17; 3:22 (*for all, who believe...* but not the others!); 5:1; 8:1.8-14; 9:1-3. In 2Co 5:20, Paul clearly says that reconciliation with God must be accepted ("*...we implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God!*"). You are not 'automatically' reconciled. The words of Jesus also show this: "*Whoever is thirsty, let him come...*" God does not force

¹⁴⁸ René Pache, *The Future Life*, p. 292 (French original edition p. 229).

¹⁴⁹ See e.g. Werner Schulz, *Meine Hoffnung hat einen Namen: Jesus* (Überlingen, Germany: W. Schulz, n. d.), pp. 301-303 (with reference to Rev 20:7-10).

¹⁵⁰ See chapter VIII, **The Resurrection**, sub-point A., **The dead**. See also chapter X.C.3.

anyone. He who does not receive, does not believe, **remains** lost: cf. Joh 1:11-12; 3:16-18.36; 5:40; 7:37; Mat 23:37; Luk 7:30 and so on. The apostle Peter says that Jesus Christ even paid the ‘ransom’ for the false teachers, but that these will be lost in spite of this, *even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them* (2Pe 2:1).

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Universalists justify their interpretation by pointing out, that expressions in the Old Testament, such as ‘forever’ (לְעוֹלָם [l^e ‘ōlām]), do not always have to have the meaning that we attribute to them. The expression ‘forever’, can, depending to the context, also indicate a period of time or an epoch. It does not necessarily mean ‘eternal’ in the sense of ‘never ceasing’. No one doubts though that when it is a question of the Lord himself and *eternal life with him*, these expressions must be understood unconditionally. Why should we have a different attitude when it is not a question of eternal glory but of (eternal) damnation? Here are some examples:

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“Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever!”¹⁵¹ (Psa 45:6)

“...from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”¹⁵² (Psa 90:2)

“I will make an everlasting covenant with you.”¹⁵³ (Isa 55:3)

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Is it not significant that Dan 12:2 uses the same word for *everlasting life* and for *everlasting contempt*; in fact the word mentioned above ‘ōlām (לְעוֹלָם)? Is it not therefore inconsequent to interpret the life of the righteous after their resurrection as being never ending bliss but the life of the unrighteous after their resurrection as (for example) lasting *1000 years* or even as being extinguished? The corresponding use of the word ‘ōlām in the two contexts should not be overlooked.

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Universalists also argue that the Greek word for ‘eternal’ in the New Testament (αἰώνιος [aiōnios]) could, in the context of the future age, simply mean ‘a long period’ (or something similar). The word αἰών (aiōn) can in fact be translated as ‘epoch’. That is pertinent. The New Testament does not leave the reader in the dark over the meaning of the respective sense of this word (71 times in the N.T.) in its particular setting. This word comes 64 times in connection with the godly and blessed realities of the *other world: the eternal God, his eternal strength/power, the eternal Spirit* (Heb 9:14), *eternal life, the eternal gospel* (Rev 14:6), *the eternal kingdom, eternal salvation, eternal redemption, the eternal covenant, the eternal inheritance, eternal glory, eternal comfort, eternal dwellings, eternal times, eternal invisible things...* In all these cases, there is no doubt that ‘eternal’ means ‘never ceasing’. This word is also used seven times in terms of *eternal destruction*: Mat 18:8; 25:41 and Jud 7: *eternal fire*; Mat 25:46: *eternal punishment*, Mar 3:29: *But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of eternal sin* (in Greek: εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [eis ton aiōna]), 2Th 1:9: *everlasting destruction*, Heb 6:2: *eternal judgement*. The following question must be posed: Why should the word *eternal* be used 64 times in the sense of *never ceasing* and the same word in seven other texts suddenly mean something different, i.e. **not eternal in the sense of being never ending**? That is what the advocates of Universalism maintain in the final analysis. In the words of Jesus in Mat 25:46, the same expression of time is used for *eternal life* as well as for *eternal judgement: Then they will go away to eternal punishment*, (εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον [eis kólasin aiōnion]), *but the righteous to eternal life* (εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον [eis zōēn aiōnion]). If *life* is to continue forever, why not *punishment* as well?

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¹⁵¹ The Hebrew text says: כְּסֹאֲךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד.

¹⁵² The Hebrew text says: וּמִעוֹלָם עַד־עוֹלָם אַתָּה אֵל.

¹⁵³ The Hebrew text says: וְאֶכְרַתָּה לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם.

The same can be said in the case of the word 'eternity' or 'eternally'. In the New Testament these words are used in an unconditional sense. Here is an example:

- 5 “But because Jesus lives forever (in Greek: εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [*eis ton aiōna*]) he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them . . . but the oath that came after the law appointed the Son who has been made perfect for ever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [*eis ton aiōna*]). . . . Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [*eis tous aiōnas*]; this time a plural in Greek: *throughout eternities*).” (Heb 7:24-25.28b; 13:8)
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- Why should the same term have another meaning when Jude uses it in his letter (verse 13,¹⁵⁴ cf. v. 6) in reference to hell? In my opinion, it is arbitrary and dangerously inconsistent to insist on this.
- 15 Certain Universalists maintain that the expression ‘forever and ever’ (or *from age to age*) must be understood in the following way: There are *two future epochs*. The first *epoch* is the millennium; the second is eternity, the new creation. According to these commentators, perdition is limited to the first epoch. This argument however does not bear closer examination. Take for example Rev 14:11. It is clear from this passage that the punishment and torment will never end. This verse does not only speak of two ages but literally: ‘*from*
- 20 *ages to ages*’ or ‘*from epochs to epochs*’. In the Greek text: εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων (*eis aiōnas aiōnōn*): literally: ‘*to ages of ages*’. This means that the word ‘age’ is both times in the plural in Greek (*to ages of ages*). The hypothesis of apparently (only) two ages cannot be substantiated from the original Greek text. These expressions mean without any doubt
- 25 ‘forever’, ‘without end’. That means that blessedness, eternal life, will be *forever*... consequently the same is true for perdition, for hell: it will never end! “*Their worm does not die . . . the fire is not quenched.*” Personality and human consciousness will never be destroyed (annihilated). This is also true for the devil and his angels. Undoubtedly, a spirit cannot die! The angels are, according to the Holy Scripture, spiritual beings. It is the same
- 30 with the spirit of man, the invisible immaterial person!

E. What will be the condition of those condemned to Hell?

- Here are some passages showing the seriousness of eternal punishment: the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in **Luk 16:19-31** make it plain that the lost (condemned) person still retains his memory, conscience and consciousness beyond the grave. He is in torment and without hope of one day getting out of this misery... “*There is no rest day or night for those...*” (Rev 14:11).
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- Mat 8:12** speaks of darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth. Isa 66:24 (cf. Mar 9:46-48) uses the picture of the never dying worm and unquenchable fire to describe the same truth. Isa 50:11 and Rev 14:9-11 make the seriousness of eternal judgement clear showing the place of the lost as a place of fire where the condemned *will never more have peace, day and night from eternity to eternity*.
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¹⁵⁴ Jud 13: “...for whom blackest darkness has been reserved for ever (εἰς αἰῶνα [*eis aiōna*]).”

Hell will never come to an end. Just as heaven is eternal, so is hell. This fact should challenge every Christian to have an evangelistic lifestyle. Jude (the brother of the Lord) calls upon us to: "*Snatch others from the fire and save them!*" (Jud 23)

X. THE JUDGEMENTS

A. The reality of the judgements

Gen 18:25 *Will not the judge of all the earth do right?*

5 **Act 17:31** *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.*

10 **2Ti 4:1** *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom...*

Heb 9:27 *Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement...*

15 **Heb 10:27** *...but only a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

The Bible reveals clearly both the **grace** as well as the **judgement** of God. You only have to look at how many of the prophetic books in the Old Testament are divided up: *grace and judgement* or *judgement and grace*! Isaiah is just one example: Isa 1: judgement; Isa 2: grace (restoration); Isa 3: judgement; Isa 4: grace. Much of the Old Testament has to do with the terrible judgements on the nations and individuals because of their sin. The Gospels give an account of the judgement (par excellence) on sin... that is the judgement which took place on the cross, when Jesus Christ took our judgement on himself (substitution): cf. Joh 19:30; 1Co 1:30 and 2Co 5:21. It is less important to know **how** someone must be judged as to know that fact, **that** someone must be judged. Judgement reveals the righteousness of God as opposed to the sinfulness of man.

That is why the Bible says that before the judgement seat of God, *every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God* (cf. Rom 3:19).

30 B. The Judge

God is the sole judge!

Gen 18:25 *Will not the judge of all the earth do right?*

35 **Isa 35:4** *Your God will come, he will come with vengeance, with divine retribution!*

Heb 12:23 *You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect...*

But God (the Father) has handed over judgement to his Son:

Joh 5:22 *Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son...*

Act 10:42 *He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.*

Rom 2:16 *...on the day when God will judge man's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

2Co 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

2Ti 4:1 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom...*

The Bible also tells us **why** the Son will judge mankind:

Joh 5:27 *And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.*

Jesus Christ lived here on earth just like us – but unlike us he did not sin (cf. 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1Jo 3:5) –, therefore God the Father has entrusted judgement to him. Jesus was tempted just like us. He was acquainted with the problems and the suffering of this earthly life (cf. Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-16). He is, so to speak, an *insider* (the Son of Man), having full understanding of life here on earth. He is, therefore, able to judge in complete righteousness (as Son of God). Mankind will be judged by one of themselves (cf. Heb 2:14).

C. The various judgements

1. In the past

This judgement was borne by our substitute, Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary. He took our sins on himself while we were still sinners:

Isa 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

2Co 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.*

Our sins were judged once and for all on the cross, i.e. blotted out (cf. Heb 10:10 [cf. v. 14]: the Greek expression *ἐφάπαξ*, ['*ephápax*' = *once and for all*]). For this reason, no believer will be judged for his sins but rather for the works that he has done as a believer: 2Co 5:10 (more about this below).

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Joh 3:18 *Whoever believes on him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

10 **Joh 5:24** *I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*

15 **Rom 8:1** *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Consequently, believers are delivered from the power of Satan and sin. The following diagram shows the way believers will be judged:

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PastPresentFuture

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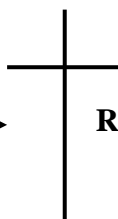
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Sinner**child of God****servant**

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R**Rom 8:1**remembering
Calvary:
cf. 1Co
11:24-25the judgement
seat of Christ
cf. 2Co 5:10

the reward:

CROWN

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These truths should
encourage us to examine
and judge ourselves daily



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**The consequence
of sin:****death:**Rom 6:23:
but Jesus is
our substitute: 2Co 5:21**discipline:**every Christian should
examine and judge himself,
so that the Lord
will not have to judge
him (cf. 1Co 11:31)**the crown:**the reward that the
believer will receive
at the judgement
seat of Christ (cf.
2Ti 4:8; 1Co 3:
11-15; 9:24-25).

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50 **①** The sinner, who receives Jesus Christ as his redeemer and therefore as his substitute, is forgiven and therefore will not be judged for his sin. This is only possible because Christ suffered death, i.e. the unavoidable consequence (the wages) of sin (Rom 6:23), in the place

of man (2Co 5:21). Christ's righteousness is credited to every person who believes on him and his work of redemption.

② Every child of God is challenged to examine and judge himself (cf. 1Co 11:31), so that the Lord must not judge him. The remembrance of Christ's redemptive work on the cross (cf. Joh 19:30; 1Co 11:24-25: "*do this in remembrance of me*") and the knowledge that we believers will one day have to give account before the judgement seat of Christ (cf. 2Co 5:10) should encourage us to examine ourselves and when necessary to 'judge' i.e. purify ourselves (cf. 1Jo 2:28-29; 3:3; 2Pe 3:11-14).

③ The faithful servant of Christ will finally (i.e. after the rapture) receive the crown before the judgement seat of Christ (cf. 2Ti 4:8; Rev 2:10).

This 'agenda' is only for those who have been redeemed through Jesus Christ. Unbelievers will be judged before the great white throne and will be eternally lost (cf. Rev 20:11-15).

2. At present

This judgement is experienced by **every child of God:**

Heb 12:6 *...because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.*

Christians are being disciplined daily by their Lord. The apostle Peter confirms this:

1Pe 4:17 *For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

We need to understand that the Lord disciplines us to encourage us **to judge ourselves:**

1Co 11:31 *But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement.*

Our willingness to discipline ourselves is encouraged by our future hope (cf. 1Jo 3:3) and the knowledge that one day we will all have to appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give account (cf. 2Co 5:10).

The basis of our judging ourselves is always the judgement *par excellence* on all sin, which Jesus Christ suffered for us on the cross.

Our 'today' is (or *should be!*) influenced therefore by the past (namely through Jesus Christ's work of redemption) and by the future (the knowledge of the coming judgement of rewards before the judgement seat of Christ).

3. In the future

a.) The judgement seat of Christ

2Co 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.* (cf. Rom 14:10-12)

The day of the judgement of rewards before the judgement seat of Christ is also known as '*the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*' (cf. 1Co 1:8). We will experience this judgement as '*servants of the Lord*'. This judgements of rewards before the judgement seat of Christ will, according to Luk 14:14 and 1Co 4:5 take place after our resurrection i.e. the rapture of the Church (cf. 1Co 3:13: '*the day*' mentioned in this passage is '*the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*').

1Co 3:10 *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an excellent builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.*

This has nothing to do with the foundation of our redemption, that has been completed for all time through grace (cf. Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-10). It has to do with the way in which the believer builds on the foundation i.e. it is to do with work. In other words, it has nothing to do with our **position**, but rather with our **condition**:

2Co 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him **for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.***

Paul speaks of fire, which will test the quality of the works of the believer:

1Co 3:13 *his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light, It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.*

This *fire of testing* is probably to be understood as the '*presence of the Lord*' (cf. Heb 12:29). When we stand before the judgement seat of Christ, our faith as such will not be tested, rather **our works**, which we have done in faith. Our salvation depends on the foundation laid in Jesus Christ and this will not be tested again. Rather, **our reward** is dependent on the *way in which* we have built, and this will be '*tested*'.¹⁵⁵

Here we must come back again to the Church of Rome's teaching on '*purgatory*'. 1Co 3:15 is the only so-called canonical Bible passage on which the Catholic Church basis its teaching on Purgatory. The following arguments speak against this teaching:

1. 1Co 3:11-15 does not speak of correction or improvement.
2. The fire, mentioned in this passage, refers to the return of Christ. In spite of what the Catholic Church says, this passage has nothing to do with an actual cleansing in purgatory.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Heb 9:27-28, where it says that Christ will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

3. The fire mentioned here is not a permanent fire as found in the Catholic teaching on purgatory, but rather one specific incident, happening at a particular moment (namely the return of Christ).

5 The following things will be tested at the judgement seat of Christ:

- Works: 1Co 3:10-15; Rev 14:13.
- Labours 1Co 3:8-9; 15:58.
- The race: 1Co 9:24-25; Phi 3:13-14.
- 10 • Ministry: Dan 12:2-3 (cf. Eze 3:17-18).
- Use of the entrusted talents: Mat 25:14-18; 2Ti 1:6-7.
- The entrusted earthly goods: Mat 6:4; Luk 14:13-14; 2Co 9:6-7.
- Persecution suffered: Mat 5:11-12; 2Co 4:17; 1Pe 4:13.
- Faith,¹⁵⁶ courage: 2Ti 4:7-8; Heb 10:35.

15

The main criterion however is **faithfulness**: cf. Mat 24:45; 25:22-23; **1Co 4:2**; Rev 2:10. The consequences of the judgement seat of Christ:

20 **1Co 3:15** *If it (someone's work) is burned up, **he will suffer loss**: he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.¹⁵⁷*

1Co 3:14 *If what he has built survives, **he will receive his reward**.*

25 **1Jo 2:28** *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident **and unashamed before him** at his coming.*

30 **1Jo 4:17** *In this way, love is made complete among us **so that we may have confidence on the day of judgement**, because in this world we are like him.*

The reward will be **a crown**. We do not know if this will be a real crown or simply a symbol of the reward. As *sons* we receive life, as *servants* we receive wages (the reward):

35 **2Ti 4:8** *...now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day . . . and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

40 **1Co 9:25** *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

45 **Jam 1:12** *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

1Pe 5:4 *And when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

¹⁵⁶ Here it is not a question of saving faith but of the gift of faith, which gives encouragement in the battle of faith (cf. 1Co 12:9).

¹⁵⁷ This means he will lose his reward but not his salvation.

Rev 2:10 *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

5 The Church (the bride), crowned with the reward, will return with Jesus Christ (the bridegroom) to earth (1Th 3:13). She will reign with him 1000 years (Rev 5:10; 20:4-6). In other passages, which speak of the wages of the servants of Christ, we read that *the kingdom* (cf. Luk 19:17-19; 2Ti 2:12; Rev 2:26; 3:21) or *the harvest* (Psa 126:5-6; Gal 6:7-9; 2Co 9:6) will be their wages. See also:

10 **2Pe 1:10-11** *Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

15 We want to ask ourselves what **we** then actually earn: Luk 17:7-10 gives us an unmistakeable answer: We are unworthy servants who do not deserve anything. How encouraging for us that we will in fact be rewarded at the judgement seat of Christ for our faithfulness!

20 But be careful: the Holy Scriptures speak of the possibility of losing our reward on the day of the judgement seat of Christ:

1Co 3:15 *...he will suffer loss...*

25 **Gal 2:2** *...for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.*

2Jo 8 *Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully!*

30 *“Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victors crown unless he competes according to the rules.” (2Ti 2:5)*

Moses is a good example for us: *“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his [heavenly] reward.”*
35 (Heb 11:26; cf. with the example of Jesus in Heb 12:2-3)

b.) The judgement of the nations

See chapter IV (*The nations and the return of Christ*)), subtitle F.

c.) The great white throne (the judgement of unbelievers)

40 This judgement will take place after the 1000 years (cf. supra). Unbelievers of all generations will be judged before the great white throne. This judgement is also known as *‘the last judgement’*. It says in Rev 20:13-14 that Hades will give up its dead on that day. The unrighteous will rise for the judgement (i.e. to be condemned). Probably the fallen angels will also be judged at that time. We read in passages such as Jud 6; 2Pe 2:4 and Isa 24:21-22 that these are held in the abyss to await judgement. However, it must be said that the text in Rev
45 20:11-15 does not mention the angels (Satan is mentioned though in Rev 20:10). Of course, the judgement of the angels at that point of time is only a supposition. Following are some comments about this judgement:

1. **The point of time of the judgement of the great white throne:** cf. Rev 20:7ff: it will be at the end of time, after the millennium and on the threshold of eternity.¹⁵⁸
2. **The Judge:** Jesus Christ: cf. Joh 5:22.27; Act 10:42; Rom 2:16.
- 5 3. **Those in attendance:** the saints, i.e. the Church of Christ: cf. 1Co 6:2-3.
4. **The accused:** All the (unbelieving) dead, great and small (Rev 20:12), i.e. all whose names are not written in the book of life (cf. Rev 20:12.15). As said before, the text in Rev 20 does not say if the angels will be judged at this point of time. The Holy Scripture says however that the Church of Christ will take part in the judgement of the devil and his
10 angels: cf. 1Co 6:3 (cf. 2Th 1:6-10).
5. **The procedure of the judgement:** The judge will judge righteously: Psa 111; 2Ti 4:8; Rev 16:7; 20:12-13b: according to what the accused have done. That does not mean that a person will be saved through (his own) works – no, salvation is only by grace, through faith (cf. Rom 5:1; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-10). It must not be forgotten though that *faith without works is dead* (cf. Jam 2:17-26)! Works without faith are possible, but faith will
15 be measured by works, which in the last analysis result from the practical outworking of faith.
6. **There are grades of judgement:**¹⁵⁹ cf. Mat 10:15; 11:20-24; Luk 12:47-48; 1Co 3:13-15; 2Pe 1:11 etc.
- 20 7. **The verdict:** Rev 20:15: All those whose names are not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, into hell. That is eternal condemnation. The tragedy of this is that the lake of fire was prepared for the devil and his fallen angels, but many people choose eternal condemnation in that they reject the grace offered in and through Jesus.

¹⁵⁸ One should notice the chronology of events: according to Rev 20:15 (lake of fire) follows eternity (new heaven, new earth, New Jerusalem...).

¹⁵⁹ Both for the redeemed in heaven and for those lost in hell.

XI. THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

Is 'heaven' simply a description of a state or condition, or is it also an actual place? We must first of all differentiate between the following:

- 5 1. The earthly (atmospheric) heavens: i.e., among other things, the place of the birds (cf. Gen 1:20; Mat 6:26).
2. The cosmic heavens (the universe, the stratosphere): the place of the stars, other planets, but also galaxies (cf. Gen 15:5).
- 10 3. The spiritual heaven: the 'dwelling place' of God (cf. Psa 115:3; Mat 5:9; Joh 17), Jesus Christ, his Son (Act 1:10-11), the (holy) angels (Mat 18:10; Rev 12:7-9) and the spirits (until the resurrection of the body) of the redeemed (Joh 14:2; Heb 12:23; Rev 6:9-11).

15 This 'division into three' of the heavens (or heaven¹⁶⁰), may explain Paul's reference to 'the third heaven' in 2Co 12:2. *Heaven* is without doubt a 'place description' but probably not as we conceive it. It is also a description of the *state of the heavenly body* (cf. 1Co 15:40.44.47.49), of the *state of future sinlessness* (perfection), *eternal glory* etc.

A. The reality of the new heaven and the new earth

20 **Isa 65:17** *Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.*

God, the Creator, will reveal himself again through a glorious new creation:

25 **2Pe 3:13** *But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Our hearts long for this new creation in which redemption in its fullness (perfection) will be revealed and evil will exist no longer (Rev 21:4.27).

30 Revelation 21:1–22:5 gives us an insight into the wonderful things which will come and which – apart from John in his vision – no man has yet seen. Bible commentators discuss whether these descriptions of the new heavens, the new earth and the New Jerusalem are to be taken literally or if they should be understood as describing pictorially the eternal state. To put it simply, will there (still/again) be gold, precious stones, pearls etc. in the new creation?

35 Will the new creation be completely immaterial? I will risk making the following statement: A careful study of the Bible passages that speak of the risen Lord, leads me (at least) to

¹⁶⁰ Plural see passages like Isa 66:22; 65:17 (הַשָּׁמַיִם הַחֲדָשִׁים [haššāma'im hachādāšim] = *new heavens*) in the Old Testament and 2Pe 3:12, the present ('old') heavens (οὐρανοὶ [ouranoi] = *heavens*), which will finally be destroyed, and 2Pe 3:13 (in the acc. pl. καινούς οὐρανούς [kainous ouranous] = *new heavens*) the new heavens, which God will create after this universe is destroyed. In Rev 21:1, there is a singular accusative: "And I saw *a new heaven...*" (οὐρανὸν καινὸν [ouranon kainon]).

surmise that the new creation will not be of a completely immaterial nature. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared over a period of forty days to his followers. They could for instance touch his resurrection body (see Thomas in Joh 20:24-29) and they saw him eat (cf. Luk 24:39-43; Joh 20:27-29; 21:9-13; Act 10:41). Could these be used as arguments for a literal interpretation of the descriptions in Rev 21:9–22:5? I should mention here that some commentators are of the opinion that Rev 21:1-8 describes the new creation, while Rev 21:9–22:5 describes the (earthly) millennium. Beasley-Murray is one of these expositors.¹⁶¹ He thinks that especially the descriptions in Rev 21:24-27 are better used to describe the earthly millennium than to describe the eternal state, i.e. the new creation. I hold the opposite opinion along with many other commentators. I believe that the events in Revelation must be interpreted chronologically, with the exception of the so-called parentheses (ch. 7; 10–11:14; 12–14).¹⁶² I will limit myself to mentioning two arguments, which arise from Rev 21:

1. It says in Rev 21:22 that there will no longer be a temple in that Jerusalem. There will however be a temple in Jerusalem during the millennium: see Isa 66:20; Eze 40–48; Joe 3:17-18 (other translations 4:17-18); Mic 4:2; Zec 14:8-21).
2. In the New Jerusalem of Rev 21, there will be no more sun, no moon, and no more night. In the millennium though, these will still be there; summer and winter, rain, blessing and curse as well as fruitfulness will still be a reality: cf. Isa 65:17-22; Eze 47; Zec 14:8.17 etc. I want to point out the following interesting detail: in Isa 65:17, the prophet proclaims the creation of a **new** heaven and a **new** earth. From 65:18 onwards, he describes the glory of Jerusalem but leaves out (surely not by accident) the attribute 'new' (חדָשָׁה [khadāšā]). The prophet uses this exclusively in connection with the new (חֲדָשִׁים [khadāšīm]) heavens and the new (חֲדָשָׁה [khadāšā]) earth. In Rev 21:1-2, on the other hand, the attribute 'new' (καινός [kainós]) is not only used for *heaven* and *earth*, but also for *the holy city of Jerusalem* (Ἱερουσαλὴμ καινὴν εἶδον [Ierusalēm kainēn eidon] = "[the] New Jerusalem I saw"), *coming down out of heaven*. I therefore believe that the city of Jerusalem that is described in Rev 21:9ff represents eternity. A temple or sanctuary will no longer be needed because there we will at last see God face to face (cf. Rev 22:4).

B. The origin of the new heaven and new earth

2Pe 3:10 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*

Rev 20:11 *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.*

Isa 24:18-20 *...the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder; the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls – never to rise again.*

¹⁶¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Revelation' in *THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY Revised*, ed. D. Guthrie et al. (London: Inter-Varsity Pres, 1970), pp. 1304-1309.

¹⁶² The judgements (7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls of God's wrath, Babylon: ch. 6–18), the marriage feast of the Lamb and the return of Christ (ch. 19), the resurrection and the millennium, followed by the last judgement before the great white throne (ch. 20) and lastly the new creation (21:1–22:5).

Before the new creation can be 'born', the old must disappear:

Heb 12:26-27 *Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven...*

5 **Isa 65:17** *Behold I create new heavens and a new earth...*

Rev 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...*

10 **Rev 21:10** *...and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...*

We must simply acknowledge that we cannot really describe the new creation; it is simply beyond our human understanding because no man has actually experienced it. Paul, for example, whom the Lord allowed to catch a glimpse of 'the other world' testified that he had heard inexpressible things that man is not permitted to tell (2Co 12:2-4).

C. The purpose of the new heaven and new earth

1Co 15:28 *...that God may be all in all...*

20 The Son of God will himself 'return' all things to his Father.

Rev 21:22 *I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*

25 **Rev 21:23** *The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.*

Rev 22:5 *There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.*

30 **Rev 22:1** *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

35 The Jerusalem that comes down from heaven (Rev 21:10) will be the dwelling place of God. The fact, that the New Jerusalem is described as a cube (cf. Rev 21:16), could be a reference to the perfection of the new creation. There we will finally experience fellowship with our Lord and God unknown before:

40 **Rev 22:3-4** *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads.*

And all this will be forever and ever!

45 **Therefore we say:**

"We love because he first loved us!" (1Jo 4:19)

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