Extensive review of Jonathan Menn's Biblical Eschatology

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Review and summary of *Biblical Eschatology* by Jonathan Menn

I've often seen this book in my Amazon Wishlist and asked myself, "Is it worth it? I don't know the author, but it seems that he is amillennial." My question was answered when I came across a YouTube series from ECLEA (Equipping Church Leaders East Africa), where Dr. Jonathan Menn is the director, entitled "Biblical Eschatology." That series is based on a book also called *Biblical Eschatology* which ECLEA has published and which is available for free. Upon watching the series and skimming through the ECLEA book, I was impressed how thorough the author was and how widely read he was. Then I compared the table of contents of his larger book and the ECLEA book and came to the conclusion that they dealt with the same subjects, only that his book was much larger and thorough. That motivated it me all the more to get the larger book. The summaries of his book which are also available at ThirdMill also helped in my decision.

Now that introductions are out of the way, I think that this is one of the best books on eschatology from an amillennial viewpoint. My very favorite is probably Sam Storms' *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* because it was the first book that I read after becoming an amillennial through a YouTube video. *The High King of Heaven* from Dean Davis is likewise a favorite of mine because it was thorough and dealt with many Old Testament prophecies and interpreting them through the lens of the New Testament just like the Apostles did (see my review here). But Dr. Menn's book is by far the most comprehensive. The author is widely read as the 20 pages of the bibliography can testify. In one sense, the book accumulates the best scholarship and summarizes it. This book is filled footnotes to all kinds of authors from various eschatological viewpoints.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all the ellipses, square brackets and italics in citations are not my own, but Dr. Menn's.

Hermeneutical issues

In the *Introduction*, Dr. Menn explains the distinction between individual and corporate eschatology. He then proceeds to define the major hermeneutical issues which must be decided when thinking about eschatology. These are:

- Do the second coming of Christ, the resurrection and judgment of all humanity, and the inauguration of the eternal kingdom, occur as aspects of one great event, or are they

separated by a temporary messianic kingdom that lasts a thousand years?
- Are we able to predict when any of the "end-time" events will occur by paying attention to the events transpiring in the Middle East or other geopolitical occurrences?
- What is the role of the church in all of this?

The major eschatological positions (premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism) differ on the nature and timing of the kingdom in Revelation 20. He then proceeds to briefly lay out the eschatological positions and words which are often used.

Interpreting prophecy

Nature of Prophecy

In chapter 2, entitled "Interpreting Prophecy and Apocalyptic" he lays out the hermeneutics needed which will be used in interpreting prophecy. This is mainly directed against dispensational premillennialism with its insistence on "consistent literal interpretation," especially of prophecy. Before we *a priori* decide upon a "literal interpretation" of prophecy, we must first understand the nature of prophecy. The prophets primarily did two things: "(1) They warned God's people of the consequences of disobedience to the Lord's ways by *oracles of judgment*; and (2) They called God's people back to faithfulness by *oracles of salvation*" (pp. 6-7). Their purpose was to change the behavior of people and call them to repentance rather than give them things interesting to think about or a map of the future. Their primary function was forth-telling rather than fore-telling. What makes prophecy difficult is the medium in which it was given to the prophets. They are sometimes given in a dream or visionary form. This means that such a prophecy must be interpreted in line with its literature, and not the same as Genesis or Exodus which is narrated history. The way that God talks to the prophets is said to be "in dark sayings" (Ps. 78:2; cf. Num. 12:6-8), which obviously does not mean that such a prophecy is clear on first sight. Prophecy, in comparison with didactic (*teaching*) or historical portion of the Bible, is less clear.

Contingency

Another important factor to keep in mind when dealing with prophecy is that, because it is concerned with the behavior of God's people, it is therefore **contingent**. "God announced this principle of contingency in Jer 18:6–11; 26:12–13; 36:1–3; Ezek 18:1–32; 33:10–20" (p. 8). Sometimes this principle is explicitly stated (Menn adduces Jer 38:17–18; 42:7–17; Acts 27:21–44; Rom 11:17–24). Other times it is not stated though it is nonetheless conditional (Menn adduces Exod 32:9–14; Isa 38:1–5; Jonah 3:1—4:2; Matt 19:27–28. "In Matt 19:27–28 the promise by Jesus to the Twelve that they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel included *Judas*."). This principle of contingency is also clearly seen in the preaching of Jonah to Nineveh which simply was "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4). There are no ifs or buts to be seen in Jonah's prophecy, but God clearly relented from the disaster which He intended to bring on Nineveh. Why? Because Nineveh repented and God will not judge the righteous. While there was no contingency in Jonah's preaching, prophecy by its nature is nonetheless contingent.

Redemptive historical context

When interpreting prophecy, it is important to consider the context in which it was spoken. In this respect, it is of special importance to consider the redemptive historical context. Old Testament prophecy primarily gave New Covenant prophecies veiled in the shadows and types of the Old Covenant. The New Testament is unmistakably clear that the Old Covenant and its institutions are by nature typological of New Covenant realities and are fulfilled in Christ and His people.

> Examples of this include: Jesus describes his body as the "temple" (John 2:18–22); the church as a whole is called the "temple" or the "tabernacle" in 1 Cor 3:9, 16–17; 2 Cor 6:16—7:1; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12; Rev 13:6; Paul uses OT language of burnt offerings to describe money given to assist his ministry (Phil 4:18; see Exod 29:18); in Revelation the leaders of end-time nations are referred to as "kings" (e.g., Rev 16:14; 19:18); and the bringers of catastrophe are compared to horses whose riders are equipped with ancient armor and weapons (e.g., Rev 6:2, 4, 5, 8; 9:7, 9, 17). (p. 10).

It is also to be observed that the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant is astronomical. We cannot interpret the Old Testament as if the Lord Jesus Christ—the Messiah of Israel—has not yet come. In light of Christ's first coming, the Old Testament must be interpreted by the light which is still shining forth from the empty tomb. The Messiah is not a mere addition to Old Testament prophecy but is the heart of it and in Him (and those who are joined to Him) they find their ultimate fulfillment. Therefore, when we consider the temple in Old Testament prophecy, we must never think of a building of brick and mortar, since Christ Himself claimed to be the true temple (John 2:19-22) and the rest of the NT makes also

clear that His people are the temple (e.g., Eph. 2:19-22; 2 Cor. 6:16-18). Therefore, to think of a return to a physical building is such an anti-climax that it is unimaginable how Christian interpreters can match it with the progressive nature of revelation which is fulfilled in the New Covenant. At this point it is also important to understand the purpose for which the physical temple (to keep using the same example) was given. The purpose of the temple was to be a place where the true God would be worshiped and meet with His people. Under the New Covenant, this purpose is fulfilled in the believers *being* the true temple of God. Therefore, the focus should not be on the physical building of the temple, but on the purpose for which it was given. Since the purpose for which it was given is fulfilled, therefore, the temple is likewise fulfilled. This is placing Old Testament prophecy in its covenantal context so that the people of God could understand yet it was not the purpose of Old Testament to give the idea that the physical temple will be rebuilt (think of Jer. 3:16-17 for example). The reality to which the temple pointed is already here, what use is the type if the antitype is already in place? Menn cites Graeme Goldsworthy who observes, "This means that the form and the content of the fulfillment exceeds by far the form and content of the promises themselves. . . . *Literalism* involves the very serious error of not listening to what the New Testament says about fulfillment. It assumes that the fulfillment must correspond exactly to the form of the promise." (p. 13).

At this point, we have articulated the principle that the best interpreter of the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Whatever the New Testament says is the fulfillment of a text in the Old Testament, that is the best interpretation of a text in the Old Testament. Sometimes, it may seem weird for us how the authors of the New Testament interpret a particular passage, but since the Holy Spirit was present with the prophets as well as the apostles, we know that the apostolic interpretation is correct.

Old Testament eschatology

The Latter Days

After discussing prophecy and apocalyptic, chapter 3 moves to the "Old Testament Eschatological Expectations and the Significance of Christ's First Coming." The Old Testament contains many eschatological themes, but it is difficult to bring them into a coherent whole. One unifying aspect of the eschatological expectations is summed up under the "latter days" statements. For example (pp. 20-21):

- "Shiloh" will come from Judah (Gen 49:1, 10).
- A star and scepter shall come from Israel (Num 24:14, 17).
- Israel will return to the Lord and listen to his voice (Deut 4:30).
- Israel will act corruptly, provoke the Lord, and evil will befall it (Deut 31:29).
- The mountain of the house of the Lord will be established and the nations will stream to it (Isa 2:2).
- The anger of the Lord will not turn back (Jer 23:20).
- The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has accomplished his intent (Jer 30:24).
- God will restore the fortunes of Moab (Jer 48:47).
- God will restore the fortunes of Elam (Jer 49:39).
- Gog will come against Israel (Ezek 38:1–16).
- Four kingdoms will arise and then God will set up his kingdom (Dan 2:28–45; 8:17–25).
- Out of the Greek empire different kings will arise, fight, and control Israel (Dan 11:35–45).
- Many will be purged and refined but the wicked will act wickedly (Dan 12:4–10).
- Israel will return and seek the Lord (Hos 3:5).
- The mountain of the house of the Lord will be established and the peoples will stream to it (Mic 4:1).

Some of the "latter day" statements do not appear to be about the end of the world, but unspecified time in the future of the author. Dr. Menn cites Geerhardus Vos who explains that *acherith hayamin* ("latter days" in Hebrew) is "elastic as to its extent, no less than movable as to its position. It covers . . . unfavorable and favorable happenings occurring in the farthest visible plane to which the prophetic vision extends, and there is not clear marking of the sequence of these in time. . . . Sometimes *points* are mentioned as falling within the 'acherith,' sometimes a *condensation of events* occupying apparently a certain stretch of time." (p. 20)

Besides the "latter day" statements we have various eschatological themes like:

- a new exodus (the remnant: Isa 43:1–7, 15–21; 48:20–21; 49:24–26; 51:9–11; 52:1–12; Jer 23:7–8; 30:4–11. The nations: Isa 2:2–4; 19:18–25; 49:5–6; 56:1–8; Mic 4:1–4; Zeph 3:9; Zech

8:20–23.),
- a new people of God (Isa 10:20–23; 11:11–12; 14:1–4; 46:3–4; 51:11; 61:4–7; Jer 23:1–8; 29:10–14; 30:10–11; 31:7–9; Mic 2:12),
- a new deliverer (Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13—53:12; 61:1-3; Dan. 7:13-14),
- a new rule of God (Isa 12:6; Ezek 37:27–28; 40–48; Joel 3:16–17; Zeph 3:14–17),
- a new pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28–32; Isa 32:9–20; 44:3–5; Ezek 36:25–28; 37:14),
- a new land (Isa 1:27; 2:1–3; 11:6–9; 35:1–10; 54:1–17; 61:3—62:12; Ezek 34:11–16, 25–31; 36:35–38),
- a new covenant (Jer 31:31-34; 32:38–40; 50:4–5; Ezek 11:16–20; 36:24–32; 37:15–28.),
- a new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17-25; 66:22).

These themes are seen in the prophets, but they were not synthesized yet. It is generally accepted that the Old Testament did not distinguish between the first and second comings of the Messiah.

The very first verse of the New Testament makes clear that Christ is here as the continuation of the storyline in the Old Testament: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). The kingdom of David lay dormant since the Babylonian Captivity, but things are to change with this son of David.

Jesus Christ—the Fulfillment and Fulfiller of the Old Testament

Jesus Christ is the true and new Adam, seed of Abraham and Israel. Even in Isaiah's Servant of the LORD passages there is a certain identification made between the Servant and Israel. For example, in Isaiah 49 we read:

> Isa. 49:3-5 And he said to me, "**You are my servant, Israel**, in whom I will be glorified." 4 But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God." 5 And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, **to bring Jacob back to him**; and that **Israel might be gathered to him**— for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Verse 3 makes clear the identification between the Servant of the LORD and Israel by God directly calling Him "Israel." But this could simply be a personification of the nation. That may be legitimate to conclude if we don't read the rest of the passage where it is clear that this Servant is ordained to "bring Jacob back to" God and that "Israel might be gathered to" God. Therefore, the Servant is not merely Israel the nation, but represents Israel and is called Israel. The New Testament makes clear that the Servant passages are about the Lord Jesus Christ. This Israel fulfills the mission which earthly Israel failed to fulfill. This could also be seen in the way that Matthew begins his Gospel and how it parallels Israel's experience: going into Egypt, coming out of Egypt, being baptized in the Jordan, the temptations in the wilderness, giving His law on a mount and so on.

In connection with our Lord being the Servant of the LORD Who is to "bring back Jacob" to God, we observe our Lord fulfills various prophecies about the regathering of remnant of Israel as can be seen in John 10. In John 10:11, 14, our Lord identifies Himself as "the Good Shepherd." The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and lays His life down for His sheep (John 10:15). Then He says, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). The other sheep which He is seeking are of the Gentiles. Remember that He said that He "came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10)? That is a clear allusion to Ezekiel 34:16 upon which John 10 is also based. Christ is regathering Israel to Himself not to a piece of land in the Middle East.

That He is the true son of Abraham is indicated also by the first verse of the New Testament. But Paul is so bold as to declare that the promises that were made to Abraham were made ultimately to Christ (Gal. 3:16-17)! On this basis, he can say to Gentile Christians "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29). Union with Christ by the Spirit is all that matters, not a fleshly union.

And so, we could endlessly go on how our Lord fulfills (either in Himself or in His people, and either completely or inaugurates the fulfillment) everything in the Old Testament. But it is better for you if you read the chapter yourself. It is excellent.

The Overall Structure of Eschatology (Two-Age Model)

In chapter 4, which is titled "Interpreting Biblical Eschatology in Light of its Overall Structure," Dr. Menn introduces us to the two-age model. The two-age model is one of the greatest strengthens of amillennialism, because it is so simple and straightforward. The two-age model basically maintains that there are two ages which comprehend all of time (Eph. 1:21; Matt. 12:32). When our Lord says that "whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32), the parallel passage in Mark 3:29 says that that person "is guilty of an eternal sin". These two ages comprehend all of time. These passages also suggest that there is no intervening age between these two. The "age to come" indicates that it will succeed "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). Furthermore, these ages are contrasted in Scripture. Observe the following contrasts:

Characteristics of "this age" Direct comparisons and contrasts:	**Characteristics of the "age to come" Direct comparisons and contrasts:**
(1) It will end (Matt 13:39–40, 49; 24:3–30)	(1) It will last forever (Luke 1:33; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 11:15)
(2) It is the age of things that do not last (1 Cor 15:50; Heb 13:14)	(2) It will be the age of things that last forever (1 Cor 15:50)
(3) It is "of the world" (Rev 11:15)	(3) It is heavenly and "of the Lord" (2 Tim 4:18; Rev 11:15)
(4) Satan is the god of this age (2 Cor 4:4)	(4) God will be "all in all," and Satan will be tormented forever (1 Cor 15:28; Rev 20:10)
(5) Wicked and righteous people coexist (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43)	(5) The wicked and the righteous will be separated and will not coexist (Matt 13:40–43)
(6) It is the age of worry, persecution, and suffering (Matt 13:22; Mark 10:30; Rom 8:18)	(6) There will be no mourning, crying, or pain (Rev 21:4)
(7) It is the age of death (Luke 20:29–36; 2 Cor 4:3–4)	(7) It will be the age of eternal life; there will be no death (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Luke 20:36; Rev 21:4)
(8) People marry and are given in marriage (Luke 20:34)	(8) There will be no marriages or giving in marriage (Luke 20:35)
(9) Now we see dimly, know only in part, and have been blinded (1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 4:4); the rulers of this age do not understand God's wisdom (1 Cor 2:6–9)	(9) Then we will see clearly and will know fully (1 Cor 13:12)
(10) This present age and its ways are evil (Gal 1:4); people walk in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1–2)	(10) Evildoers and immoral, impure, covetous people and idolaters will not inherit the kingdom, but only the worthy will inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5)
(11) Now it has not appeared what we will be like (1 John 3:2)	(11) We will be like Jesus (1 John 3:2) and will be "like angels" (Luke 20:36)
(12) Christ is reigning and is above all names in this age and will be with us until the end of the age (Matt 28:20; Eph 1:21)	(12) Christ will reign and be above all names in the age to come (Eph 1:21)

Coupled to the two-age model is the fact that the last days begun in the first century A.D. (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1-2; Jas. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:3; also 1 Cor. 10:11; Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 4:1-6; Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:3-5, 20; 1 John 1:28; Jude 17-19). With the coming of our Lord Jesus, the age to come has broken into the present evil age wherefore we speak of the overlapping of the two-ages. All of our blessings are of an eschatological nature which belong to the new world, but we already partially partake of them while awaiting the complete fulfillment in the new world. Dr. Menn gives the following examples:

> The breaking in of the "age to come" into "this age" is parallel to the "already, but not yet" nature of the kingdom. Thus, the age to come is the reign of Christ; the reign of Christ has already begun (Acts 2:29–36; Eph. 1:21). The age to come is the age of resurrection (Luke 20:34–36); the resurrection has already begun (1 Cor 15:23). The age to come is the age of eternal life (Mark 10:30); eternal life has already begun (John 3:36; 17:3; 1 John 1:2–3; 5:13). The age to come is the age of the new creation (Rom 8:18–22; Rev 21:1–4); in a sense the new creation already has begun (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). (pp. 44-45)

Christ's Second Coming

Chapter 5, titled "The Eschatological Significance of Christ's Second Coming," begins by answer the question about the demarcation line between the two ages, between the last days and the last day. From Titus 2:13 it appears that our Lord

second coming will be the last day of the present evil age and the first day of the age to come.

Afterwards he surveys the vocabulary connected to Christ's coming:

- **Coming**: *parousia; erchomai; analuō; panerchomai; hupostrephō; hēkō*
  - "in the NT parousia essentially is a technical term for the eschatological coming of Christ in glory." (p. 51)
- **Revelation**: *apokalupsis; apokaluptō* and **appearing**: *epiphaneia; phaneroō; horaō*

Another important phrase is "the day of the Lord" with its various designations which is carried over from the Old Testament but now is connected with Christ.

In amillennialism, the second coming of our Lord is connected with the resurrection, the judgment and the renewal of creation. There are no tribulations or millenniums intervening. Dr. Menn summarizes the biblical data as follows (partially citated):

- The following passages speak of Christ's second coming as entailing the resurrection of the just and unjust alike: Matt 13:30, 40–41, 48–49; 25:31–32; Luke 17:22–37; John 5:25–29; Acts 24:14–15.
- The following passages speak of the second coming of Christ as entailing the judgment of all people, believers and unbelievers alike: Matt 13:24–30, 36–51; 16:27; 24:42–51; 25:14–30, 31–46; Luke 12:35–48; 17:22–37; 19:12–27; 21:26–28; John 5:25–29; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Thess 1:6–10; 2 Tim 4:1; Jas 5:7–9; Rev 11:18; 19:11–21; 20:11–15; 22:12.
- Christ's second coming brings with it the destruction or cleansing of the present world and the restoration of creation: Acts 3:19–21; Rom 8:17–25; Heb 1:10–12; 2 Pet 3:3–15.

The Bible furthermore "teaches that there is one general resurrection, and one general judgment, of both believers and unbelievers" (p. 55). Dr. Menn explains:

> The day of judgment is always spoken of in the singular, e.g., *"day of judgment"* (Matt 10: 15; 11:22–24; 12:36); *"that day"* (Matt 7:22; Luke 10:12); *"the judgment"* (Luke 10:14; 11:31); *"a day in which he will judge the world"* (Acts 17:31); *"a day of wrath"* (Rom 2:5); *"a day of judgment"* (2 Pet 3:7); *"the day of judgment"* (1 John 4:17); *"the great day of their [God's and the Lamb's] wrath"* (Rev 6:17); *"the time for the dead to be judged"* (Rev 11:18); *"the great day of God"* (Rev 16:14). That day—which in- volves both resurrection and judgment—takes place on "the last day," the "end of the age."
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> …
>
> The universality of the judgment is specified in the following passages: Acts 17:31 says, *"He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."* Jesus says in Rev 22:12, *"I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done."* Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5 all speak of Christ who will judge *"the living and the dead."*
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> …
>
> The presence of believers and unbelievers being present together is made clear in the following passages which speak of those who are vindicated and those who are condemned at the same judgment: In Matt 12:35–37…Rom 2:5–8…Rev 11:18…Matt 12:39-42… (pp. 55-56)

He then goes on to give passage which bring all these items together. But before he does that, he first dispels the contention which is often brought up where absence of evidence is adduces as evidence of absence. In his own words:

> When we see the overlap of multiple passages, we clearly see that the second coming of Christ is equivalent to "the last day," "the end of the age," and "the day of the Lord," and it entails resurrection, judgment, and renewal of the earth. In other words, if A includes B; and B includes C; then A also includes C. Or, to put it another way, if in one place A is said to include B; and elsewhere A is said to include C; then we may conclude that A includes both B and C.

By simple logic, since the resurrection is one and is said to be happen on "the last day" (John 6:39; 11:24), since the judgment is one and said to happen on "the last day" (John 12:48); this means that Christ will come on the last day and all of

these things will take place. Even if 1 Thessalonians 4 or 1 Corinthians 15 does not speak of the resurrection of the wicked, since several passages unite the universal resurrection of humanity (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), we must by simple logic believe that they will take place at the same time. Dr. Menn adduces several passages in Scripture where various aspects are correlated (pp. 59-61).

Historical survey

Chapter 6 is titled, "Historical Overview of Eschatological Thought." I must admit that I find the placement of this chapter a little weird. A survey of the history of eschatological thought would be expected in the introduction or the first chapter of a book, but in this book, it is placed just before the discussion on the Millennium. While weird, it can have its advantages one of which is trying to approach the biblical text without a framework already set up in our minds.

In the historical survey it becomes clear that premillennialism and non-millennialism has been there since the earliest days of the church. This is seen by statements from premillennialists themselves such as Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165 A.D.), who while discussing the millennium says, "many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise" (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 80). Therefore, premillennialists (especially of the dispensational kind) are sometimes heard of saying that premillennialism was dominant in the early church as if no other view existed. The statements from premillennialists themselves deny this. In this respect, I commend to you two particular works which deal with the eschatology of the early church and which Dr. Menn relies upon. The first is Patrick Alan Boyd's *A Dispensational Premillennial Analysis of the Eschatology of the Post-Apostolic Fathers (until the death of Justin Martyr)* (found here). As the name suggests, Boyd himself was a dispensationalist when he conducted his survey and he sought to search if dispensationalism was found among the early fathers. This was prompted by Dr. Charles Ryrie's statement that "premillennialism was the historic faith of the church." While remaining a dispensationalist, his conclusion should be considered:

> It is the conclusion of this thesis that Dr. Ryrie's statement is historically invalid within the chronological framework of this thesis. The reasons for this conclusion are as follows: 1). the writers/writings surveyed did not generally adopt a consistently applied literal interpretation; 2). they did not generally distinguish between the Church and Israel; 3). there is no evidence that they generally held to a dispensational view of revealed history; 4). although Papias and Justin Martyr did believe in a Millennial kingdom, the 1,000 years is the only basic similarity with the modern system (in fact, they and dispensational premillennialism radically differ on the basis for the Millennium); 5). they had no concept of imminency or of a pretribulational Rapture of the Church; 6). in general, their eschatological chronology is not synonymous with that of the modern system. Indeed, this thesis would conclude that the eschatological beliefs of the period studied would be generally inimical to those of the modern system (**perhaps, seminal amillennialism, and not nascent dispensational premillennialism ought to be seen in the eschatology of the period**). (pp. 89-91)

His conclusion is very telling and is based upon characteristics of dispensational premillennialism which he defined at the beginning of his thesis. These are the points which dispensationalists believe are indisputable for their position. Boyd, a dispensationalist, believes that the eschatology of that period (until 165 A.D.) can better be described as "seminal amillennialism." This basically disqualifies *dispensational* premillennialism of having its distinctive features present in the early church.

The second work is Dr. Charles E. Hill's *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001). In it he sets out to survey various early church fathers and works. In his research he finds the interesting correlation between an author's premillennial position and their position on the intermediate state for believers. Except for one author, the premillennialists of the early church did not believe that Christians immediately go into the Lord's presence. Instead, they are kept in a subterranean place. Only the martyrs and those who are translated (like Elijah) are present in heaven. Based on Dr. Hill's work, I have gone and sought the resources which he cites, and I've collected them in a document. You can see my work here.

Dr. Menn approvingly cites D. H. Kromminga's statement that

> The evidence is uniformly to the effect, that throughout the years from the beginning of the second century till the beginning of the fifth chiliasm, particularly of the premillenarian type, was extensively found within the Christian Church, but that it never was dominant, far less universal; that it was not without opponents, and that its representatives were conscious of being able to speak only for a party in the Church. It may be added, that chiliasm never found creedal expression or approbation in the ancient Church. (pp. 63-64)

Dr. Menn then goes to survey the eschatology following from the early church into the present. It is an excellent summary of

the eschatology of the church.

The Millennium

Now in chapter 7, titled “The Millennium,” we get into the meat of the issue. Here will come the major disagreements. He presents the essential beliefs in a table which is as follows (pp. 78-79, also available in the ECLEA version, p. 41):

Essential beliefs of both premillennialist positions	Essential beliefs of both non-premillennialist positions
1. The “1000 years” is a discrete period of time in the future, which follows Christ’s second coming. It may not be exactly 1000 years, but it is a discrete and special period of time.	1. Christ’s second coming follows the “1000 years” of Rev 20:2–7.
2. There will be two bodily resurrections and two judgments: the resurrection and judgment of believers at the time of the second coming; and the resurrection and judgment of “the rest of the dead” at the end of the 1000 years.	2. There will be one general resurrection and judgment of all people, both believers and unbelievers, at the time of the second coming.
3. Revelation is essentially chronological. Specifically, the events of Revelation 20 chronologically follow those of Revelation 19.	3. There is chronological movement within Revelation, but the visions of that book are largely parallel accounts of similar events with different emphases. Specifically, Revelation 20 recapitulates, rather than follows, the major events of Revelation 19.
4. Non-resurrected people in their natural bodies and resurrected people in their glorified bodies will coexist after the second coming during the “millennium.”	4. Non-resurrected people in their natural bodies and resurrected people in their glorified bodies will not coexist after the second coming.
5. Both human sin and physical death will continue to exist for 1000 years after Christ’s second coming.	5. Both human sin and physical death will not continue to exist after Christ’s second coming.
6. Unbelievers will still have the opportunity to come to faith in Christ for 1000 years after his return.	6. Unbelievers will not have the opportunity to come to faith in Christ after his return.
7. The natural creation will continue for 1000 years after Christ’s second coming and will be subjected to the curse imposed by the fall of man, although it will be modified.	7. The natural creation and the curse imposed by the fall of man will not continue after Christ’s second coming. Instead, Christ’s second coming will bring with it the renewal of creation and the removal of the curse.
8. The new heavens and new earth will not be introduced until 1000 years after the return of Christ.	8. The new heavens and new earth will be introduced at the return of Christ.

After this, he surveys historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism. For each, he gives a few arguments from the proponents and then a few criticisms of the system. Much of this criticism is based upon what already has been established in the previous chapters concerning the structure of biblical eschatology (the two-age model), the second coming and the concomitant general resurrection, final judgment and renewal of creation. He is especially hard on dispensational premillennial because it is the most novel eschatological system which is sometimes intolerant of other views. While Premillennialists (like George Eldon Ladd) teach that the doctrine of the millennium must be based upon the New Testament, dispensationalists insist that it must be based on the Old Testament. In this respect, it is interesting to note one of the objects which Dr. Menn raises against dispensational premillennialism and also cites Anthony Hoekema:

> Dispensationalism’s idea of the nature of the millennium is without basis. Dispensationalists think that the purpose of the earthly millennium is to fulfill OT promises to Israel. Thus, the dispensationalist version of the millennium restores Israel to its land and, in fact, exalts the nation of Israel above all other nations. Jesus will rule from an earthly throne in Jerusalem, akin to king David, as an all-powerful earthly potentate. Hoekema astutely notes the vast amount of eschatological data concocted by dispensationalists from the key passage that deals with the “millennial reign,” Rev 20:4–6:
>
> > If this is to be the purpose of the millennium, is it not passing strange that Revelation 20:4–6 says not a word about the Jews, the nation of Israel, the land of Palestine, or Jerusalem? This would not be so serious if the idea of the restoration of Israel were only an incidental aspect of the millennium. But, according to dispensational teaching, the restoration of Israel is the central purpose of the millennium! It is therefore all the more significant that nothing of this alleged central purpose is mentioned in the only biblical passage which deals directly with Christ’s millennial reign, Revelation 20:4–6. We conclude that dispensational premillennialism must be rejected as a system of biblical interpretation which is not in harmony with Scripture. (p. 88)

The primary purpose of the millennium for dispensationalists is not even present in the only passage which speaks about a millennium. This is not merely absence of evidence taken as evidence of absence. According to dispensationalists, the restoration of Israel is not a minor point of the millennium, it is in fact one of the most primary points.

Dr. Menn also takes some time to critique preterism (both the partial-preterism connected with postmillennialism and also full preterism).

The Olivet Discourse

Chapter 8 is titled "The Olivet Discourse: the Tribulation and the Second Coming." The Olivet Discourse refers to the discourse our Lord delivered on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). No eschatological book can ignore this important passage from our Lord's lips. Throughout his book, he provides various tables of parallels between the Olivet Discourse and various eschatological passages in the New Testament contending how central the Olivet Discourse is for New Testament eschatology. At the same time, he shows that the Olivet Discourse is dependent upon the Old Testament.

For me, this one of the most challenging chapters. As I mentioned in the beginning of this post, Sam Storm's *Kingdom Come* was one of the first books I read on amillennialism. In it, he took a partial-preterist interpretation (dominant among postmillennialists) of Matthew 24:1-35. I was convinced of it especially because of Matthew 24:34. Whatever I thought of the discourse, I did not think it pertained primarily to our future. The futurist interpretation was out of the question for me. I have read several passages of Josephus which correspond to our Lord's prophecy. Therefore, I even regarded Matthew 24:29-31 to be speaking about our Lord's judgment upon Jerusalem. I still had questions about some aspects of these verses, but the whole tenor seemed to me to be speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem.

Reading this chapter challenged me on several fronts. Dr. Menn argues convincingly argues that the first half of the discourse obviously has to do with the destruction of Jerusalem. It is very limited and it is spoken of in terms of being near and so on. In fact, the whole context leading up to the disciples' questions in Matthew 24:3 has to do with the then-standing temple in Jerusalem. The great tribulation he also takes to be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Something which I believed and still believe especially in light of the parallel passage in Luke 21:20 (with the abomination of desolation).

He sees a transition point from the near and only-pertaining-to-the-destruction-of-Jerusalem in Matthew 24:22—

> Matt. 24:21-22 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

The reference to "those days" in v. 22 he takes to be the whole inter-advent age and not the great tribulation. He marshals several arguments to this effect (taken from the ECLEA version, pp. 69-70):

1. Although the "kai" of Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20 could connect those verses to the prior section, Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19 themselves make a suitable ending to Matt 24:15-21; Mark 13:14-19. The word "for" in Matt 24:21 and Mark 13:19 concludes Jesus' discussion of the events of AD 66-70 by giving the reason why people need to flee from Judea (Carson 1984: 501-02).
2. The grammar of Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20 combines with the substantive context to show that the entire section deals with events of the entire interadvent period ending with the Second Coming. First, kai often has a contrastive or adversative effect (see Matt 23:37; Mark 7:28; Luke 1:7; 4:23; 8:13; 15:16; 20:19; John 1:5, 11; 3:19; 5:40; Acts 9:26; 1 Cor 12:31b; Eph 4:26; 1 John 2:1, 4; 4:20; Rev 12:8, 16). The context, not the word itself, determines the meaning. Second, grammatically Matt 24:23 begins with "then" (Mark 13:21, "and then"), and Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22 begins with "for." Those verses therefore are linked with Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20. Consequently, to link Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20 with Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19 would also link Matt 24:23-24; Mark 13:21-22 with Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19. However, Matt 24:23-24; Mark 13:21-22 (and therefore Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20) are linked with what comes after the destruction of Jerusalem, namely, the events that culminate in the Second Coming. "Verses 23, 24 [of Matthew] deal with deceivers and are similar to verses 5 and 11. Verses 23-26 provide the reason for the emphasis in verse 27, and verse 27 gives the reason why we are to give no credence to the pretensions mentioned in verses 23-26. Verse 27 deals obviously with the advent." (Murray 1977: 388)

3. The themes of persecution and false Christs are characteristic of the entire period before Christ comes again, not merely the time before AD 70. The persecution or tribulation mentioned in Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20 was also mentioned in Matt 24:6-9; Mark 13:7-9, 12. The warnings against false Christs and being misled (Matt 24:23-26; Mark 13:21-22) were also given in Matt 24:4-5, 11; Mark 13:5-6. All of those things are characteristic of the entire period between Christ's two advents. This section ends with the Second Coming (Matt 24:27-28), just as the first section of the Discourse also concluded with "the end" (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:13).
4. Jesus describes the time period as *"those days"* which God will *"cut short."* Jesus used *"those days"* to refer to the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Matt 24:19; Mark 13:17, 19; Luke 21:23), and uses *"those days"* to refer to tribulation that will occur before the Second Coming (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24). However, in Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20 Jesus adds the phrase that *"those days will be cut short."* That added comment indicates that *"those days"* referred to in Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20 include the entire period of time until the Second Coming (contrary to the more limited reference in Matt 24:19; Mark 13:17, 19; Luke 21:23). It indicates something worldwide in scope is occurring, not a local phenomenon, because the basis on which the lives of God's people are saved is different in the two situations: in AD 70 people in Judea are urged to *"flee to the mountains"* in order to save their lives (Matt 24:16; Mark 13:14); before Christ comes again people are saved not by fleeing but by God's "cutting short" the days. In other words, tribulation will characterize the entire period before Christ's return, and it will even worsen shortly before his second advent, but God will not allow the age to run its course, humanity to destroy itself, or his people to be eliminated from the earth.
5. The reference to *"no life"* being saved in Matt 24:22 and Mark 13:20. The Greek phrase *pasa sarx* (lit. "all flesh," translated "no life" or "no one" in Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20) "normally refers to all mankind and is more sweeping than 'no one in Jerusalem'" (Carson 1984: 502). Every use of "all flesh" in the Greek NT (Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; 15:39; Gal 2:16; 1 Pet 1:24) describes all mankind, except 1 Cor 15:39 where the phrase is used in even a broader sense to describe all human and animal life. Thus, Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20 appear to begin a discussion of events that are worldwide, rather than limited to Jerusalem and Judea as was the case in Matt 24:16; Mark 13:14.
6. The reference to cutting the days short *"for the sake of the elect"* (Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20). "The term 'elect' (in Matthew only at 22:14; 24:22, 24, 31; plus the variant at 20:16) most naturally refers to all true believers, chosen by God; so it is reasonable to assume that it does so here" (Carson 1984: 502). Indeed, "earlier that same day He had equated the 'elect,' Gk. *eklektoi,* with those who were faithful to Himself [Matt 22:14], and of any nation, in fact, except Israel [Matt 21:43]" (Payne 1980: 487n.41). The *"cutting short those days for the sake of the elect,"* was not required in AD 70 because, as mentioned above, the Christians had fled to safety. The nonbelieving Jews who remained in the city were no longer God's "elect" after their rejection of Christ (Matt 13:10-17; 21:18-22, 33-46; Mark 11:12-14, 20-24; 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18).

To be honest, I am still unsure if I am completely convinced, yet I find the point interesting that to be saved from the great tribulation one had to flee Judea, but to be saved from "those days" it will take God cutting them short.

As to the description of the *parousia* of the Son of Man in Matthew 24:29-31, I had no difficulty (nor do I now have difficulty) seeing this as a spiritual coming in judgment, but I had difficulty with the description of the angels gathering the elect "from one end of heaven to the other" with "a loud trumpet call" (Matthew 24:31). These are descriptions which I find in eschatological passages not connected with the destruction of Jerusalem like 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-55 (as well as Rev. 10:7; 11:15). To be consistent, I must take these descriptions to be talking about the second coming and the rapture or resurrection of the saints. I know that the word *angelos* can mean messenger, but what is the meaning of the verse then and how is it fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem? These were questions which troubled me.

There are more things to be said about the chapter, but I found it very interesting and well researched, and certainly challenging and a discussion which I will certainly return to in the future.

A Pre-Tribulational Rapture?

Chapter 9 is titled "The "Rapture": Pretribulational or Part of the Second Coming?" In this chapter, Dr. Menn deals with the biblical data about the rapture in connection with the tribulation and how dispensationalists have interpreted this. According to dispensationalists, the rapture of the chapter will happen just before the Great Tribulation, which is connected to Daniel's 70th week (Dan. 9:24-27). This Great Tribulation will be 7 years long. Just before the tribulation, the church is raptured away to heaven to be with Christ. After the tribulation, Christ comes back to establish the millennium on earth. Christian eschatology up to the rise of dispensationalism in the 1800's was clear that the church will pass through the tribulation. There have certainly been ideas in the early church about a rebuilt temple and so on, but never the idea that the church will be raptured before the tribulation. The tribulation is, in fact, against the church as the true people of God.

He starts the chapter by looking at the primary passage for the rapture and that is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. He surveys the uses of the word *parousia* in the epistle (1 Thess. 1:9–10; 2:19–20; 3:12–13; 4:15–17; 5:23). After noting the use of some of those passages by dispensationalists to refer them to the rapture (1 Thess. 2:19; 5:23) while the others to the second coming, he observes with the help of William Everett Bell that 'in all the references to Christ's coming in 1 Thessalonians "there is not the slightest hint in the epistle that two separate and distinct comings are to be distinguished. The speaker remains the same, the audience remains the same, the general subject remains the same, and the specific terminology remains the same."' (p. 153).

The next passage is 1 Corinthians 15, which is a passage that amillennialists have championed. In 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection of the saints and the transformation of living saints happens at the coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:23). This is also the point when death is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:54). The scenario given in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 is of our Lord reigning until He destroys all enemies, the last of which is death. Since the death of death takes place at the resurrection of the saints, which is at the second coming, this means that Christ was reigning and destroying His enemies *prior* to Him coming back. This is classic amillennialism and contrary to both historic as well as dispensational premillennialism. I highly recommend "Appendix 7 – 1 Cor 15:20-57: The Resurrection, the Parousia, and the Millennium" as well as the accompanying video. It is one of the best discussions on 1 Corinthians 15.

After that he looks at 2 Thessalonians 1-2. On 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, he observes:

> Even pretribulationists agree that 2 Thess 1:6–10 concerns the posttribulational second coming of Christ. At that time (and not before) Christ will do two things: (1) punish the ungodly who are persecuting Christians (1:6, 8–9); and (2) rescue Christians who are being persecuted and give them rest (1:7, 10). The "rest" or "relief" of 1:7 is contrasted with the "tribulation" or "affliction" of 1:6. This passage is fatal to any view of a pretribulational rapture… (p. 155)

After that he dives into 2 Thessalonians 2 and the issue of the restrainer (2 Thess. 2:6-7) which dispensationalists have identified with the Holy Spirit indwelling the church. Since the restrainer is taken out of the way, dispensationalists argue that means that the church will also be taken away. But this identification is by no means easy to make and it is unique to dispensationalism. Neither does it follow that if the Holy Spirit was the restrainer and He would be taken out of the way, that would mean a pretribulation rapture. He cites leading dispensational theologians who admit that the distinction between Israel and the Church is basis for the pretribulational rapture:

> Leading dispensationalist John Walvoord admits, "It is safe to say that pretribulationism depends on a particular definition of the church." Dispensationalist Charles Ryrie acknowledges that that is the basis for the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture: "The distinction between Israel and the Church leads to the belief that the Church will be taken from the earth before the beginning of the tribulation (which in one major sense concerns Israel)." The reason is that "the guaranteed indwelling presence of the Spirit in believers [i.e., in the church] *will necessitate the removal of the Spirit* when believers are raptured." [from Ryrie] (pp. 157-158)

He furthermore discusses the inconsistency of dispensationalists about the Holy Spirit during the tribulation period (pp. 158-160). During the tribulation many people will come to faith and believe in the Lord Jesus, but they are not part of the church, because the church age is over, and the church has been raptured away. But what is one to call a person who believes in Christ than a Christian and part of the body of Christ—the church?

In the rest of the chapter, he goes on to answer various common objections and the relation between God's wrath and the Christian. If one is familiar with dispensationalism, they will be familiar with various distinction which our dispensational brothers make between the rapture and the second coming. These may also be found in tables as contrasts. For example, Dr. Menn adduces this one (p. 168, ECLEA version p. 90):

Rapture	Second Coming
1. Translation of all believers	1. No translation at all
2. Translated saints go to heaven	2. Translated saints return to earth
3. Earth not judged	3. Earth judged and righteousness established
4. Imminent, any-moment, signless	4. Follows definite predicted signs including tribulation
5. Not in the Old Testament	5. Predicted often in Old Testament
6. Believers only	6. Affects all men
7. Before the day of wrath	7. Concluding the day of wrath
8. No reference to Satan	8. Satan bound
9. Christ comes for His own	9. Christ comes with His own
10. He comes in the air	10. He comes to the earth
11. He claims His bride	11. He comes with His bride
12. Only His own see Him	12. Every eye shall see him
13. Tribulation begins	13. Millennial Kingdom begins

While impressive at first sight, all these points fall to the ground when we remember the oft-played card of dispensationalists where absence of evidence is taken for evidence of absence. I humorous reply to such classifications, is given by William Everett Bell:

> Using [pretribulationists'] own methodology, it would be a simple matter to "prove" that the second advent described in Revelation 19 is not the same second advent described in Revelation 1:7, for example, (although [dispensationalist John] Walvoord and pretribulationsists generally insist that they are the same):
>
> (1) At the second advent in Revelation 19, Satan is bound and cast into the abyss, while at the second advent in Revelation 1:7 Satan is not bound.
>
> (2) At the second advent in 1:7, Christ comes in the clouds, while at the second advent in chapter 19, He does not come in the clouds.
>
> (3) The dead are resurrected at the second advent in chapter 19, but no mention of a resurrection is found in 1:7.
>
> (4) At the second advent in chapter 19, AntiChrist is destroyed, while at the second advent in 1:7, AntiChrist is not destroyed.
>
> (5) The second advent of chapter 19 initiates the millennium, but no mention of any millennium is found in 1:7, thus inferring that amillennialism may be the Biblical teaching here.
>
> This type of argument could be carried on indefinitely from the two passages until dozens of supposed "distinctions" were noted. . . . Such arguments, if expanded slightly, could be used to "prove" three, four, five, or almost any number of future comings of Christ. Such arguments, then, are completely irrelevant to a serious study of the nature and time of the second advent and serve to influence chiefly those who are impressed more with the quantity than the quality of the arguments. (pp. 169-170)

He then goes to deal with the distinction (for dispensationalist also a *separation*) between Christ's coming for His saints and coming with His saints (pp. 170-171). Both will happen at the same time. When Christ comes from heaven with the dead in Christ, He will catch away the living saints (coming for His saints), and then proceed down to the earth (coming with His saints). This is how the word *apantesis* is used in the New Testament and in the ancient world (1 Thess. 4:17; Matt. 25:6; Acts 28:15-16). Dr. Menn cites F. F. Bruce who said: "When a dignitary paid an official visit or *parousia* to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escorting him on the final stage of his journey was called the *apantēsis*." (p. 170)

The Antichrist

The next chapter is titled "The Antichrist" and it is about a fascinating subject. This is especially fascinating in light of the time in which we are living where people are expecting "the mark of the Beast" and the arise of Antichrist everywhere.

Early in the church, with Irenaeus (ca. 130-200) and Hippolytus (ca. 170-236), Christians started to believe that the Antichrist would be a person from the tribe of Dan (p. 176). This is in contrast to the Jewish idea that the enemy of God would be a Gentile. The Christian position was based upon Jeremiah 8:16 and the absence of the tribe of Dan from Revelation 7:4-8. The characteristics of Antichrist from Irenaeus to the early fourth century are summarized by David Aune as: "(1) he is the agent of Satan, (2) he is a deceiver, (3) he performs false signs and wonders, (4) he is extremely evil, (5) he persecutes the people of God, (6) he has excessive pride, and (7) he claims divine honors." (pp. 176-177)

As to the question of whether Antichrist is a person or a personification, Dr. Menn argues that it is a personification since 'the Bible always uses the term "beast" to describe empires, not individuals. The description of the "beast" in Revelation 13 is drawn from Daniel 7, which describes four empires as four different beasts. The fourth beast in Dan 7:7–8, 11–12, 19–25 refers to the Roman Empire, not an individual. Nevertheless, the fourth beast is spoken of in "personal" terms. Consequently, the use of personal pronouns to refer to the "beasts" of Revelation is not determinative of whether Antichrist is a person.' (p. 177)

He begins his biblical survey with the Antichrist texts in John's epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). Antichrist here 'is equated with all false teachers and was actually present in John's day.…."antichrist" appears to be a personification to describe anyone who denies the truth of Christ' (p. 179).

He then briefly takes a look at Daniel's "little horn" and the "despicable person". What we have in the other Antichrist passages, 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13 and 17, are based and built upon Daniel's prophecies. In this respect also, there is an already-not-yet sense of the Man of Sin in 2 Thessalonians 2. Dr. Menn observes:

> Paul also saw an ongoing connection between the first century and the end-time: "*In his time he [the 'man of lawlessness'] will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work*" (2 Thess 2:6–7). Beale discusses this, "The reason Paul uses the word 'mystery' in verse 7 is that he understands the Antichrist prophecy from Daniel as beginning to be fulfilled in the Thessalonian church in an enigmatic manner not clearly foreseen by Daniel. . . . Paul sees that, though this fiend has not yet come so visibly as he will at the final end of history, he is *nevertheless* 'already at work' in the covenant community through his deceivers, the false teachers." (p. 182)

A very helpful table of comparison is provided on pp. 183-184 between Daniel's visions, 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation 13, 19.

When discussing the passages in Revelation, he starts by noting that 'Although many people apply the "beast" imagery to a supposed end-time individual, the Bible always applies beast imagery to empires, forces, and entities that transcend the individual. In addition to the "beasts" of Daniel 7, the OT contains several other references to "beasts" as epitomizing evil empires.' (p. 189, he footnotes Ps 74:13–14; 87:4; 89:10; Isa 27:1; 30:7; 51:9; Jer 51:34; Ezek 29:3; 32:2–3). Certain characteristics of the Beast are certainly based upon first-century Rome, but at the same time, "John's combining Daniel's four beasts into one suggests that the beast transcends any one historical empire." (p. 190)

The beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1-10) mimics Christ is several ways (see p. 191, ECLEA version p. 102). The parallels are fascinating. The beast from the earth (Rev. 13:11-17) is false religion who is later seen to be "the false prophet" (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Dr. Menn observes that 'This beast parallels the "*man of lawlessness*" with respect to satanic influence (Rev 13:11; 2 Thess 2:9), signs (Rev 13:13–15; 2 Thess 2:9), deception (Rev 13:14; 2 Thess 2:10), and worship (Rev 13:12, 15; 2 Thess 2:4).' (p. 192).

Now he moves to discuss the number of the beast which everyone knows that it is 666 (Rev. 13:18). Preterists identify this with Nero and maintain that gematria (the method of substituting numbers for letters) delivers the name Cesar Nero in Hebrew. But gematria doesn't seem to be expected here. He gives the following two reasons:

> First, to attempt a literal calculation of some individual's name is contrary to the symbolic way in which numbers are used in Revelation and other apocalyptic literature. Second, there are many names, both ancient and modern, that come to 666 when subjected to gematria. Even the word "beast," when transliterated into Hebrew, comes to 666. As far back as the second century, Irenaeus recognized the same thing: "It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved." (p. 194)

The number is explained as the number of man generically not a particular man. It symbolizes man's utter fallenness and contrasted with the sevens throughout the book, which signify completeness (p. 195).

The Book of Revelation in Biblical Eschatology

Chapter 11 is titled "The Book of Revelation" and it deals with everything related to the named book. It is an excellent discussion of the interpretation and symbolism of the Apocalypse. It is the longest chapter in the book: pp. 199-327! In it, Dr. Menn brings the best scholarship from all sides into clearing up the book of Revelation.

Apocalyptic and symbolic

When we pick up Revelation it is essential to understand what kind of literature we are reading. Because the kind of literature will determine how we are to read it. If it is history, then we read it as a straightforward history. If it is poetry, we will read it as poetry. Revelation is clearly apocalyptic. This is a genre which is "highly visionary and symbolic" (p. 201). This means that Revelation is not to be read as straightforward history. It is very interesting how the dictum to "interpret literally unless told otherwise" is filled on its head with Revelation:

> Revelation as a whole, beginning with Rev 1:1's use of *sēmainō* ("communicate by symbols") and *deichnumi* ("show"), together with the repeated introductory formula "I saw" or similar expressions, denote the fact that the general nature of the book is symbolic, not "literal" or didactic. The use of *sēmainō* in Rev 1:1 is an allusion to Daniel 2:28–29, 45 and means "symbolize." The fact that John states that Revelation is being communicated by symbols (which, in fact, fill the book) has important hermeneutical implications. Beale states that, in light of the explicitly symbolic nature of the book, "the dictum of the popular approach to Revelation—interpret literally unless you are forced to interpret symbolically—should be turned on its head. Instead, . . . the preceding dictum should be reversed to say 'interpret symbolically unless you are forced to interpret literally.' Better put, the reader is to expect that the main means of divine revelation in this book is symbolic." (p. 201)

Beale as also said something like, "because I interpret Revelation 1:1 literally, I must interpret the rest figuratively." Knowing that Revelation is apocalyptic, we can now endeavor to understand apocalyptic literature in order to understand Revelation rightly. Dr. Menn provides us with some guidelines (pp. 203-205) such as listening to the way symbols are interpreted within the book itself (e.g., Rev. 1:20) and being aware of the Old Testament background. Important to keep in mind the ethical purpose of prophecy. In the words of Menn: "in interpreting Revelation's symbolism we must always bear in mind the moral and ethical purpose behind all prophecy, including apocalyptic: to get God's people to see spiritual reality from God's point of view and then respond to his will and purpose." (p. 204). This is seen in the command to heed what is written at the beginning as well as the end of the book (Rev. 1:3; 22:7).

Structure

The major interpretive approaches are described and critiqued (pp. 207-214). Menn takes the eclectic approach which is: "This approach is consistent with biblical prophecy and apocalyptic in general: prophecies based on specific events result in themes and principles that apply throughout history; the prophets take prophecies relating to one event, time, and place, and rework and apply them to other events, times, and places; specific events often serve as examples or paradigms for later events or principles." (p. 214). This eclectic approach recognizes that Revelation "describes both first-century events and also the consummation of the ages." (p. 214).

The structure of Revelation is complex and there are many outlines (see pp. 221-224). But interestingly, Menn shows that there are many linguistic connections and phrases which are repeated and which tie concepts together (see the table on p. 219, ECLEA version p. 117). As has been said long ago by Augustine, the story is of two cities: the city of man and the city of God. The parallels are impressive when we look to the sections speaking about Babylon the Great and the New Jerusalem:

17:1-3: *"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls . . . came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I will show you' . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit."*	**21:9-10:** *"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls . . . came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I will show you' . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit."*
19:9b-10: *"And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.' Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God.'"*	**22:6-9:** *"And he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true . . . And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.'"*

"Together these two sections form the climax towards which the whole book has aimed: the destruction of Babylon and her replacement by the New Jerusalem." (p. 220, cited from Richard Bauckham).

The structural approach which he takes, which is coupled with the eclectic interpretive approach, is progressive parallelism. This means that he sees

> the book's different sections as being essentially parallel to each other: the same substantive events may be repeated

in different visions (using different imagery) and in different literary units. These parallel sections encompass the entire church age; they overlap both temporally and thematically (i.e., recapitulate each other); and they conclude with the end of the age, the parousia, the judgment, and the new heavens and new earth. Even though they recapitulate each other, the parallel sections show some chronological and thematic progression: i.e., earlier in the book the end is reached, but the end assumes greater focus and becomes more exhaustively described in later parallel accounts. (p. 225)

Such progressive parallelism is shown in events which are described which cannot be constantly repeated (pp. 228-232). He points to

- 'the progressively more intense descriptions of the "earthquake" in Rev 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21 and the cosmic destruction in Rev 6:12-17 and 20:11',
- the "repeated pattern of judgment" in Rev. 14:14-20; 19:1-21; 20:9-22:5,
- the 'repeated references to the "wrath" of God' in Rev. 6:17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15,
- the descriptions of God and Christ missing the familiar "who is to come" in Rev. 11:17; 16:5 (compare Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8),
- the references to the saints singing and rejoicing in heaven in Rev. 11:17; 19:6; 15:3-4,
- repeated references of finality in Rev. 10:7; 15:1; 16:17; 21:6.

Images of the Church

There is an extensive survey of images and symbols used to depict the church in Revelation (pp. 237-261, ECLEA version pp. 126-140). This is in part an answer to the dispensational idea that the church is not found from Revelation 4 until 19 (p. 234). These images and symbols are

1. The "bond-servants" (Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 11:18; 19:5; 22:3, 6)
2. The seven churches (Rev 2:1—3:22)
3. The "saints" (Rev 5:8; 8:3–4; 11:18; 13:6–7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9)
4. Those who have been "purchased . . . from every tribe and tongue and people and nation [who have been made] a kingdom and priests to our God" (Rev 5:9–10)
5. The martyrs (Rev 6:9–11)
6. The "144,000" (Rev 7:4–8; 14:1–5)
7. The "great multitude" (Rev 7:9–17; 19:1, 6)
8. The "temple" and "holy city" (Rev 11:1–2)
9. The "two witnesses" (Rev 11:3–12)
10. The "woman" and "her children" (Rev 12:1–17)
11. The "harvest" (Rev 14:15–16)
12. The victors over the beast (Rev 15:2–4)
13. The "called and chosen and faithful" (Rev 17:14)
14. "My people" (Rev 18:4)
15. The "bride" (Rev 19:7–9; 21:2, 9; 22:17)
16. The "armies" (Rev 19:14)
17. Those sitting on the thrones (Rev 20:4–6)
18. The "camp of the saints and the beloved city" (Rev 20:9)
19. "His people(s)" (Rev 21:3)
20. The "New Jerusalem" (Rev 21:1—22:15)

Therefore, the dispensational idea of the rapture of the church based on the fact that the word "church" does not occur cannot be taken seriously. The whole book is directed to the church. In Revelation 1:11 the Lord Jesus tells John to "Write what you see in a book and send it **to the seven churches**". At the end of the book, in Revelation 22:16 our Lord says again, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things **for the churches**". Not only a few chapters, but the whole book concerns the church.

Revelation 20

After this survey, he moves to consider the major ideas and sections (pp. 262-326). As this review has already been very

long, I will consider his view on Revelation 20 and the reign of the saints. The longer discussion is located in appendix 2 "The Millennium: An Amillennial Synthesis of the Biblical Data" (pp. 367-390).

Revelation 20 is divided in four paragraphs or subsections (p. 303):

1. The binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3)
2. The reign of the saints (Rev. 20:4-6)
3. The final destruction of Satan and his forces (Rev. 20:7-10)
4. The last judgment (Rev. 20:11-15)

(1) We must first of all recognize the use of symbol language to describe the binding of Satan. He is not a dragon who is bound in some physical place with a physical chain. Passages such as Matthew 12:29 (where the same word for *binding* is used) and John 12:31 (where the same word for "cast out" or "threw him" is used) indicate that the binding of Satan occurred at the first coming of Christ. His binding is a limitation on his powers and is connected with what he will do after he is released. He is kept from achieving worldwide persecution and destruction of the church. The binding of Satan is paralleled in Revelation 12:7-12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12 (pp. 305-306, 309).

(2) Premillennialists take that the reign and resurrection of the saints in Revelation 20:4-6 is of a physical kind and for a literal thousand years. Amillennialists, on the other hand, contend that the thousand years is the current time (the church age) until Christ comes back. As to the nature of the resurrection, they 'contend that the "first resurrection" refers to Christians' new life in and union with Christ, Christ's resurrection in which believers spiritually participate, or the Christians' translation to heaven upon their physical death.' (p. 310) I show in my book that the most prominent amillennial interpretation of the nature of the resurrection is the entrance of the believers into heaven (Simon Wartanian, *A Layman's Systematic and Biblical Exposition of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith: Vol.* II [Creative Space KDP, 2021], p. 513, expanded version of this article):

1. The saints' share in the resurrection of Christ (Sam Waldron);
2. Regeneration (Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case For Amillennialism*, pp. 247-249, though he mixes views 2 and 3; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 1063; James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, pp. 458-461);
3. Entering heaven (Herman Hoeksema; Anthony Hoekema, *Bible and The Future*, pp. 232-237; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, pp. 191-192; G. K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, pp. 438-445; Dean Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, pp. 478-482; Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come*, pp. 451-466; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case For Amillennialism*, pp. 242-249; Cornelis Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, pp. 331-336; Robert B. Strimple, "Amillennialism" in *Three Views of the Millennium*; David J. Engelsma; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* pp. 715-716, 726-727; Saekle Greijdanus, *De Openbaring Des Heeren Aan Johannes*, pp. 299-303; Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, pp. IV:660-663, §569; B. B. Warfield; Geerhardus Vos, *Shorter Writings*, pp. 44-45; John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises,* p. III:446).

The parallel with Revelation 6:9 also indicates that the reign is currently happening in heaven. This is also consistent with the promises given to the churches in Revelation 2:26-27 and 3:21. Dr. Menn seems to take a combined view of the first resurrection (see pp. 386-289).

(3) In Revelation 20:7-10 we see a recapitulation of what we've previously seen in Revelation 16:14-16 and 19:17-21 (as well as Rev. 6:12-17). The same final battle is fought. These other passages clearly describe the final judgment and final battle; therefore, the structure of Revelation cannot be chronological but is rather recapitulatory. The connection between these passages is not only seen by the use of the same description for "the war" (*ton polemon*) or the idea of forces being "gathered," but also in their dependence upon Ezekiel 38-39.

(4) Menn contends that "Rev 20:7-10 and 20:11-15 both describe the final judgment, each description has its own emphasis." (p. 314). Earlier in the book, he had discussed how the final judgment can be viewed as a battle or as a courtroom proceeding (pp. 302-303). He cites William Shea who explains the emphases: "The earlier of the two [Rev 20-7-10] emphasizes the destruction of the devil and his agents, perhaps because the whole narrative of Rev 20 began with him as its subject. Then the closing scene which follows places its emphasis upon God as the judge, who presents his final judgment at this time." (p. 314) The description of earth and sky flying away in Revelation 20:11 is a recapitulation of earlier descriptions of the final judgment in Revelation 6:14; 11:13; 16:20). The description of the final judgment occurs at the second coming which sweetly corresponds to Paul's statement that death is destroyed at Christ's coming and the bodily resurrection of the saints in 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54. Revelation 20:14 says that "Death and Hades were thrown into the lake

of fire." He cites Sydney Page who comments that "The symbolic description of the destruction of Death and Hades [at the eschatological judgment] corresponds to Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15:26. . . . For both John and Paul the last scene in the drama of redemption before the inauguration of the eternal state is the elimination of death." (p. 315, both ellipses and brackets are Menn's).

In connection with the last judgment, he notes that dispensationalists see three distinct judgments instead of one final judgment: 'the judgment of the "nations" to see who will enter the millennial kingdom (Matt 25:31–46); a separate judgment of believers before the "judgment seat of Christ" to receive their rewards (2 Cor 5:10); and the "great white throne" judgment of Rev 20:11–15 which they think applies only to unbelievers. Others see Rev 20:11–15 as the general judgment of all people, believers and unbelievers alike.' (p. 315) There may be an emphasis on unbelievers in these particular passages, but "since, as previously discussed, the Bible indicates that there is only one general judgment of all people." (p. 315) Revelation 20:11-15 is an expansion of the previous statement concerning the final judgment of all the dead in Revelation 11:18: "The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." Menn further notes:

> The wording of Rev 20:11–15 (i.e., "*the great and the small*"), when compared with the limitations or qualifications of that phrase when it is used elsewhere in Revelation, leads to the conclusion that all people, believers and unbelievers, are being judged. Thus, in Rev 11:18 and 19:5 *"the small and the great" refers to all believers*, and in Rev 13:16 and 19:18 "*the small and the great*" refers to *all unbelievers*. On the other hand, as David Brown points out, "in the passage before us, the only party to whom 'the small and great' belong—as far as appears—is 'the dead.' Are we not irresistibly led, then, to conclude that the meaning intended is, the dead—universally, or at least indiscriminately?" (p. 316)

In the rest of the chapter, he discusses the rest of Revelation (pp. 317-327).

The Rest of the Book

The last chapter is chapter 12, "The Importance of Eschatology." Funnily, this was the least important chapter for me. In this chapter, he researches the effect of eschatological thought to our actions.

The rest of the book contains 7 appendices! Do not be fooled to think that they are short chapters, in these appendices he deals with some of the most discussed eschatological passages such as Ezekiel 40-48 (app. 3), Daniel 9:24-27 (app. 4), Zachariah 14 (app. 5), Romans 11:25-26 (app. 6), 1 Corinthians 15 (app. 7). There is also an appendix where the four millennial positions are laid out (app. 1) as well as a synthesis of the biblical data according to amillennialism. These appendices are invaluable and contain very helpful information. Appendix one summaries the four eschatological positions in a table! This is very nice when one wants a summary of what a certain position thinks about the rapture or Israel or something else. Among these, my favorite is appendix 7 on 1 Corinthians 15. That passage is a clearly amillennial passage which has been used by every amillennialist. The rest of the appendices discuss controversial prophecies and Dr. Menn brings out the best scholarship on it and tries to give the various available options.

Conclusion

I initially thought that this review would be short, but it became more than a summary, and this is because I loved this book. I do think that it is the best book written on eschatology from an amillennial perspective and this is for several reasons among which are its clarity, scholarship, and comprehensiveness.

While the book is built on solid scholarship, Dr. Menn constantly quotes and references various scholars (the bibliography of 20 pages is evidence of this), the book is nonetheless written for the church. This is seen in the fact that the book is filled with explanatory comments and square brackets within citations. Therefore, the size of the book should not be an indication that it is only written for academia. The size of the book indicates its comprehensiveness and its interactions with opposing views. Dr. Menn deals, I think, with every major biblical prophecy and eschatological issue which is what makes this book comprehensive.

All in all, the only criticisms I had, are the ones I already voiced concerning the structure of the book (putting the discussion of the millennium and millennial positions *after* the discussion the second coming passages). This has its advantages obviously, but it is unusual.

All in all, I highly recommend this book and it is certainly one to which I will often return.