

IS PREMILLENNIALISM CONSISTENT WITH NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY?

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Introduction

Few areas of theological study ignite such heated controversy as eschatology. Sadly, too often Christians launch unrelenting salvos in the form of harsh, bitter invectives against those whom they would claim as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Such behavior, not to mention the doctrinal divisions, both damages the public witness of the Body of Christ and significantly hinders the proclamation of the Gospel. In the words of the Apostle James, “My brothers, this should not be” (James 3:10).² As believers in Christ, we must be able to lock arms together on all essential matters of the Christian faith, while lovingly agreeing to disagree in non-essential or disputable matters. We must remember that famous statement of Rupertus Meldenius, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”³ When we fail to do so, we stand in violation of Christ’s command to love one another as He loved us, an outworking of the second greatest commandment (John 13:34; Matt 22:39). As long as we accept the *absolute* essentials⁴ of orthodox Christian eschatology, we can agree to disagree with fellow believers on such eschatological questions as the timing of the rapture or the issue of the millennium. ***If we are unable to respectfully differ in Christian love with fellow believers on disputable eschatological matters, we, including this author, have absolutely no business communicating our eschatological opinions.*** It is with a *friendly* spirit that I approach the question, “Is premillennialism consistent with New Covenant Theology?”⁵ The purpose of this paper is to *fairly* and *biblically* demonstrate that all forms of premillennialism are inconsistent with New Covenant Theology.⁶

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²This quotation of James 3:10 is from the New International Version. All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.

³Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII: Modern Christianity and the German Reformation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910; reprint 1974), 650. Although frequently attributed to Augustine of Hippo, Schaff notes that the theological axiom “appears for the first time in German, A.D. 1627 and 1628” and “has recently been traced to Rupertus Meldenius, the otherwise unknown divine.”

⁴The absolute *essentials* of orthodox Christian eschatology ***require*** that a believer accept the following: a future, bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ; a future, bodily resurrection of all believers for glory; a future, bodily resurrection of all unbelievers for reprobation; a future, final judgment for believers and unbelievers; and the eternal state, consisting of both an ***eternal*** hell for the reprobate and the eternal New Heavens and New Earth for believers. As long as a believer accepts these fundamental elements, his or her eschatology may be considered orthodox.

⁵The term “New Covenant Theology” is used throughout this paper to indicate that branch of New Covenant Theology promoted by John Reisinger, Gary D. Long, Tom Wells, A. Blake White, and the faculty of Providence Theological Seminary.

⁶My goal in writing this paper is ***not*** to impose a non-premillennial eschatology upon advocates of New Covenant Theology. ***Nor*** is it to divide proponents of New Covenant Theology by placing an inordinate emphasis on disputable (i.e. of secondary importance) eschatological matters. ***Nor*** is it to offend, disparage, or push out fellow believers who do not agree with the non-premillennial eschatology I will set forth in this paper. ***Rather, my goal is to stimulate warm-hearted, Christian discussion in order that we, as proponents of New Covenant Theology, may collectively refine our understanding of the last things.*** Furthermore, agreeing to disagree with regard to eschatology (assuming one upholds the absolute essentials of orthodox Christian eschatology, see footnote 4) ***neither*** disallows ***nor*** prohibits warm-hearted, Christian discussion of such things.

Using eight *biblical* arguments, this paper will attempt to demonstrate that premillennialism is not consistent with the tenets and hermeneutics of New Covenant Theology.⁷ The first section will analyze the fifteenth chapter of Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, followed secondly by an analysis of the third chapter of Second Peter. The third section will feature an examination of Romans 8:19-23, while the fourth segment will explore Hebrews 11:9-16. Following this, this paper will examine the eschatological temple of Ezekiel 40-48 in light of Revelation 21-22. The final three sections will investigate the typological fulfillments of the Abrahamic (Gen 12, 17) and Davidic (2 Sam 7) covenants, Romans 9-11, and Galatians 4:21-5:1.

The Parousía: Christ’s Return, the Resurrection, and the End (1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 50-58)

All versions of premillennialism hold that the existence of a future premillennial kingdom is taught or is compatible with Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 15. I believe that this view is imported into the text, due to inaccurate presuppositions, and that there is a more accurate way to interpret this passage. Understanding the structure of 1 Corinthians 15 is crucial to recognizing that the chapter is indeed a *unified* explanation of *one* general resurrection. The chapter may be summarily outlined in the following manner:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 15:1-11 | The Centrality of the Resurrection to the Gospel |
| 15:12-19 | The Necessity of the Resurrection to the Gospel |

⁷This paper will not address the twentieth chapter of Revelation, the only eschatological passage which explicitly mentions the “thousand years” (*chilia etē* – Rev 20:2-7). I have chosen to do this for three reasons. **First**, an exposition of Revelation 20 is beyond the scope of this paper. **Second**, a detailed explanation of Revelation 20 is not required to demonstrate that premillennialism is inconsistent with New Covenant Theology. Why? The predominant genre of the book of Revelation is apocalyptic, a highly-disputed genre which is notoriously difficult to interpret. Because Revelation 20 belongs to the apocalyptic genre, it is significantly more obscure than any of the eschatological passages addressed in this paper. If the ‘clearer’ eschatological passages of Scripture (i.e. 1 Cor 15, 2 Pet 3, Heb 11:9-16; Rom 8:19-23, etc.) do not teach a future premillennial kingdom, the literal (i.e. premillennial) interpretation of more ‘obscure’ eschatological passages, such as Revelation 20 and Ezekiel 40-48, **must** be called into question. The analogy of Scripture, a foundational principal of biblical hermeneutics, teaches that the clearer passages of Scripture must interpret the less clear passages, not the other way around. If the ‘clearer’ eschatological texts do not teach a premillennial kingdom, I would assert that Revelation 20 does not teach a premillennial kingdom either. I respectfully disagree with the highly respected scholar, George Eldon Ladd, whose sole basis for his premillennial views is what he calls “the most natural exegesis” of Revelation 20:1-6. What is “natural exegesis” with respect to the difficult passages will depend on the *analogy of Scripture* and the context. See George Eldon Ladd, “Historic Premillennialism” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 17, 32 and *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 266-67. **Third**, other writers have skillfully argued for a non-literal interpretation of Revelation 20. See Gregory K. Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 972-1038; W. J. Grier, *The Momentous Event* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 87-124; William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1940; reprint 1967, 1998, 2007), 16-23, 184-210; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 173-238; Meredith G. Kline, “Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium” in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:2 (June 1996): 218-22; Gary D. Long, *Context! Evangelical Views On The Millennium Examined* (Charleston, SC: Createspace.com an Amazon.com company, 2001; reprint 2002, 2011), 5-7, 34-46, 83-119, 260-67; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 177-187; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 195-246; Samuel E. Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple* (Santa Barbara, CA: Calvary Press, 2003), 83-105.

- 15:20-28 The Sequence of the Resurrection:
1. Christ the Firstfruits
 2. **Adam vs. Christ**
 3. Resurrection occurs at Christ's coming (*parousía*)
 4. **Destruction of Death**
- 15:29 Baptism for the dead⁸
- 15:30-32 Paul's Persecution: Another Justification for the Resurrection
- 15:33-34 Apostolic Exhortation
- 15:35-49 The Resurrection Body
1. Earthly perishable body vs. spiritual imperishable body
 2. **Adam vs. Christ**
- 15:50-58 The Manner of Resurrection
1. Resurrection of the Elect
 2. **Destruction of Death**

Notice that both the Adam – Christ comparison and the destruction of death are mentioned twice within Paul's resurrection discourse. Both concepts are mentioned briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; however, each receives greater treatment later in the chapter. For example, the Apostle Paul introduces the typological comparison between Adam and Christ in verses 20-21, and he later expands this concept in verses 45-49. Similarly, he states that death is the last enemy to be destroyed in 1 Corinthians 15:26, while later devoting verses 50-58 to the swallowing up or *destruction* of death. The repetition of these concepts strongly implies that Paul is teaching *one* general resurrection when death is swallowed up at the end of the New Covenant age when Christ returns at His Second Coming in both 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

In 1 Corinthians 15:22-23, the Apostle Paul declares, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming [*parousía*]." There are two primary meanings of the Greek word *parousía*: (1) "the state of being present at a place, *presence*" and (2) "arrival as the first stage in presence, *coming, advent*."⁹ A contextual word study of the Greek word *parousía* (1 Cor 15:23) and its various synonyms further strengthens the argument that 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 describe the exact same event.¹⁰ For example, verse 23 of 1 Corinthians 15 clearly teaches "that those who are Christ's" will be resurrected "at His coming [*parousía*]." Couple this verse with 1 Thessalonians 3:13 which declares, "...so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming [*tē parousía*] of our Lord Jesus **with all His saints**"

⁸It is best to understand that Paul mentions the Corinthian practice of baptism for the dead in order to point out the inconsistency of the Corinthian denial of a future bodily resurrection, not to endorse or condone this practice.

⁹Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker [BAGD], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 780.

¹⁰An exhaustive contextual word study of *parousía* and other *synonymous* terms is beyond the scope of this paper. However, such a study should include the following terms and references: 1) *parousía* (Matthew 24:27-31, 24:37-39; 1 Thess 3:13, 4:15-17, 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 2:8; 2 Pet 3:4, 3:10-12; 1 Cor 15:22-26), 2) *apokalypsis* (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:4-10; 1 Pet 1:7, 1:13, 4:13), 3) *epiphaneia* (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Thess 2:8; 2 Tim 4:1, 4:8; Titus 2:13), 4) *Day of the Lord* (2 Pet 3:10-12; 2 Thess 2:1-2; 1 Thess 4:15-5:10; Zeph 1:14-18; Isa 13:6-13; Joel 2:1-11; cf. Matt 24:27-31, Rev 6:12-17), and 5) *Day of Christ* (Phil 1:6, 1:10, 2:16; 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:14). Special attention should be given to overlapping references where a few of these terms are clearly equated or used interchangeably (e.g. 2 Pet 3:10-12; 1 Cor 1:7-8; 2 Thess 2:1-8). Furthermore, the absence of any explicit reference to unbelievers, judgment, torment, punishment, glory, etc. does not justify understanding any of the above verses as a reference to a pretribulation rapture. *Such argumentation is from silence and extremely weak.*

[emphasis mine].¹¹ The implications of this second verse are quite staggering: at His *parousía*, the Lord Jesus Christ will return with *all* His saints! Hoekema perceptively writes, "...the passage clearly says that Christ will return with *all* his saints, not just with some of them. How does this leave room for the reemergence of other saints who have not yet been born, and who must still be converted during the millennium?"¹² *This clearly indicates that there is only **one** general resurrection at the end of the New Covenant age when Christ returns at His **one-stage** Second Coming.*

As previously stated, the destruction of Death is highlighted twice in the fifteenth chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. The Apostle writes in 1 Corinthians 15:22-26:

²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's *at His coming* [*tē parousía autou*], ²⁴then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶***The last enemy that will be abolished is death*** [emphasis mine].

In 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, he declares:

⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³***For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.*** ⁵⁴***But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory."*** ⁵⁵"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ [emphasis mine].

Since Death is destroyed in both 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, the *parousía* of 1 Corinthians 15:23 **has to be** the event described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. Furthermore, the *parousía* of 1 Corinthians 15:23, 51-57 is "the end" (1 Cor 15:24), when Death is destroyed. *There can be only **one** destruction of death not two!* This exegetical reality leaves *no* room for a literal, earthly millennium.¹³ Revelation 20:12-14 teaches that "death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire" after the Great White Throne Judgment. The only way to reconcile Revelation 20:12-14 with

¹¹Based upon Matt 16:27, 25:31; Mk 8:38; and 2 Thess 1:7, some argue that "all His saints" in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 refers to *angels* and not *believers*. While this is a possible interpretation of this phrase, it is more likely that Paul is referring to believers here, since this is how he primarily uses "saints" in his writings (cf. Rom 1:7, 8:27, 12:13, 15:25-26, 16:2, 16:15; 1 Cor 1:2, 6:1-2, 14:33, 16:1, 16:15; 2 Cor 1:1, etc.). Furthermore, even if 1 Thessalonians 3:13 is understood in this manner, "all his saints" would include *all believers* and *all angels*, since the word *saints* can carry the meaning of believers and/or angels.

¹²Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 218.

¹³Many premillennialists argue that the temporal adverb *eita* (meaning "then") in the phrase "then comes the end" (1 Cor 15:24) signals that "the end" occurs after a literal, earthly millennium. Therefore, the crucial question regarding this particular word is whether it indicates that "the end" occurs at Christ's *parousía* or after a literal, earthly millennium. However, this particular question can only be answered by the local context in which *eita* appears. Although *eita* can signal a long interval as Premillennialists claim, the context argues that Christ's *parousía* is the end. Recall that Death is destroyed in both 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. Also recall that Death is destroyed at "the end" (1 Cor 15:24). Furthermore, since the *parousía* is the event described in both 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, Christ's *parousía* signals the end. Thus, *in the context* here the temporal adverb *eita* does not indicate a long interval.

1 Corinthians 15 is to recognize that Death is destroyed at the resurrection which occurs at Christ's *parousia* and is then thrown into the lake of fire at the Final Judgment which occurs immediately after Christ's return. This interpretation, therefore, does not allow for any form of premillennialism.

In addition, 1 Corinthians 15 strongly indicates that Christ's current reign in heaven *must* be the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, since Christ is to relinquish the kingdom to God the Father at His *parousia*. Verses 25-26 declare that Christ "must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death." Remember that death is destroyed at the resurrection that occurs at Christ's Second Coming or *parousia*. This means that the end, when Christ "delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father," occurs when the Lord Jesus returns in glory at the end of the New Covenant age. *Therefore, Christ's current reign in heaven is the fulfillment of the*

Davidic Covenant. Is such a view of 1 Corinthians 15 compatible with the stipulations of the Davidic Covenant? Or can the Davidic Covenant *only* be fulfilled in an earthly millennial reign of Christ as premillennialists claim? All forms of premillennialism teach that the Lord Jesus Christ will reign over the earth from Jerusalem after David has been resurrected. The problem with this teaching lies in the fact that it directly contradicts the terms of the Davidic Covenant! Recall that the Lord promised David, "***When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom***" (2 Sam 7:12) [**emphasis mine**]. In other words, David *has* to already be dead, for God to raise up David's Greater Son and "establish his kingdom." This is why the Apostle Peter emphasizes the fact that David is dead in Acts 2 as a proof that Christ's cosmic reign at the Father's right hand fulfills the Davidic Covenant:

²⁵For David says of Him, 'I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; ²⁷Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. ²⁸Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.' ²⁹***Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, ³¹he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. ³²This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. ³⁴For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, ³⁵Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.' ³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified'*** [**emphasis mine**].

John Reisinger highlights this truth with the following words:

Further proof of this time factor can be seen in the words "while David was sleeping with the fathers." This can only mean that Christ would sit on David's throne at the *same time* that David was still "sleeping with the fathers," or *before David's resurrection*. This is why Peter deliberately mentioned that David is "both dead and buried and his sepulcher is with us unto this day." Peter is saying, "The promise to David has been fulfilled in the exact manner and precise time (how and when) as it was prophesied to David." The throne was to be established at the time of the resurrection and ascension of

Christ, and it would happen “while David was sleeping with his fathers” awaiting his own resurrection (1 Chronicles 17:11 and Acts 13:35, 36 for the same time reference).¹⁴

1 Corinthians 15 clearly teaches that the *single* general resurrection occurs at the end of the New Covenant age when the Lord Jesus Christ returns at His *one-stage* Second Coming. This section of Scripture teaches neither a two-stage return of Christ nor a future premillennial kingdom. As a result, advocates of these two teachings cannot legitimately appeal to the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians 15 to find support for their eschatological constructs. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns at His *parousía*, He will resurrect and rescue His people, destroy all of His enemies, resurrect the wicked, execute the Final Judgment, abolish death once and for all, and usher in the eternal state.

The Cosmos Will Be Consumed by Fire at Christ’s Return (2 Peter 3:3-12)

Second Peter 3:3-12 is another New Testament passage which strongly asserts itself against any form of premillennialism. In 2 Peter 3:4, the last day scoffers brazenly mock, “Where is the promise of His coming (*tēs parousias*)? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” Like the occurrence of *tē parousía autou* in 1 Corinthians 15:23, *tēs parousias* (i.e. the coming) in 2 Peter 3:4 is a reference to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The context of the passage indicates that the scoffers are mocking God’s promise that He will return to judge mankind, destroy the earth with fire, and destroy the wicked (2 Pet 3:5-7). In verse 10, Peter responds to the scoffers’ mocking by declaring: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”¹⁵ The context clearly indicates that the Apostle Peter understands Christ’s *parousía* and the “Day of the Lord” to refer to the same eschatological event.¹⁶ The fact that Peter understands Christ’s *parousía* to be synonymous with the Day of the Lord becomes even more apparent when 2 Peter 3:10 is understood in light of its three subsequent verses. 2 Peter 3:10-13 reads:

But ***the day of the Lord*** will come like a thief¹⁷, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

¹¹Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening ***the coming [tēn parousian] of the day of God***, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. **[emphasis mine]**

¹⁴John G. Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds: A Biblical Examination of the Presuppositions of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism* (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 1998), 56.

¹⁵Many Dispensational Premillennialists understand the term “Day of the Lord” to refer to either the seven-year tribulation or the entire period extending from the pre-tribulation rapture to the end of the premillennial kingdom. See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964), 229-232. The Dispensational conclusion that the “Day of the Lord” is a period greater than a twenty-four-hour day demonstrates the inconsistency of the *literal* or *normal* hermeneutic of Dispensational Premillennialism.

¹⁶See footnote 8.

¹⁷Although Dispensationalists typically understand Jesus’ reference to “the thief in the night” analogy in Matthew 24:43 as applying to the pre-tribulation rapture, the context of Matthew 24:43 reveals that it is in fact a reference to His Second Coming. When Peter states in 2 Peter 3:10 that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief,” he is obviously making an allusion to Matthew 24:43. Like Jesus, he uses it not to describe a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church but the Second Coming of Christ in glory.

In other words, when the Lord Jesus returns in glory, the entire cosmos will be destroyed with fire. When the understanding of 1 Corinthians 15 is combined with understanding of 2 Peter 3:3-12, it clearly reveals that Christ's *parousia* signals His return in glory, the destruction of His enemies (including death, the last enemy), the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, and the destruction of the cosmos by fire. With the entire cosmos destroyed by fire, where will this literal, earthly millennium take place? Interestingly, Peter's equation of Christ's *parousia* and the Day of the Lord has staggering implications for many New Testament eschatological passages, in particular 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10.

'Resurrection' of the Cosmos Tied to the Resurrection of Believers (Romans 8:19-23)

Like both 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Peter 3:3-12, Romans 8:19-23 is another passage which eliminates any possibility of future premillennial kingdom as taught by all versions of premillennialism. This Scriptural pericope *clearly* teaches that the resurrection of believers is inextricably linked to the resurrection or recreation of the cosmos. How? **First**, God's Word declares that all believers will be resurrected when the Lord Jesus returns at His *parousia* (cf. 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 3:13). For instance, 1 John 3:2 states, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." This verse evinces that when Christ returns, all believers will be made like Him in His sinless and resurrected humanity. **Second**, Scripture also declares that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, His followers will be revealed with Him. For example, Colossians 3:4 proclaims: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Now, if *all* believers are both resurrected and revealed in glory when Christ is revealed from heaven, it is evident that the *apokalypsis*¹⁸ ("revealing") of Christ and the *apokalypsis* ("revealing") of all believers occur simultaneously. This has staggering implications for Romans 8:19-23:

¹⁹For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing [*tēn apokalypsin*] of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul compares the current state of believers to that of creation. Just as "we ourselves groan within ourselves" (Rom 8:23), all of "creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (Rom 8:22). Moreover, just as "we ourselves" await "eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:23), the cosmos longs to "be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21).

¹⁸Paul uses *apokalypsis* in three primary ways: (1) he uses ἀποκάλυψις to indicate a revelation of truth (Rom 16:25; Eph 1:17), (2) he uses *apokalypsis* to indicate a revelation through vision(s) (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 2:4; 1 Cor 14:6; 1 Cor 14:26; 2 Cor 12:1; 2 Cor 12:7; Gal 2:2; Eph 3:3), and (3) a revelation of the disclosure of secrets belonging to the last days (Rom 2:5; **Rom 8:19**; 1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7). See Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 112. Romans 8:19 specifically details the "time when they [i.e. believers] will be revealed in their glorified status" ("For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing (*apokalypsis*) of the sons of God."); in other words, "revelation of the sons of God" is the *general* eschatological resurrection when they will receive their resurrection bodies. It is also important to note that Romans 2:5 also deals with eschatological revelation, as it speaks of "the day of wrath and revelation (*apokalypsis*) of the righteous judgment of God."

Furthermore, Romans 8:19 declares that the creation anxiously awaits the revelation of the sons of God, which is their resurrection. Why does the creation so eagerly await this eschatologically climactic event? The creation eagerly awaits “the revelation of the sons of God” because the “resurrection” of creation in the New Heavens and the New Earth will occur simultaneously with the resurrection of the elect. Concerning Romans 8:19-23, Robert Strimple writes, “The apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches us that the resurrection glory of the children of God will mark the resurrection glory of creation as well. At Christ’s coming, not a millennium later, ‘the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay’ and come to enjoy a glory that is likened to ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God.’”¹⁹ Elsewhere, he notes:

Paul describes the deliverance of creation as creation’s liberation ‘from its bondage to decay... into the glorious freedom of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21). Thus, the deliverance of creation itself from all the corrupting consequences of human sin as they have affected the creation will be as complete and as final as the deliverance from sin and its consequences are for God’s people... Here again the apostle directs our attention to when this deliverance will be achieved: when ‘the sons of God [are] revealed’ (Rom. 8:19). That day of their ‘revelation’ [*apokalypsis*] as God’s children is the glorious goal of the believers’ expectation, and it is the goal of the creation’s expectation also. At that time the creation itself ‘will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God’ (v. 21). The ‘revealing of the sons of God’ and ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God’ cannot be postponed beyond the coming of Christ and the resurrection, nor can the deliverance of creation be postponed beyond that great day.²⁰

Therefore, when “those who are Christ’s” are resurrected “at His coming” (1 Cor 15:23), the cosmos itself will be re-created into the New Heavens and the New Earth.²¹ When the understandings of 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Peter 3:3-12 and now Romans 8:19-23 are combined, it clearly reveals that Christ’s Parousía signals His return in glory, the destruction of His enemies (including death), the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, the destruction of the cosmos by fire, and the recreation of the cosmos into the New Heavens and New Earth. Again, how can there be any room for a literal, earthly millennium?

Looking for a Heavenly Country (Hebrews 11:9-16)

Hebrews 11:9-16 also strongly argues against the existence of a future premillennial kingdom as taught by all versions of premillennialism. This passage teaches that the patriarch Abraham was not looking for an earthly country but a “heavenly one” (Heb 11:16) and “the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God” (Heb 11:10), that is, the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Heb 12:22). Hebrews 11:9-16 declares:

¹⁹Robert Strimple, “Amillennialism,” in *Three Views On The Millennium And Beyond*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 106.

²⁰Ibid., 106.

²¹See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 517. Moo, a Premillennialist, is convinced that this passage does not exclude the existence of a premillennial kingdom. See also Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2007), 64. Horner states, “Romans 8:22-33 clearly presents a similar prophetic vision that anticipates the future glorious Messianic kingdom which will manifest Christ’s reign from Jerusalem over Jew and Gentile.” While this passage is asserted to be consistent with a premillennial eschatology, it is certainly not clear which aspects logically lead to such a conclusion.

By faith he [i.e. Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised;¹² therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants* as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

A plain or “natural” reading of this passage strongly indicates that Abraham was not looking for a literal, earthly, millennial kingdom. Nevertheless, Barry Horner, a Premillennialist, writes:

Abraham, summoned by God and converted from paganism in Ur of the Chaldeans, entered Canaan via Haran and was confronted with more paganism in the land of promise. He explored his inheritance from north to south as an unsettled nomadic tent-dweller and, it is reasonable to assume (Deut 18:9-14; 20:17-18), continued to be appalled at its pervasive unholiness that only the future leadership could begin to cleanse. His search for “a better country, that is, heavenly one” must be understood not according to a Gentile worldview, but the Hebrew worldview of the author.... Abraham’s hope was eschatological, but not in the sense of heaven’s superiority to the earth, of the spiritual as superior to the material. Rather, his hope was of the future messianic age, the millennial kingdom in which heaven would be manifest on earth and residence there would be gloriously holy, permanent.²²

However, there is a pivotal text that Horner has seemingly overlooked in his explanation.

Hebrews 11:39-40 is an interpretive crux for the entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews and strongly indicates that Abraham was not looking for an earthly millennium. Verses 39-40 proclaim, “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” *First*, the author of Hebrews states that all Old Testament (OT) saints (including those mentioned in Hebrews 11) did not receive “what was promised” so that “they should not be made perfect” apart from New Covenant believers. Interestingly, both David and Samuel are explicitly mentioned in Hebrews 11:32, two men who lived during the days when Israel possessed the land of Canaan. However, Hebrews 11:39-40 informs us that even David and Samuel “did not receive what was promised.” Clearly, an earthly, premillennial kingdom in which Israel possesses the land of Canaan is not in view here. *Second*, Hebrews 11:39-40 also indicates that whatever these OT saints were looking to receive, we are as well.²³ So, what was Peter, an ethnic Jew and New Testament apostle, looking for? 2 Peter 3:13 declares that he was “looking for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (cf. Paul’s hope – 2 Tim 4:18). In view of the preceding biblical facts, Hebrews 11:9-16 clearly teaches that Abraham was looking for the New Heavens and New Earth, not a literal, earthly millennium.²⁴

²²Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2007), 249-50.

²³The baptism of the Holy Spirit as “the blessing of Abraham” (Gal 3:10-14) is included here, but this particular promise is not my focus with regard to Hebrews 11:39-40.

²⁴See Long, *Context*, 8-9.

The Eschatological Temple of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-48 and Revelation 21-22)

Another particular passage that premillennialists frequently cite as evidence for a literal, earthly millennium is Ezekiel 40-48. For example, Horner notes:

Further, Jesus as the superseding, incarnate spiritual “Temple” in no way negates the spiritual materiality of the eschatological temple from which Jesus Christ will reign (Isa 2:2-4; 56:6-7; Ezek 40-43; Mic 4:1-5; Zech 6:12-15), unless one understand this prospect in purely abstract, ethereal terms that a number of more recent amillennialists have rejected. Thus Ezekiel was told concerning a future temple into which “the glory of the LORD entered, . . .” Son of man, this [temple] is the place of My throne and the place for the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the Israelites forever” (Ezek 43:4,7). I believe this future temple, situated in Jerusalem, will accommodate the enthroned temple Jesus.²⁵

Numerous parallels between Ezekiel 40-48 and Revelation 21-22 reveal that God gave Ezekiel an ‘Old Testament’ version of the vision of the New Heavens and New Earth that the Apostle John received in the two final chapters of Revelation. After briefly describing the weaknesses of a literally interpretation of Ezekiel’s vision, I will produce the parallelisms between Ezekiel 40-48 and Revelation 21-22.

In his staggering vision, the prophet Ezekiel is spirited to “the land of Israel” and set “on a very high mountain” (Ezek 40:2). He is shown a temple “like a city” (Ezek 40:2), which is laid out as “a perfect square” (Ezek 40:47) and whose name is “The Lord is there” (Ezek 48:35). Repeatedly emphasized throughout the vision is the division of the land “for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel” (Ezek 47:13), which calls to mind the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. Concerning the measurements of both the temple and the land divisions, Martyn Lloyd-Jones astutely observes, “If you work out all those measurements about the restored Temple, you will find that you have measurements which cannot be fitted into a literal Palestine.”²⁶ Beale states, “Additional details of Ezekiel’s vision are so strange that they would seem to require a symbolic understanding. The city is perfectly square (Ezek. 48:16); the territorial allotments for each Israelite tribe are ‘divided by dead straight lines running east and west and ignoring all the facts of geography (48:1-29).’²⁷ In other words, Ezekiel’s measurements do not fit the topography of Jerusalem or land of Israel. Is a literal interpretation then the most “natural” in this context?

The presence of the Levitical priesthood in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 40:46; 43:19; 44:10; 44:15) provides another strong argument against the ‘millennial’ interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48. Why is this so? Hebrews 7:11-12 unmistakably declares that the Lord Jesus Christ, who is a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” has forever superseded the Levitical priests of the Old Covenant. Since the Old Covenant stands nullified in the presence of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:13), there has been a permanent change of priesthood (Heb. 7:12). Another issue which further complicates the ‘millennial’ interpretation of Ezekiel’s vision lies in the fact that sacrifices offered in this temple-city are for *atonement!* This is repeated no less than five times (Ezek 43:20; 43:26; 45:15; 45:17; 45:20) throughout the vision, and in each case, a derivative of the Hebrew verb *kāpar*, meaning ‘to cover’ or

²⁵Horner, *Future Israel*, 73-4.

²⁶Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, vol. 3, *Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Good News, 2003), 108. See Long, *Context*, 109-12.

²⁷Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 342.

‘to atone’, appears. This particular word is repeatedly used to describe the Old Covenant sacrifices which were offered for atonement (Lev 1:4; Lev 4:20; Num 8:21; Deut 21:8). Because the Levitical sacrifices clearly typified the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Christ “to put away sin” (Heb 9:26-28), restoration of temple sacrifices in any form would be directly contrary to Scripture! Proponents of the ‘millennial’ interpretation of Ezekiel’s vision typically maintain that such sacrifices would merely memorialize Christ’s sacrifice. In response to this view, Beale writes that “the Lord’s Supper is the only memorial instituted by Christ to ‘memorialize’ his redemptive work.”²⁸ He further states that “even to entertain the possibility that the sacrifices are memorials contravenes a literal interpretation of the prophecy because of the Hebrew word that Ezekiel uses to explain the purpose of the sacrifices: ‘to make atonement’.”²⁹

Most theologians correctly identify the Davidic prince of Ezekiel’s vision as none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of David. However, Ezekiel 46:16 states that this prince has “sons;” this verse is yet another indicator that the prophecy must be interpreted symbolically. Arguably one of the most prominent elements of Ezekiel’s vision is the river of living water which flows “from under the threshold of the house toward the east” (Ezek 47:1) to water the entire earth. Concerning the river, Lloyd-Jones writes that “if you work out what you are told there about the river, you will find that river will have to rise and flow up over mountains – impossible if you take it literally!”³⁰ Likewise, Beale describes this “unusual” river: “The problem with a literal understanding of the river is that there are no tributaries mentioned that feed into the river to make it deeper. And, if there are unmentioned tributaries, then ‘common’ water would be mixed with the pure water of life. If the picture were of an actual river, then it would have to be supernaturally produced and its purity supernaturally maintained.”³¹ It is apparent that a literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48 is hamstrung by many hermeneutical difficulties.

There is substantial Scriptural evidence that strongly indicates that John’s vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21-22) is an *expanded* recapitulation of Ezekiel’s vision. Like Ezekiel, the Apostle John is taken to a high mountain (Rev 21:10; Ezek 40:2). Just as Ezekiel saw a temple-city (Ezek 40:2) which was laid out as “a perfect square” (Ezek 40:47; 45:2), the beloved disciple observes the heavenly “city” which “lies foursquare” and the “length and width and height are equal” (Rev 21:16). Like Ezekiel’s temple, the New Jerusalem has “a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev 22:1). Just as Ezekiel’s temple-city had twelve gates named for the twelve tribes of Israel (Ezek 48:31-35), the New Jerusalem has “twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names *were* written on them, which are *those* of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel” (Rev 21:12). The Book of Revelation also identifies the New Jerusalem as the Church, as the angelic guide says to John, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev 21:9) and then promptly shows him “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:10). Furthermore, Revelation 21:14 declares “the wall of the city had twelve foundations,” upon which “were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” This verse corresponds directly with Ephesians 2:19-22 which describes the church as “a holy temple,” which is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*.” As a result, both Ezekiel’s Temple and Revelation’s New Jerusalem must be interpreted symbolically to be correctly understood.

²⁸Ibid., 344.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, 108-109.

³¹Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 343.

In addition, Scripture strongly indicates that Ezekiel's Temple is an OT symbolic representation of the New Heavens and the New Earth (Rev 21-22). It is important to remember at this juncture that temples were designed to reflect the created cosmic order. For example, the lampstand with its seven branches represented the sun, moon, and five visible planets, and the brazen laver or sea symbolized the earth's oceans. It is important to note that there are no lampstands and no brazen sea / laver in Ezekiel's temple, and these details perfectly accord with John's vision of the New Heavens and the New Earth! The Apostle John tells us in the new earth "there is no longer *any* sea" (Rev 21:1), and he also states that in the new cosmos there is "no need of sun or moon to shine" (Rev 21:23-24; Rev 22:5). Concerning the symbolism between Ezekiel's Temple and the new cosmos, Beale writes:

The lack of these items in Ezekiel's temple seems to point to a metamorphoses of the temple and thus of the creation that the temple symbolizes. Put another way, because there will be significant transformation of the cosmos in the eschatological future, the temple that symbolizes that altered cosmos also must be changed. . . . For example, the absence of the sea (= absence of the bronze laver) and the heavenly light sources (= absence of the lampstand and the starry needlework of the veil) may indicate such a cosmic shake-up.³²

Therefore, it is best to interpret Ezekiel 40-48 as a prophetic vision that describes the realities of the New Testament (i.e. Christ, the Church, and the New Cosmos) in Old Testament language. Beale states, "It is not incorrect to say that Ezekiel speaks in the language and images familiar to his audience in portraying sacrifices in a temple to prophesy about the escalated redemptive-historical realities of Christ's sacrifice and the church's imitation of that sacrifice."³³ He continues: "To see Christ and the church as the true end-time temple is neither an allegorical spiritualization of the Old Testament temple nor of prophecies of an eschatological temple, but is an identification of the temple's real meaning. While it is true that Christ fulfills what the temple stands for, it is better to say, 'Christ is the meaning for which the temple existed.'³⁴ Ezekiel 40-48 is yet another passage which does not provide evidence for a literal, earthly millennium.

Typological Fulfillment of the Davidic and Abrahamic Covenants (2 Samuel 7 and Genesis 12, 17)

Most premillennialists insist that an earthly, millennial kingdom is necessary in order to fulfill the covenantal promises that God made with Abraham and David. For example, Merrill Unger writes, "But premillennialists hold that the promise of the fulfillment of the covenants and promises to Israel in the OT demand such an earthly kingdom."³⁵ Consider also Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "The basis for the belief in the messianic age is the numerous prophecies of the Old Testament that speak of the coming of the Messiah who will reign on David's throne and rule over a peaceful kingdom. . . . Another basis for the belief in a coming kingdom rests on the four unconditional, unfulfilled covenants God made with Israel."³⁶ However, such conclusions overlook the fact that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are fulfilled typologically. In other words, the 'near' fulfillments of these covenants in the OT are typological of their 'ultimate' fulfillments in the New Covenant Age. For the purposes of this paper, I shall consider first the Davidic Covenant.

³²Ibid., 358.

³³Ibid., 343.

³⁴Ibid., 374.

³⁵Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 855.

³⁶Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983; reprint 1995), 267-9.

The Davidic Covenant

Generally speaking, the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7) promised to David a son, a throne, and a temple (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-15; Ps 89:3-4, 29, 36-37). Few evangelical Christians dispute the fact that the promises of the Davidic Covenant find a *near fulfillment* in David's son, Solomon.

1 Chronicles 28:5-7 plainly evinces that Solomon *is* the near fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. In fulfillment of *the son of God promise*, the Lord declares of Solomon, "...for I have chosen him to be a son to Me, and I will be a father to him" (2 Chr 28:6b). In fulfillment of *the throne promise*, the Lord chose "Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" (2 Chr 28:5). Finally, Scripture resoundingly affirms that Solomon built the Temple of God in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kings 5-9) in fulfillment of *the temple promise* in the Davidic Covenant. How the promises of the Davidic Covenant find their ultimate fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ is a subject of great debate among evangelical Christians. All Christians, however, will affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is not only the antitype of Solomon but also the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic 'son' promise (cf. Mark 1:1; Matt 1:1; Luke 1:30-33).

Because the Davidic monarch *is* typologically analogous of God Himself, David's throne *is* typologically analogous of God's throne. Thus, when the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of His Father, He did so in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. In response, Fruchtenbaum, a Dispensationalist, asserts: "It is foolish to claim that the Throne of David and the Throne of God are the same unless Covenant Theologians wish to insist that David once sat on the Throne of God the Father!"³⁷ It is obvious that David's throne and God's throne *cannot* be equated in any real sense. However, David's throne *is* typologically analogous of God's throne, because the Davidic monarch *is* typologically analogous of God Himself. It is upon this basis that the Old Testament on no less than three occasions typologically equates David's throne with Yahweh's throne.³⁸ Recall King David's testimony before the princes of Israel regarding his son Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:5: "And of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons), **He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel**" [emphasis mine]. 1 Chronicles 29:23 also states, "Then Solomon sat on **the throne of the LORD as king** instead of David his father; and he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him" [emphasis mine]. Additionally, the Queen of Sheba declares to Solomon, "Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you, **setting you on His throne as king for the LORD your God**; because your God loved Israel establishing them forever, therefore He made you king over them, to do justice and righteousness" (2 Chronicles 9:8) [emphasis mine]. Scripture itself

³⁷Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link In Systematic Theology* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1989), 633.

³⁸See Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1995), 113. Regarding Daniel 7:13-14 which many Dispensationalists understand to refer to the establishment of Christ's thousand-year reign on the earth, Mathison writes the following on page 112: "Dispensationalists consider this passage a prophecy of the second coming of Christ to earth to establish His millennial kingdom. But that is not what Daniel says. Verse 13 indicates clearly that this is not a vision of Christ's coming *down* to earth. Daniel sees the Son of Man coming *up* to the Father, the Ancient of Days. Daniel, writing from the perspective of one standing in the throne of God, sees Jesus coming up. Daniel 7 cannot be a prophecy of the second coming....Only one place in Scripture vividly describes the fulfillment of a scene like the one in Daniel 7. In Acts 1, Jesus Christ, the *Son of Man*, comes *up* to the Ancient of Days on the clouds (Acts 1:9). Daniel 7:13-14 is thus a prophecy of the ascension of Christ. In verse 14, we are told what happened after Christ ascended to the Father: He was given an everlasting dominion. He was given glory. He was given a kingdom that extends over all peoples, nations, and men of every language....Despite the Dispensationalist denials, the Bible distinctly teaches that Jesus Christ was crowned King of Kings at His ascension. He is now "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5). 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever' (Rev. 11:15)."

indicates that David's throne *is* typologically analogous to God's throne. Thus, Christ's current reign at God's right hand in heaven over the entire cosmos *is* the antitypical fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.

If Solomon is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, then the temple that Solomon built *must* likewise be typologically analogous to the temples that Christ Himself would build. Furthermore, the temples that Christ will construct must be greater than Solomon's temple by a magnitude which *approaches* infinity, as they are antitypical of the Temple in Jerusalem. This sheer fact disqualifies a millennial temple as being the antitype of Solomon's Temple. So what are these temples that Christ will construct? *First*, Christ's body *is* the ultimate temple of God. One of the key characteristics of God's Temple was that it was the location where God Himself dwelt. Accordingly, Colossians 2:9 declares of Christ Jesus, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." There can be no doubt that Christ is *far* greater than a physical temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, the Lord Jesus says exactly this in Matthew 12:6, "But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here." Moreover, John 2:19-21 states: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰The Jews therefore said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' ²¹But He was speaking of the temple of His body." *Second*, the Church is another temple constructed by the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ baptized His followers with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Church was born. Through Pentecost and its subsequent extensions, the Lord forever joined elect Jews and elect Gentiles into one new body in *one* New Covenant (cf. Eph 2:11-18). God's Word clearly demonstrates that the 'near' fulfillments of the Davidic Covenant in the OT are typological of their 'ultimate' fulfillments in the New Covenant Age.

The Abrahamic Covenant

In Genesis 12 and 17, God covenantally promised to Abraham a seed, a nation, and a land. Few premillennialists will dispute that the Abrahamic promises find fulfillment in Isaac, the nation of Israel, and the land of Canaan. However, such fulfillments were only 'near' fulfillments, that is to say, fulfillments which are typological of their 'ultimate' fulfillments in the New Covenant Age. *First*, the miraculous birth of Isaac, the "unique" (*monogenē*)³⁹ son of Abraham (Heb 11:17) is typologically parallels the miraculous virgin-birth of Jesus Christ, the "unique" (*monogenē*) Son of God (John 3:16) and *the* Seed of Abraham (Cf. Gen 17:7-8; Gal 3:16). *Second*, Israel, the Old Covenant people of God typologically parallels both Christ (cf. Hos 11:1; Matt 2:15) and the Church, the New Covenant people of God (cf. 1 Pet 2:9; John 15:1).

The Church has *not* replaced Israel; the Church *is* the fulfillment of Israel as the people of God.⁴⁰ Israel was God's Old Covenant people (cf. Exod 19:3-6; Heb 8:13), and the Church is God's

³⁹*Monogenē* is also translated as "only" (ESV: Heb 11:17; John 3:16), "only begotten" (KJV, NASB: Heb 11:17; John 3:16), and "one and only" (NIV: Heb 11:17; John 3:16).

⁴⁰The olive tree metaphor of Romans 11:16-28 implies that there is only *one* redemptive plan of God, not two (i.e. one for Israel and another for the Church). Israel was God's Old Covenant people, a group that included both *unbelieving* Jews and *believing* Jews. When the New Covenant was established by the Lord Jesus Christ with the *believing* remnant of Israel (at the cross and subsequently Pentecost), the *unbelieving* "natural" branches of Israel were broken off from the olive tree. This divine 'pruning' coincided with the formation of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. While the *temporary* hardening of Israel endures, God continues to graft "wild" branches (i.e. *believing* Gentiles) into the olive tree. However, either immediately before or coinciding with Christ's *parousia*, the Lord will graft a vast number of *believing* "natural" branches (i.e. *believing* ethnic Jews) into the olive tree. The Church, the spiritual body composed of *believing* Jews and *believing* Gentiles (cf. Eph 2:11-18), is the *typological* fulfillment of Old Testament Israel, a national body which was composed of *believing* Jews and *unbelieving* Jews. It is the Church, not Israel, that reveals "the manifold

New Covenant people, comprised of both elect Jew and elect Gentile (cf. Eph 2:11-18). Such teaching does not conflict with Jeremiah 31:31, where the God specifically promises to forge the New Covenant “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” To whom was the Gospel preached first? To the houses of Israel and Judah (cf. Jer 31:31-33; Matt 10:6; 15:24). Upon whom was the Holy Spirit poured out first? Upon the houses of Israel and Judah (cf. Jer 31:31-33; Acts 2). At Pentecost, the believing remnant of ethnic Israel was transformed into the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ – the spiritual body that reveals “the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10). Furthermore, God is continuing to draw out his elect from the houses of Israel and Judah, and shortly before Christ returns in glory a massive number of ethnic Jews will be saved and incorporated into the Church (Rom 11). The ‘Church versus Israel’ dichotomy, which so prevalently manifests itself in Dispensational Premillennialism, is without biblical warrant. The Bible *never* uses such language. Rather, it compares and contrasts Israel and the Jews with Gentiles, but never Israel with the Church.⁴¹ Consider the following passages: Luke 2:29-32, John 11:49-53, John 1:12-13, Acts 15:7-11, Galatians 3:6-9, Galatians 3:13-14, Galatians 3:26-29, Ephesians 2:11-22, Ephesians 3:4-6, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 3:29-31, Romans 9-11, Romans 15:27, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, and Colossians 3:11.

Third, whereas the land of Canaan was given to Israel, the Old Covenant people of God, the New Heavens and New Earth will be given to the Church, the New Covenant people of God (cf. Heb 11:9-16; 2 Pet 3:3-13; Rev 21-22). In fact, on no less than three occasions, the Old Testament declares that God fulfilled the land promise in its ‘near’ sense when He gave the land of Canaan to Israel. For example, Joshua 21:43-45 declares:

⁴³So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. ⁴⁴And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.

Also, Solomon proclaims in 1 Kings 8:56, “Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant.” Finally, the Jewish people confess in Nehemiah 9:7-8:

⁷Thou art the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham. ⁸and Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee, and didst make a covenant with him to give *him* the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the

wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10). The hope of Israel is not a premillennial kingdom, as premillennialists assert, but includes Yahweh (cf. Ps 69:6; Jer. 14:8; 17:13), the Messiah (cf. Acts 28:20; Phil 1:13; Col 4:3), the gospel (cf. Acts 28:20; Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3), the promise of the Spirit (cf. Ezek 36:26-27; Gal 3:13-14; John 14:16-17), the adoption of sons (cf. Rom 8:23; Gal 4:3-5; Eph 1:3-5), and the New Heavens and New Earth (cf. Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; 2 Tim 4:18; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev 21:3-4), all of which are fulfilled in the Church, the New Covenant people of God.

⁴¹It is important to note that 1 Corinthians 10:32 does *not* logically justify the Dispensational Premillennial view of distinct redemptive programs in the plan of God for Israel and the Church: “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.” In this passage, “Jews” exclusively refers to *unbelieving* Jews, and “Greeks” exclusively refers to *unbelieving* Gentiles. However, the “church of God” exclusively refers to *believing* Jews and *believing* Gentiles (cf. Eph 2:11-18). Thus, the Apostle Paul divides humanity into three groups: *unbelieving* Jews, *unbelieving* Gentiles, and the Church (i.e. *believing* Jews and *believing* Gentiles). He admonishes the believers in Corinth not to offend these three groups, groups which have their own distinct ideologies, beliefs, and practices. Furthermore, although the Church is predominantly a Gentile body, it is nonetheless comprised of both elect Jew and elect Gentile. As a result, the Church is not, cannot, and should not be *equated* with the term ‘Gentiles.’

Jebusite, and the Gergashite – to give *it* to his descendants. And Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, for Thou art righteous.

And so it is affirmed that the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic land promise is not a repossession of the land of Canaan by Israel in an earthly millennium. As implied by Matthew 5:5, 2 Peter 3:13, and Hebrews 11, the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic land promise is the New Heavens and the New Earth. There is no abrogation of any covenantal promises given to Abraham and David, only typological fulfillment.

A Future for Ethnic Israel (Romans 9-11)

Romans 9-11 is yet another passage which strongly argues against the existence of a future millennial kingdom as taught by all versions of premillennialism. Nevertheless, premillennialists insist that Romans 9-11 teaches a premillennial kingdom in accordance with their eschatology. For example, Fred G. Zaspel, a Premillennialist, argues that “all Israel shall be saved” in Romans 11:26 refers “to a national conversion of ethnic Israel,” and the rest of his work indicates that he understands “national” to indicate the restoration of the nation of Israel in a literal, earthly millennium.⁴² Regarding this same verse (Rom 11:26), John MacArthur states that Paul’s reference to Zion from Isaiah 59:20-21 indicates that “the Lord Jesus Christ’s millennial rule will be associated with [earthly] Mt. Zion.”⁴³ “The mystery” to which the Apostle Paul refers in Romans 11:25 is teaching in context a massive, end-time ingathering of believing ethnic Jews. But, such an event does not include a “national” restoration as explained for the following *two* reasons.

First, no *explicit* reference is made to the land of Israel or the land promise given to Abraham throughout Romans 9-11. The Apostle’s reference to Zion from Isaiah 59:20-21 does *not* refer to the physical land of Israel or to the earthly city of Jerusalem. More likely, it refers to the heavenly Mount Zion (cf. Heb 12:22-24). Mark Seifrid writes:

That the Redeemer comes “from Zion” for Israel implies that Israel is in exile, a setting that the allusion to Ps. 14 accentuates: God saves his people who are in captivity. Likewise, the text of Isaiah 59:20 describes God as “the Redeemer,” who savingly comes to his exiled people – a prominent characterization of God in Isa. 40-55....Paul undoubtedly refers to Christ as the coming Redeemer, whom he here again identifies with God through his use of the Isaianic text (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 11:26; 15:23; 16:22; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; on redemption, see Rom. 7:24). Christ, the stumbling-stone whom God has placed in “Zion” and with whom God himself is identified (Isa. 8:14; Rom 9:33), will come forth from *the heavenly Zion* as the Redeemer of Israel....In any case, the salvation of Israel by the coming of the Redeemer from Zion will be, according to Paul, the resurrection of the dead, the final salvation of all who believe (11:15) [**emphasis mine**].⁴⁴

Furthermore, Paul’s omission of any reference to the land or the land promise in Romans 9-11 can be explained by Paul’s earlier discussion of the resurrection of the elect and of creation in Romans 8:19-23. As previously discussed, this passage in Romans 8 implies that the land promise given to Abraham finds its ultimate eschatological fulfillment not in a reconstituted land of Israel but

⁴²Fred G. Zaspel, *Jews, Gentiles and the Goal of Redemptive History: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Romans 9-11* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1995), 13.

⁴³John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1544.

⁴⁴Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Gregory K. Beale and Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 674.

in the New Heavens and New Earth. Paul even refers to the patriarch Abraham as “the heir of the world (*kosmou*)” in Romans 4:13, and the elect, like Abraham, will inherit the ‘resurrected’ cosmos (cf. Matt 5:5; 2 Pet 3:13). When Romans 9-11 is viewed in the context of the epistle’s eight preceding chapters (especially Romans 8), it becomes readily apparent why the Apostle does not refer to the land of Israel in Romans 9-11.⁴⁵ God’s restoration of Israel does not involve a redeemed nation of Jews dwelling in the Promised Land and reigning with Christ over the nations for a thousand years. Rather, when Christ “the Redeemer will come from Zion” (Rom 11:26) to restore Israel, He will spiritually redeem a vast number of elect *ethnic* Jews and permanently unite them to Himself by incorporating them into His spiritual body, the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:13-14; Rom 8:9). The Lord Jesus Christ will then resurrect and rescue His Church, destroy His enemies, execute the Final Judgment, and transform the cosmos into the New Heavens and New Earth. The eschatological goal of history is the resurrection of both the elect and the entire cosmos, *not* a premillennial kingdom.

Second, no reference is made to Israel as a political entity in Romans 9-11. Although Romans 11:25-31 does teach that there will be a massive, end-time ingathering of believing *ethnic* Jews when Christ returns, it does *not* teach that there will be a *national* or *political* restoration. The fact that Paul compares and contrasts Israel with the Gentiles evinces that the emphasis in Romans 9-11 is upon socio-ethnic groups not political ones. The distinction between ethnic Israel and national/political Israel is one which the Bible itself frequently employs. For example, Amos 9:8 declares, “Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom [i.e. political Israel], and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob [i.e. the elect remnant of ethnic Israel],” declares the LORD.” In other words, although God promised to destroy Israel as a *political* entity for her apostasy and wickedness, He promised to preserve an elect *ethnic* remnant. In accordance with Amos 9:8, Romans 11:25-31 describes the deliverance of the elect *ethnic* remnant of Israel not a *national* or *political* restoration. This deliverance will occur at Christ’s *parousia* in the form of a massive, end-time ingathering of believing *ethnic* Jews. Although most proponents of New Covenant Theology reject a national restoration of Israel in a literal, earthly millennium, they still heartily affirm that there will be a massive, end-time ingathering of believing ethnic Jews in accordance with Romans 9-11.

A Tale of Two Ladies (Galatians 4:21-5:21)

Galatians 4:21-5:21 is a passage from the New Testament which strongly contends against premillennialism, specifically Dispensational Premillennialism. In this particular pericope, the Apostle Paul uses a *typological allegory* involving Hagar, Sarah, Ishmael, and Isaac in order to warn the Galatians against reverting to the Mosaic Law.⁴⁶ Galatians 4:25 declares: “Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.” In Paul’s allegory, Hagar corresponds to the Old Covenant that was forged between God and Israel at Mount Sinai. She also represents Mount Sinai and the present Jerusalem, both of which are intimately tied to that particular covenant. Another point of similarity between Hagar and the Old Covenant is that of *an enslaving nature*. Just as Hagar was an Egyptian slave woman, the Old

⁴⁵To interpret Romans 9-11 as a codicil divorced from its preceding context is hermeneutically unsound and should be avoided.

⁴⁶See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 292.

Covenant by its very nature was a ‘covenant of slavery’ that *only* produces slaves under the curse of the Law.⁴⁷

Then, in Galatians 4:26, Paul writes, “But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.” The unnamed free woman, who is not only the mother of believers but also represents the heavenly Jerusalem, is without a doubt Sarah, the wife of Abraham. As already shown, Hebrews 11:9-16 notes that Abraham was not looking for an earthly country but a “heavenly one” (Heb 11:16) and “the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God” (Heb 11:10), that is, the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Heb 12:22).⁴⁸ Just as the free woman Sarah *by faith* (cf. Heb 11:11-12) produced Isaac a *free* child of promise, so also the New Covenant produces *free* children of promise, who are born through faith, which is graciously given by God to all true members of the New Covenant. Paul is not trying to say here that the church, which is elsewhere described as the heavenly Jerusalem, is the mother of believers. Regarding this, Schreiner writes: “The Jerusalem on high is identified as the ‘mother’ of believers. The mother of believers here is not the church but the heavenly Jerusalem, showing that believers in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are citizens of the heavenly city.”⁴⁹

Galatians 4:30 proclaims, “But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.’” In this particular verse, the Apostle Paul produces Genesis 21:10 as *a response* to the Judaizers’ persecution of the Galatian believers (cf. Gal 4:29). *Only the children of promise*, who are Spirit-born members of the New Covenant, will inherit the heavenly blessings that God has promised to His people. Although Longenecker is correct that verse 30 should not be understood as an indiscriminant “broadside” against all Jews, this verse does implicitly contend against Judaism itself and *unbelieving* Jews. In the allegory, Paul equates Hagar with both the Old Covenant and the present Jerusalem, and as in the Genesis account, Hagar is expelled from Abraham’s tent and *never* returns. Thus, the Old Covenant has now been abrogated (Heb 8:13), and it, along with all its vestiges and trappings, will *never* return. This fact poses an interesting conundrum for Dispensational Premillennialism, a system which sees an eschatological ‘semi-reversionary’⁵⁰ restoration of Israel which includes a physical city of Jerusalem, a rebuilt temple, a restored Aaronic priesthood, renewed sacrifices, and a repartition of the physical land of Palestine to Israel. It seems that Dispensational Premillennialists, according to their theological system, have believing Jews (also represented in Isaac) either dressing themselves in

⁴⁷See Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 208-9. See also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 301. Schreiner notes, “Paul sees a correspondence between Hagar and Mount Sinai, and then draws a connection between Hagar and the Jerusalem of his day, since he sees the Jews of his day as enslaved under the law.”

⁴⁸See Schreiner, *Galatians*, 303. Here Schreiner writes: “Elsewhere in the NT the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10; cf. 2 Bar. [Baruch] 4:2) represents the heavenly city that awaits believers. The Jerusalem above, according to Paul, is the eschatological Jerusalem that has reached down into the present evil age. Even though the heavenly Jerusalem had not arrived in its fullness, the age to come had invaded the present evil age, so we have an example here of Paul’s already but not yet eschatology. It also seems likely that Paul believed that the arrival of the Jerusalem above reflects an inauguration and partial fulfillment of the new covenant promise of a new creation (Isa 65:17; 66:1-11).” See also Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 41, *Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 214. He writes: “This concept of a ‘heavenly’ or ‘new’ Jerusalem also epitomized the hopes of Jewish Christians, as in Heb 11:10, 14-16; 12:22; 13:14; and Rev 3:12; 21:2, where the full realization of God’s kingdom and Christ’s reign is set out in terms of a ‘heavenly’ or ‘new’ Jerusalem that was looked forward to by the patriarchs and is now experienced by Christians in an inaugurated fashion.”

⁴⁹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 303. Earlier, Schreiner also writes: “The earthly Jerusalem stands in contrast to the Jerusalem above, for the latter is free, and it is this Jerusalem that stands as the mother of believers in Jesus Christ. Believers are citizens of the heavenly city.”

⁵⁰This is not to say that Dispensationalists hold to a salvation other than *the one* that is *by faith alone, by Christ alone, and by grace alone*.

Ishmael's clothes or seeking after Hagar's way of life.⁵¹ How can these Sinaitic shadows return if the Old Covenant itself has been fulfilled and resultantly abolished, never to be renewed (cf. Heb 8:13) in any form? Such an eschatological understanding is incompatible with Galatians 4:21-31.

Note also that Hagar is expelled with her son Ishmael, who symbolizes unbelieving Jews who seek to be justified, yet are enslaved, by the Law. Galatians 4:30 states that all unbelieving Jews (except for those who will eventually become part of the Body of Christ through faith, cf. Rom 9-11), have been rejected and will *never* inherit the promises revealed in the Old Testament. Fung, quoting A. T. Hanson summarizes the overall meaning of Paul's analogy with the following words: "The contrast Paul sets forth by means of the Hagar-Sarah analogy has been helpfully summed up in the following basic terms: 'Hagar the slave bears a son who persecuted the son of Sarah, the free woman. She and her son are cast out by divine command. The unbelieving Jews, enslaved to the Torah, persecuted believing Christians, who are free in Christ. The unbelieving Jews are rejected by God.'"⁵² In other words, Galatians 4:21-5:1 strongly indicates that any form of premillennialism is 'semi-reversionary.'

Conclusion

Is premillennialism consistent with New Covenant Theology? No, premillennialism is *not* consistent with the tenets and hermeneutics of New Covenant Theology for the reasons addressed in this paper. *First*, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 and 50-58 both demonstrate that Christ's *parousia* signals His return in glory, the destruction of His enemies (including death), and the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. *Second*, 2 Peter 3:3-12 indicates that when the Lord Jesus returns in glory at His Second Coming, the entire cosmos will be destroyed with fire. *Third*, Romans 8:19-23 that Christ's *parousia* also signals the 'resurrection' of the cosmos into the New Heavens and the New Earth. In other words, Christ's Second Coming encompasses His return in glory, the destruction of His enemies (including death), the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, the destruction of the cosmos by fire, and the recreation of the cosmos into the New Heavens and New Earth. *Fourth*, Hebrews 11:9-16 clearly teaches that Abraham was looking for the New Heavens and New Earth, not a literal, earthly millennium. *Fifth*, the numerous parallels between Ezekiel 40-48 and Revelation 21-22 strongly indicate that God gave Ezekiel an 'Old Testament' version of the vision of the New Heavens and New Earth that the Apostle John received in the two final chapters of Revelation. *Sixth*, the 'near' fulfillments of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants in the OT are typological of their 'ultimate' fulfillments in the New Covenant Age. *Seventh*, Romans 9-11 teaches a massive, end-time ingathering of believing ethnic Jews, not a national restoration of Israel in a literal, earthly millennium. Finally, Galatians 4:21-5:1 strongly indicates that any form of premillennialism is 'semi-reversionary.' In conclusion, rather than affirming premillennialism, New Covenant Theology more accurately reflects a biblical progressive revelation – the New interpreting the Old – a hermeneutical principle key to understanding God's unfolding plan of redemption.

⁵¹Using the Hagar-Sarah allegory, another figurative representation of Classic Dispensationalist understanding of future believing Israel would be the believing Jews allowing Hagar to come back into Abraham's tent and adopt / mother Isaac. It must be noted that *Hagar never returns!*

⁵²Fung, *Galatians*, 215.

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