

**CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN
THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM AND THE ETERNAL STATE:
A CASE FOR A TWO-STAGED RESTORATION**

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Introduction

Scripture points to a new heavens and a new earth as the final home of the saints (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21-22). Unfortunately, the eternal state of believers is given little attention in eschatological discussions due to complicated debates regarding the millennium, the tribulation, the second coming, the rapture, and Israel's future. While each of these issues is certainly important as part of God's revealed Word, it is critical that the eternal state be studied with the same degree of enthusiasm and be understood with the same clarity and precision as these other eschatological issues. Perhaps more attention should be given to it because it is the final resting place for God's people and lasts longer than 1,000 years. It is in this spirit that this paper is offered to contribute to the search for clarity regarding the eternal state.

This paper will argue three primary truths regarding the eternal state and suggest a fourth as an option that needs further evaluation. First, it will be argued that the new earth retains continuity with the old earth by being a renovated or regenerated version of the old earth. Second, it will be demonstrated that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the millennial kingdom and the eternal state. Third, it will be demonstrated that the millennial kingdom and the eternal state represent two stages of a phased restoration of the current sin-cursed earth. Fourth, intriguing arguments will be presented, along with potential weaknesses, for placing the destruction of the earth in 2 Peter 3:10-13 prior to the millennium rather than the typical premillennial placement between the millennium and the eternal state.

Prior to continuing with these subjects, two assumptions must be stated up front. This paper assumes the truthfulness of both premillennialism and the future restoration of national Israel. Neither of these will be defended in this paper. While this paper does not seek to make a

case for an intermediate kingdom in the OT prophets, it will be defended where necessary to aid in understanding the eternal state.

Renovation, Not Annihilation

There is significant debate among theologians with respect to the new earth's relationship to the current earth. Will it be a renewed or restored version of the current earth? Or will the current earth be annihilated to be replaced by an entirely new creation? Perhaps the issue could be summarized by asking, is there a relationship of continuity or discontinuity between the current earth and the new earth?

Arguments for Renovation (Continuity)

Exegetical Arguments for Renovation

The three most significant arguments in favor of renovation will be provided.¹ First, the continuity view argues exegetically in three different ways. One, texts like Matthew 19:28, Acts 3:21, Romans 8:19-22, 2 Peter 3:10-13, and Revelation 21:5 appear to teach that the new earth will be a liberation or renovation of the current earth.² Two, there are texts which speak of the

¹ David J. MacLeod, who leans toward the discontinuity view, summarizes these arguments well in "The Seventh 'Last Thing': The New Heaven and the New Earth (Rev. 21:1-8)," *Bib Sac* 157 (Oct-Dec 2000), 441. Many of these arguments are repeated among other authors. For example, reference Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 274-287; Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 510.

² Robert L. Thomas views an argument for continuity on the basis of Revelation 21:5, which states, "Behold, I am making all things new," to be neutralized by the fact that ποιέω (*poieō*, "I am making") is used interchangeably in with κτίζω (*ktizō*, "I am creating") in Matthew 19:4 in reference to a new creation (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 439).

land of Israel being given as an everlasting possession (Gen 48:4).³ Three, there are texts which appear to teach the permanence of the earth (Ecc 1:4).

A Theological Argument for Renovation

The second argument for continuity is theological. If the current earth is utterly destroyed, then God's original purpose for this creation will be ultimately frustrated by sin.⁴ Wayne Grudem finds this argument conclusive when he states, "It is difficult to think that God would entirely annihilate his original creation, thereby seeming to give the devil the last word and scrapping the creation that was originally 'very good' (Gen. 1:31)."⁵

A Soteriological/Anthropological Argument for Renovation

The third argument is what David MacLeod calls a "soteriological or anthropological argument." This argument states that just as there is a relationship between our resurrected bodies and old bodies, so there is a relationship between the current earth and the new earth. Randy Alcorn summarizes this last argument, "Revelation 21:1 says the old Earth will pass away. But when people pass away, they do not cease to exist. As we will be raised to be new people, so the earth will be raised to be a New Earth."⁶

³ Ibid.

⁴ Thomas, a discontinuity advocate, answers the theological argument made by those holding the continuity view by stating, "This does not make a failure of God's purpose for the first creation, but a process that He intended from the beginning in allowing evil to have its day in the first creation before being purged" (Ibid., 440).

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1160.

⁶ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), 90.

Arguments for Annihilation (Discontinuity)

On the discontinuity side, various exegetical arguments are offered for an annihilation of the old earth. First, the Old Testament teaches the temporality of this earth in texts like Psalm 97:5, 102:25-26, and Isaiah 13:13, 34:4, 51:6. Second, the New Testament teaches that this earth will either pass away or be destroyed (Matt 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 16:17, 21:33, Heb 1:10-12, 2 Pet 3:10-12). Third, the immediate context of Revelation seems to allude to the dissolution of the current heaven and earth in Revelation 20:11.

Assessing Arguments for Renovation and Annihilation

An in-depth analysis of every text presented above is warranted, but beyond the scope of this paper. After examining the various texts presented, two texts deserve a bit more detailed assessment, 2 Peter 3:10-12 and Revelation 21:1 (along with 20:11). Both views claim 2 Peter 3:10 as support. Verse 10 states, “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.” Verse 12 states, “Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!” Discontinuity advocates will argue that the strong language of destruction in these verses demands a complete annihilation of the current earth.

In response, continuity advocates make two observations. One, 2 Peter 3:6 makes a reference to the flood destroying the earth, making a parallel with fire destroying the earth. Alcorn states, “The stated reference point for understanding the future destruction of the world is the Flood. The Flood was certainly cataclysmic and devastating. But did it obliterate the world,

making it cease to exist?”⁷ Because the flood destroyed the earth, but the earth remained after the destruction, it can be argued that the same will be true of the coming judgment by fire. No annihilation is demanded by the text. Two, as Robert Culver states, “The words of 2 Peter 3:10 do not in any sense require annihilation.”⁸ There does not seem to be any lexical evidence that demands an entire annihilation, even with the destructive terminology of these verses. As a result of these two observations made by continuity advocates, it is safe to conclude that annihilation is not demanded by this text. Furthermore, the first observation, in combination with other arguments made by continuity advocates from Acts 3:21 and Romans 8:19-22, strongly favor the renovation view of 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Revelation 21:1, in relationship with Revelation 20:11, is a bit more challenging to understand. Revelation 21:1a states, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.” Revelation 20:11 states, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.” Some commentators see the language of Revelation 20:11 and 21:1 as decisively in favor of a discontinuity or annihilation view.⁹ However, in response, ἀπῆλθαν (*apēlthan*, “passed away”) does not mean or demand annihilation. Furthermore, the soteriological/anthropological argument offered in favor of renovation explains how the terminology of 21:1 is compatible with continuity. Regarding 20:11, Robert Mounce offers a plausible explanation when he says that the fleeing of the heaven and earth could refer to the

⁷ Alcorn, *Heaven*, 154.

⁸ Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1954), 184. Appendix 1 in Culver’s book provides an in depth study of 2 Peter 3 as relates to the earth’s destruction by fire and the coming new heavens and new earth.

⁹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 306).

dissolution of the universe, but could also just be a reference to the fear of the corruptible in God's presence.¹⁰ Mounce's latter view seems reasonable in light of the fear created by the Great White Throne Judgment. In fact, Revelation 16:20 speaks of islands and mountains fleeing at God's judgment. Alternatively, one could simply view Revelation 20:11 to mean that the Great White Throne judgment does not physically take place on the earth, but in some different dimension. In conclusion, there is nothing that militates against the renovation view. John Piper has aptly summarized these two texts by saying,

. . . when Revelation 21:1 and 2 Peter 3:10 say that the present earth and heavens will "pass away," it does not have to mean that they go out of existence, but may mean that there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away. We might say, "The caterpillar passes away, and the butterfly emerges." There is a real passing away, and there is a real continuity, a real connection.¹¹

Outside of 2 Peter 3:10-12 and Revelation 21:1, I believe Isaiah 34:4 provides the biggest challenge to the renovation view. The verse states, "And all the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as *one* withers from the fig tree." This verse is certainly an area for further study, but on the surface it appears to refer to the heavens and sky, not the earth. Furthermore, Isaiah 34:4 refers to a time period before the Messianic kingdom.¹²

Out of all support texts for the continuity view, in my opinion, two texts are decisive. The first decisive text is Acts 3:21 where Peter speaks of the restoration of all things (including the nation of Israel) following the second coming of Christ. Certainly restoration does not mean

¹⁰ Robert H. Mounce, rev. ed. *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 375.

¹¹ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1995), 376.

¹² Refer to the final section of this essay called "The Destruction of the Earth before the Millennium" for more discussion on the timing of the earth's destruction.

annihilation.¹³ The second text is Romans 8:19-22 which speaks of creation's liberation in terms of renewal, not in terms of liberation by annihilation. Verses 21 and 22 state, "that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." Creation suffers birth pains, not death pains. The allusion is to something new coming from the presently enslaved creation, not to the annihilation of the present creation. While strong arguments exist in favor of both renovation and annihilation, the more consistent testimony of Scripture is that the current earth will be renovated into the new earth.

Continuity and Discontinuity between the Millennium and the Eternal State

A proper understanding of the millennial kingdom and the eternal state is useful to the theologian for various reasons. Appreciating discontinuities between the two helps in understanding how God will ultimately restore his creation. Furthermore, it assists in properly interpreting prophetic texts.¹⁴ There are obvious points of continuity that can be easily recognized, such as the existence of kings and nations in the new earth (Rev 21:24). The very fact that it is called the "new earth" and not something else also alludes to the fact that the eternal state is earth-like, that is, a physical existence similar to what we experience now. Most commentators are quick to point out that word *καινός* (*kainos*, "new") in Revelation 21:1 emphasizes a qualitative newness rather than a temporal newness, which allows for much

¹³ Matthew 19:28's reference to a "regeneration" at the beginning of the millennium could also be decisive, but a counterargument could be made that this refers to the rebirth of the nation of Israel. Regardless, further study is necessary to determine if this text is decisive or not.

¹⁴ Randy Alcorn's *Heaven*, as excellent a book as it is, exhibits some confusion on the relationship of the millennium to the eternal state as he relates some texts to the eternal state that are talking about the millennial kingdom.

continuity.¹⁵ Additionally, the existence of the “new Jerusalem” also shows continuity between the millennial kingdom and eternal state by using the city name “Jerusalem.” Appreciating continuities helps to solidify an understanding of the eternal state based on revelation about the millennial kingdom. This means that because there is continuity between the millennium and eternal state, the presence of something in the millennial kingdom could implicitly mean that it will be present in a perfected condition in the eternal state (i.e. animals and vegetation). My purpose in this section is not to exhaust all discontinuities or continuities, but simply to make the case that there are similarities and differences between the millennial kingdom and eternal state that help understand how God will renovate the earth and abolish death in his world. Four areas of discontinuity will be discussed in order to lay a foundation for arguing for a staged restoration of the current earth.¹⁶

Discontinuity #1: Oceans in the Millennium and not the New Earth

In identifying the absence of the sea, Revelation 21:1 provides an interesting point of discontinuity between the millennial earth and the new earth. Various reasons for the absence of the sea have been provided. The majority of commentators see the sea as connoting disorder, violence, and unrest (cf. Rev 13:1; 20:13; Isa 57:20; Psa 107:25-28; Eze 28:8).¹⁷ Revelation 13:1 and 17:15 show the waters as symbolic of the unrest of the rebellious nations. Thus, according to

¹⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 729-30. See also Alcorn, *Heaven*, 155-56.

¹⁶ The purpose of the section is not to exhaust all discontinuities or continuities, but simply to make the case that there are similarities and differences between the millennial kingdom and eternal state that help understand how God will renovate the earth and abolish death in his world.

¹⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 440; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 199.

Mounce, the sea represents that which is not in harmony with the character of the new earth.¹⁸ The Old Testament imagery frequently referred to the sea in the Messianic kingdom, thus arguing for a discontinuity between the millennial earth and the new earth (cf. Psa 72:8; Isa 11:11; Eze 47:10-20; 48:28; Zech 9:10; 14:8). This discontinuity is important to our discussion because this means that there is a major topographical change to the earth's surface between the millennium and the eternal state because the oceans as we know them will be removed.¹⁹ As will be demonstrated later, there are intriguing reasons to place the judgment of the earth at the beginning of the millennium, not at the end of it. However, even if one holds to such a view, there is still implicit evidence here in this discontinuity to allow for major surface changes to the earth at the end of the millennium.

Discontinuity #2: The Presence of Birth, Death, and Sin in the Millennium

One critical point of discontinuity between the millennial earth and the eternal state is that birth, death, and sin are present in the former, but not in the latter. That these do not exist in the new earth is evident in Revelation 21:4 which explicitly states “there will no longer be *any* death” (cf. Isa 25:8). Furthermore, there can be no birth in the new earth, because there is no marriage in the resurrection (Luke 20:34-36). Prior to summoning various texts as proof of the presence of sin and death in the Messianic age to come, one text that has been the subject of debate between amillennialists and premillennialists must be discussed in more detail.

¹⁸ Mounce, *Revelation*, 381.

¹⁹ For discussion regarding the lack of the sea and whether or not there will be large bodies of water on the new earth, reference Alcorn, *Heaven*, 273-75.

Isaiah 65:17-25 is one of two explicit references to a new heavens and a new earth in the Old Testament. Verse 17 states, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.” However, verses 20 and 23 are built upon the assumptions that both birth and death will continue into the coming age of renewal. Verse 20 states, “No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed.” Verse 23 states, “They will not labor in vain, or bear *children* for calamity; for they are the offspring of those blessed by the LORD, and their descendants with them.” The basic premillennial view is to see Isaiah 65:17-25 as blending the millennium and eternal state because verses 20 and 23 clearly fall short of the eternal state’s perfection, but far exceed the conditions of the present age. Revelation 20’s millennium and Revelation 21-22’s eternal state are here combined into one text without distinguishing between the two.²⁰

Amillennialists vary amongst themselves between two different interpretations.²¹ First, there are those who see this strictly as a reference to the eternal state, with verse 20 being a colorful way to describe everlasting life. Anthony Hoekema argues that because Isaiah 25:8 predicts a future in which there is no death, then 65:20 must be picturing, in a figurative way,

²⁰ Craig A. Blaising defense of Premillennialism in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*. ed. by Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 202; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1127.

²¹ Regardless of their interpretation, amillennialists recognize the difficulty that this text poses to their view. Hoekema states, “We must admit that this is a difficult text to interpret” (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 202). Waldron states, “Isaiah 65:17-25 is the most problematic of such passages and speaks of the new heaven and new earth in terms that at first glance seem to fall short of perfection” (*The End Times Made Simple: How Could Everyone be so Wrong about Biblical Prophecy* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2003), 236).

that people will live lives of incalculable length.²² Samuel Waldron, a present day amillennialist, states,

We must remember an important principle in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. Old Testament prophecy often predicts God's coming, glorious kingdom by things familiar to the people of God. Even we cannot understand what an earth without death would be like. This was even more true in the Old Testament shadows. Thus, the Prophets spoke of the age to come as the highest possible happiness in the world as we know it. Such happiness is picture by a world where all the greatest sorrows and deepest tragedies of our world are unknown. Thus this passage does not speak of the absence of death. It speaks rather of great longevity and the absence of premature death. The unknown is revealed in terms of the known and the future in terms of the past.²³

In response to this interpretation three observations can be made to expose the shortcomings of this view. First, amillennialists explain away the assumption of death in the defense of their interpretation, but to my knowledge, they do not try to explain away the assumption of birth in these texts. These seem to neglect it. Why? The existence of birth cannot be true in the eternal state if there is no marriage in the resurrection (cf. Luke 20:34-36). Furthermore, Isaiah 65:20 more accurately teaches the absence of infant death and the rarity of premature death in youth and adults, not the complete absence of all death. Second, it seems strange that Isaiah 65:17-25 would communicate incalculable length of life with assumptions of death and birth. This only confuses the issue leading to a lack of clarity. Isaiah was not lacking for ways to intelligibly and clearly communicate the absence of death because Isaiah 25:8 says, "He will swallow up death for all time."

Third, this interpretation is more driven by a theological system than by exegesis. For example, Waldron, based on an examination of select passages concludes (prematurely in my

²² Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 202. See also Robert Strimple's amillennial response to premillennialism in *Three Views*, 266.

²³ Waldron, *End Times*, 238.

opinion) that the future kingdom is sinless and perfected. Therefore, by his own admission, his *a-priori* conclusion is that texts like Isaiah 65:17-25 cannot refer to an intermediate millennial kingdom.²⁴ Thus, Waldron's approach to Isaiah 65:17-25 is clouded by his exegesis of other texts leading him to miss the intended meaning, rather than accurately harmonize it with the other texts.

The second amillennial interpretation sees this as a reference to both the church age and the eternal state. Amillennial commentator E. J. Young believes that Isaiah's prophecy of a new heavens and new earth spans the entire Messianic age, from the first advent, including the second advent, and eternal state. Young states, "In the concept of the prophet, time and eternity, the age of the New Testament and the eternal heaven are not sharply distinguished."²⁵ Interestingly, Young's own comments on verses 20 and 23 support the conclusion that these verses do indeed teach the existence of birth and death in the Messianic age.²⁶ The primary weakness of his view is that he does not relate these verses to any specific period of time during the New Testament church age of the eternal state. If he had tried to do that, he may have discovered the difficulty of his view and become a premillennialist!

²⁴ Ibid. Throughout his book, Waldron argues for a "two-age" eschatological system, "this age" and "the age to come." He says that this is the New Testament's own eschatological system. Of course, Waldron sees "the age to come" to be an age of perfection. However, he fails to recognize that this "two-age" system is not new to the New Testament but is built upon the foundation of the Old Testament. For example, Jer. 30:3's "Behold, days are coming" is a reference to the age to come. In the Old Testament, the age to come is often a blend of the millennium and eternal state. So, perfection does come in the age to come, but as will be argued below, perfection comes in stages separated by 1,000 years. Therefore, at the outset of the age to come, and only at the outset, sin and death do exist.

²⁵ E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 3:514.

²⁶ Ibid., 515-516.

Waldron provides what he considers four conclusive arguments against the premillennial interpretation of Isaiah 65:17-25.²⁷ First, because the phrase “New Heaven and New Earth” appears in reference to the eternal state in passages like 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1, all of Isaiah 65:17-25 must refer to the eternal state. Second, the conditions of Isaiah 65 appear permanent based on vv. 17b-18a which state, “And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create.” Third, Isaiah 65:19’s reference to the absence of crying is applied to the eternal state in Revelation 21:4 which states, “and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” Robert Strimple says that if death existed, then surely tears would exist. However, if Isaiah 65:19 teaches there will be no crying, then 65:20 cannot teach the reality of death.²⁸

Prior to discussing Waldron’s fourth argument, these first three can be addressed by recognizing one simple point. The prophets frequently do not distinguish future events in a chronological fashion, just like was observed above by Young. Waldron and others want to constrain the entire text to the future new earth for the reasons listed above; however, in his discussion of this text, he does not consider the reality of what many commentators and theologians point out. In contrast, commentator John N. Oswalt observes that Isaiah tends to combine several aspects of the kingdom of God that may be chronologically distinct.²⁹

²⁷ Waldron, *End Times*, 237.

²⁸ Strimple’s amillennial response to premillennialism, *Three Views*, 266. See also Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 202.

²⁹ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 656.

Elements of several conceptions have been combined into one, and to try to say that the composite is one thing and not another is to miss the point. Suppose the authors were talking about a coming existence that is absolutely unlike anything we know here. How would he describe it to us? Only in analogous terms that are familiar to us. Thus one cannot sustain the thesis that the picture given is not talking about a completely new world. It is and it is not, by its very composite nature.³⁰

Oswalt would not limit verse 20 to the millennium though. While recognizing the implication of death in verse 20, he says that verse 20 gives a reason why according to v. 19 there will be no crying or mourning. One of the causes of sorrow, untimely death, will be eliminated.³¹ Robert Saucy, speaking of the Old Testament prophecies of a restored Israel and a future Davidic kingdom, also observes that the interim period of Israel's restoration and the final state of perfection are not sharply distinguished.³² According to C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, verse 20 is not a reference to the destruction of death like Isaiah 25:8, but merely a limitation of death's power.³³ They level a severe charge against amillennialists for their use of Old Testament prophecy and state that this text clearly teaches a condition that does not exist in the present earth or heaven and falls short of the eternal state. The existence of both millennial and eternal conditions is because "the Old Testament prophet was not yet able to distinguish from one another the things which the author of the Apocalypse separates into distinct periods."³⁴ Grudem states regarding Isaiah 65:20, "The larger context of this passage may mingle elements of the millennium and the eternal state (cf. vv. 17, 25), but it is the nature of Old Testament prophecy

³⁰ Ibid., 657

³¹ Ibid., 658

³² Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 230.

³³ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah. Commentary on the Old Testament*, electronic ed. trans. by James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 7:623.

³⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 7:624.

not to distinguish among events in the future, just as these prophecies do not distinguish between the first and second comings of Christ.”³⁵ Therefore, Waldron’s first three arguments fail to appreciate the multiple dimensions of Old Testament prophecy.

Waldron’s fourth conclusive argument against the premillennial interpretation is that the perfection of Isaiah 65:25 exceeds that of millennial conditions. Verse 25 states, “The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain.” Waldron states, “Only the eternal state brings the end of all evil and harm in God’s holy mountain.” In response, I think Waldron misses the meaning of this verse. He seems to take the reference to “no evil” and “no harm” to mean the absence of sin. However, the subjects of these actions are animals, not human beings. The reference, in context, is that one reason for the lack of crying in verse 19 is because by renewing the animal kingdom, attacks of reckless, vicious animals on one another and humans will be prevented. This could be applicable to the eternal state, but there is nothing that would prevent it from being millennial. In fact, the renewal of the animal kingdom is a significant point of continuity between the millennium and the eternal state. That Isaiah 65:25 could be millennial is defended on the basis of Isaiah 11:6-8 portrayal of the animal kingdom’s renewal. These verses state,

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den.

³⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1127.

The reason these verses must be millennial is that they too assume the presence of birth by alluding to the presence of boys and the nursing and weaned child. However, these verses also portray a peaceful animal kingdom that according to 11:9 will not hurt or destroy in Yahweh's holy mountain, using similar language to 65:20. Therefore, if 11:6-8 is millennial, then there is nothing to prevent 65:25 from being millennial.³⁶ In my view, Waldron's fourth argument, like the previous three, is not as conclusive as he asserts. In conclusion, the premillennial interpretation of Isaiah 65:17-25 makes better sense of the details of the text.

Now that this primary text of debate has been evaluated and shown to assume the presence of birth and death in an age that is neither the present age nor the eternal state, then this demands a relationship of discontinuity between the millennial earth and the eternal state with respect to birth, death, and sin. Other texts in the Old Testament demonstrate the same discontinuity.

Regarding birth two observations can be made. Speaking of the future restored kingdom of Israel, Zechariah 8:5 speaks of the streets of Jerusalem being filled with playing children. Furthermore, Ezekiel 37:25 speaks of Israel's future kingdom by saying "They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons" This verse implies birth by speaking of their sons and their sons' sons. In the future kingdom, Israel is bearing children and multiplying their seed.

³⁶ Another interesting aspect of Isaiah 65:25 is its reference to dust being the serpent's food. This must be an allusion back to Genesis 3:14 where the serpent was cursed to eat the dust of the ground. Isaiah 65:25 could then teach the ongoing existence of this aspect of the curse. A question for further reflection would be, is this more compatible with a future millennial kingdom or the eternal state? If the amillennialist says this is true of the eternal state, then they must believe that memory of the curse remains in the eternal state. A legitimate question could be raised to the amillennialist. Is the curse fully reversed in the new earth?

Thus, with respect to birth, the relationship between the millennial earth and the new earth is one of discontinuity.

Regarding sin, four texts can be brought forward to show that sin will exist in a future intermediate millennial kingdom. First, Zechariah 14:16-19 speaks of the nations living under the constant threat of punishment for failing to worship Yahweh. Certainly, there is no threat of punishment in the eternal state because there is no sin. However, in the intermediate millennial kingdom, this threat exists because sin exists. Second, Revelation 19:5 says that at the second coming, Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron (cf. Ps. 2:9). A rod of iron would not be necessary where sin did not exist. Third, Revelation 20:7-10 speaks of the rebellion of multitudes following the millennial kingdom, implying the presence of sin in the millennial earth. Finally, Ezekiel's sacrificial system teaches the presence of both death and sin in the future kingdom (i.e. Eze 44:25, 27).

Thus, with respect to sin and death, the relationship between the millennial earth and the new earth is one of discontinuity. The millennium and the eternal state also exhibit a degree of continuity in that in both of them righteousness prevails. However, it is the basic discontinuity with respect to sin and death that is the great hope of believers as both of these all too common elements will be missing in the eternal state.

Discontinuity #3: Jerusalem's Origin, Size, and Temple

The Old Testament prophetic expectation clearly points forward to a glorious future for the city of Jerusalem, starting in Isaiah 2:1-4 and continuing on throughout the prophets. Revelation 21-22 speaks of a new Jerusalem, thus raising the question as to what the relationship is between the millennial Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem. A relationship of discontinuity can be demonstrated by examining the city's origin, size, and temple.

Revelation 21:2 speaks of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven to the new earth. The prophetic picture of Jerusalem is much different than this though. Jeremiah 30:18b states, “the city will be rebuilt on its ruin and the palace will stand on its rightful place.” At the second coming, Zechariah 14:10 says, “. . . Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site . . .” Thus, the millennial Jerusalem is pictured as rising on its site and being rebuilt, while the new Jerusalem is a city already prepared for the saints that comes down out of heaven.

Revelation 21:16 says that the new Jerusalem will be cubic in nature with the length, width, and height all equaling fourteen hundred or fifteen hundred miles.³⁷ Thomas provides a summary of those who have used these dimensions to make comparisons.

. . . Another suggestion has been that a square fourteen hundred miles on each side would extend from Rome to Jerusalem on the west and east, and to the northern and southern boundaries of the Roman Empire . . . another comparison in land area notes that the coverage would equal the combined areas of all the states in the United States except Montana, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, and Hawaii. A further comparison likens the distance to the size of the western United States between the Pacific coast and the Mississippi River . . .³⁸

Jeremiah 31:38-40 predicts a specific expansion of the rebuilt city of Jerusalem during the Messianic rule that has not been fulfilled. However, the new boundaries for the city of Jerusalem show that the millennial Jerusalem will be but a speck on a map compared to the massive size of the new Jerusalem. Furthermore, Ezekiel 40-47 depict a millennial temple with specific dimensions and instructions, however Revelation 21:22 states that the New Jerusalem has no temple because the Father and Son are its temple.

³⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 467.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Therefore, in light of the distinctions between the origin, size, and temple of both the millennial and new Jerusalem, it is safe to conclude that with respect to Jerusalem, a discontinuous relationship between the millennial earth and eternal state exists, meaning the two cities are not identical. This discontinuity also argues for some drastic topographical change to the earth between the millennium and the eternal state, not only to do away with the temple, but also to be able to accommodate the size of the new Jerusalem. From a continuity perspective, the very name “new Jerusalem” implies some sort of continuity with its predecessor. The main point of continuity is functional. Both the millennial Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem will function as their respective kingdom’s center city for the nations (millennial earth – Isa 2:1-4; new earth – Rev 21:26).

Discontinuity #4: The Form of the Kingdom

Another significant point of discontinuity between the millennial earth and the new earth relates to the form of the kingdom of God which is manifested. The millennial earth is clearly under the mediatorial rule of the Messiah (cf. Rev 20:4; Isa 9:6-7, 11:3ff, 42:1-4; Zech 14:9). However, once Christ has abolished death, he will bring an end to his mediatorial kingdom according to 1 Corinthians 15:24 which states, “then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.” Regarding these verses McClain states,

Here also the Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord ends, not by abolition, but by its mergence into the Universal Kingdom of God. Thus it is perpetuated forever, no longer as a separate entity, but in indissoluble union with the original Kingdom of God from which it sprang . . . This does not mean the end of our Lord’s regal activity, but rather that from here onward in the unity of the Godhead He reigns with the Father as the

eternal Son. There are no longer two thrones: one His Messianic throne and the other the Father's throne.³⁹

There is also a point of continuity in that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God continues his reign into the eternal state, not in a mediatorial sense, but within the unity of the Godhead.

A Two-Staged Restoration

It has been observed throughout the conclusions of this paper that the relationship between the millennial earth and the eternal state is one of both continuity and discontinuity. Typically, premillennialists have understood the millennium to be a bridge to or first stage of the eternal kingdom. Alva McClain, an advocate of a renovated, not annihilated earth, states, "The Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord will constitute the glorious consummating era of the first order of things and will serve as the divine bridge between the temporal order and the eternal order."⁴⁰ Similarly, John Walvoord makes a good connection between the millennial earth and the eternal state with respect to the curse when he states,

In the millennial scene, there is a lifting of the curse upon the earth, but not a total deliverance from the world's travail brought in by sin, for in the millennium, it is still possible for a "sinner" to be "accursed" (Isa. 65:20) with resulting physical death. In the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no curse at all and no possibility or need of such divine punishment.⁴¹

In light of this premillennial belief that history is moving toward the eternal state in two steps and not one, more clarity is needed to understand what is restored in each step as God restores all things (Acts 3:21). The restoration of all things will take place in two stages.

³⁹ McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 513.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Walvoord, *Revelation*, 331.

Stage One

The most essential point of discontinuity is the absence of sin and death in the eternal state. As discussed, sin, death, and birth all occur in the millennium, but not the eternal state. Therefore, in this first stage of restoration, the consequences of sin are not abolished. However, in this first stage, at least four consequences of the fall appear to either be abolished or reversed. First, as already noted, the animal kingdom is liberated from the bondage brought by sin (Isa 11:6-9; Isa 65:25). Second, the curse upon creation in Genesis 3:17-19 is lifted in a variety of ways. Man will not work or struggle in vanity or emptiness (Isa 65:23). Waste places will become fruitful due to an abundance of rain (Joel 2:21-24; Isaiah 30:25, 35:6-7).⁴² The land will increase in productivity and fruitfulness (Isa 32:13-15, 35:1-2).⁴³ The creation will be released from bondage (Rom 8:21). Third, the consequences of sin will begin to be reversed in man himself as infant deaths will be eliminated and premature deaths will be drastically reduced (Isa 65:20).⁴⁴ Old age will be easily attained to by most. Fourth, righteousness will begin to prevail under the righteous rod of iron implemented by King Jesus.

⁴² McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 237.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 237-38.

⁴⁴ That infant deaths will not occur seems to be an allusion to the reversing of the curse upon women in Genesis 3:16. In order to demonstrate the full reversal of the curse, it can be logically concluded (but not exegetically defended) that a period of time is needed where the effect of the fall on child birth is reversed. The amillennialist will never have a period where the effect of the curse on child birth is reversed. In their view, the curse exists up to the second coming when the eternal state commences. Because there are no children being born in the eternal state, the amillennialist must believe that the human race will never know what it is like to give birth without the curse. However, the premillennial view can provide a time when mankind will for the first time experience birth without the consequence of the fall, thus demonstrating Christ's triumph over this specific aspect of the curse.

Stage Two

The purpose of Christ's reign is to conquer his enemies. As 1 Corinthians 15:25 states, "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." 1 Corinthians 15:26 calls death Christ's enemy. It has already been observed that death is a critical point of discontinuity between the millennium and the eternal state. The first stage of creation's restoration saw the animal kingdom liberated, the creation renewed, some consequences of sin reversed, and righteousness established. However, death, the primary consequence of sin in the garden remains in the millennium, though its effects begin to see a reversal in the absence of infant deaths and the drastic reduction of premature deaths. Thus, if God is to completely restore his creation to the Edenic paradise described in Revelation 22:1-2, death must be removed. This is exactly the expectation of Isaiah 25:8, Revelation 21:4, and 1 Corinthians 15:26. All things will be conquered by King Jesus who has laid down his life in order to reconcile all things to himself (Col 1:20), thus the victory of the crucifixion and resurrection guarantees the ultimate abolishment of death. After this, he will subject His kingdom to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-28). Therefore, following Jesus' mediatorial kingdom, the second stage of restoration will be effected and the eternal age will be ushered in where sin and death are absent along with all related suffering, pain, and mourning. Thus, there are two stages to God's restoration of all things.

The Destruction of the Earth before the Millennium

Culver's Arguments for the Timing of 2 Peter 3:10-13

Second Peter 3:10-13 has been discussed already in relationship to the renovation of the earth. It remains to be discussed as to when this renovation takes place. The typical premillennial position is to see this destruction as occurring between the millennium and the eternal state.

Culver, in his book *Daniel and the Latter Days*, provides seven intriguing arguments for placing

this destruction at the beginning of the millennium such that the 1,000 year kingdom takes place on the new earth.⁴⁵ First, the judgment by fire in the Old Testament prophets, similar to Peter's reference to fire judgment, always immediately precedes the Messianic kingdom (cf. Joel 2:30, 31; Mal 3:1-3, 4:1). Second, the disturbances in the heavens, identical with Peter's, in the Old Testament immediately precedes the Messianic kingdom (Hag 2:6, 7; Joel 3:16; Isa 13:13, 51:6). Interestingly, Hebrews 12:26 predicts only one future shaking of the earth and heaven, not two. Third, the New Testament writers discuss a fire judgment prior to the kingdom (cf. 2 Thes 1:7-8; Rev 16:8-9). Fourth, the kingdom takes place on a regenerated earth (cf. Isa 65:17-25). Fifth, the context of 2 Peter 3:10 discusses events that would happen at the second coming (2 Pet 3:9, 10, 14), not in the remote future. Sixth, the kingdom is promised to be perpetual and continuous which demands the destruction precede the kingdom, not follow the 1,000 years (cf. Luke 1:32, 33; Dan 2:44, 7:14, 18). Finally, the exhortation of 2 Peter 3 assumes the possibility that the reader might live to the end of the age to see the events occur. The events do not seem 1,000 years off in the distance.

Assessment of Culver's Position

This position is definitely tempting, especially since Peter says, "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13). This promise can only be a reference to Isaiah 65:17 and 66:19. If Isaiah's prophecies blend the millennium and eternal state, on what basis can we conclude that 2 Peter 3:13 is only a reference to the eternal state and not a reference to both the millennium and the eternal kingdom? It seems Peter would have both in mind in his reference to the new heavens and new earth.

⁴⁵ Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, 179-183.

This position is logically tempting for two reasons. First, if, as I argued, the earth is renovated or restored at the second coming (Acts 3:21) and the curse on the animal kingdom and land is lifted at the second coming, then why destroy the renewed and liberated creation? What purpose remains for judging the earth by fire if it has been released from its bondage? Second, if fire consumes the wicked in the final battle against Christ at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:7-10), which unbelievers or what sinfulness remains to be judged? Peter's reference to the destruction is clearly an act of judgment against sinners (2 Peter 3:7).

With these intriguing arguments stated, Culver's view also has at least three significant challenges. First, if the millennium is on the new earth, then how does one account for the reference to the new earth appearing after the millennium in Revelation 21:1, and the making of all things new in Revelation 21:5? Could this simply refer to topographical changes that occur at the end of the millennium? Second, Revelation 20:11 speaks of heaven and earth fleeing from the presence of Christ, the judge. While it is difficult to be dogmatic or certain at this point, could this imply some sort of judgment upon the earth at the end of the millennium? Third, how does one account for the various topographical changes that happen between the millennium and the eternal state? Recall the discontinuities between the millennium and the eternal state, like the presence of the sea in the millennium and the lack of it in the new earth, or the need for a topographical change to accommodate the new Jerusalem, or the lack of a temple in the new earth. At minimum, any view that places the judgment by fire at the beginning of the millennium would have to allow for some significant changes to the earth following the millennium. Culver recognizes this point and concludes his discussion on the timing of 2 Peter 3:10 by saying, "That there may be further changes at the conclusion of the thousand years, perhaps in connection with the judgment of the great white throne (Rev. 20:7-15) is entirely possible. However, if so, the

Bible seems to be silent about it.”⁴⁶ Culver goes on to say that some of the difficulties of his view are alleviated by proper consideration of the extent of the dissolution of the current heavens and earth and by understanding the nature of the new heavens and new earth.

Conclusion⁴⁷

It has been demonstrated that the new earth is best seen as a renovated current earth, that both continuity and discontinuity exist between the millennial kingdom and the eternal state, and that God’s plan to restore his creation will occur in two stages. Areas for further study include exegetical study of Romans 8:19-22 and Isaiah 34:4 to see if the renovation position holds up to further scrutiny. Isaiah 34:4 would seem to occur at the start of the Messianic kingdom, adding extra support to Culver’s position explained above. Moreover, devoting more study to understanding God’s purposes for his creation is warranted. Other areas of continuity and discontinuity remain unexplored, like God’s relationship to his people. Revelation 22:3 states that we will see God’s face, something entirely foreign to humanity in the rest of Scripture. Also, God will uniquely dwell among his people Revelation 21:3, yet the God-man will be present in the millennium. How would these two truths be harmonized? Contrasting the need for a missionary people like Israel in the millennium, but not in the eternal state would also be a fruitful avenue of exploration.

Additionally, intriguing arguments have been presented for a shift away from the traditional premillennialist understanding of the timing of 2 Peter 3:10. These arguments deserve further study and a detailed exegetical analysis of various verses in 2 Peter 3 is warranted.

⁴⁶ Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, 183.

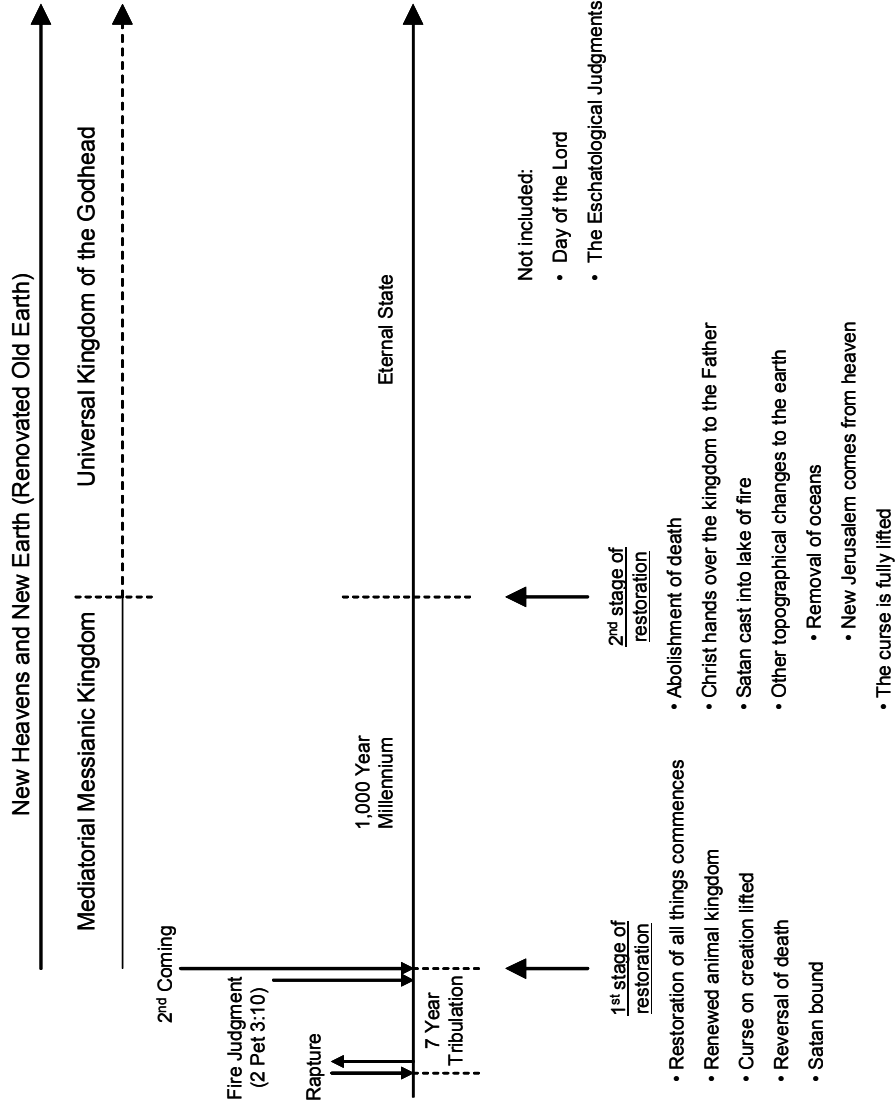
⁴⁷ I attempt to graphically represent the pertinent conclusions of this essay in Appendix A.

Furthermore, it would be helpful to interact with other men of God over Culver's arguments since this would be a shift away from the traditional premillennial understanding.

While many avenues of research still needing to be traveled, this paper has attempted to provide more clarity to our understanding of the eternal state. The more clear our understanding, the more fervent our hope will be. The more fervent our hope is, the more vigorously we will pursue God's purposes now. The saints' final rest will come in due time, but for now, we must labor hard in spreading the gospel (1 Cor 15:58), knowing that one day the church's earthly mission will come to end, and our eternity will commence in our heavenly, but also earthly home.

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Appendix A – A Graphical Representation of This Essay’s Conclusions⁴⁸



⁴⁸ This chart reflects Culver’s position that the earth is judged by fire prior to the millennium, not after it.

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