

The Nature of the Kingdom in Both Testaments

Closing Statement

Tim Warner 12-16-2002

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On Authorities and Sources

Before I get into addressing Dr. Couch's response, I would like to quickly bring to your attention a fundamental difference in the approaches taken by Dr. Couch and myself. In the first rebuttal to my opening argument, Dr. Couch wrote the following.

"Where I will be coming from: I plan to answer Warner by working the context of the biblical passages in question. When appropriate, I will be working the grammar of the Greek text because I believe that context and grammar are keys to good hermeneutics. Some time ago, an amillennial pastor said to me, "All my dispensational friends like you are always 'textual.'" I couldn't ask for a better compliment! However, I will begin by addressing some of Warner's statements that seem to me are a problem."

However, Dr. Couch's arguments have rarely been based on the grammar and context. He rarely gives us his own grammatical and contextual analysis of individual passages. Rather than allowing the weight of his arguments to rest on his own handling of the grammar, context, and historical settings, Couch typically rests the weight of his arguments on commentaries. He first heaps praise on the author as being a great scholar, then he gives a quote where the commentator agrees with Couch's opinion on a given passage. The clear implication is that the reputation of the commentator is enough to carry the weight of his argument. (There are a few exceptions, where Couch attempts to use the grammar to prove his point. But, as I have already, and will continue to demonstrate in this paper, Couch misinterprets the passages he attempts to exegete.)

Of course, the problem with his stacking the deck with big name authorities is that it is entirely subjective. From a logical perspective, he is making a circular argument. There are many commentators who are not inclined towards Couch's dispensationalism, who give very different opinions. Couch simply selects the commentators who happen to agree with him and ignores those who do not. Of course, only those who agree with his points are "great scholars" in Couch's estimation. Also, Couch quotes certain commentators on one passage to help his point, but these same commentators actually refute Couch on other points. I wonder if they are still "great scholars" in these cases? In this paper, I will take some of the commentators that Couch himself cites to support his points, and show that Couch even misinterprets his own sources.

I have tried to argue my points from the grammar, context, historical setting of the passages, prior precedent, and just plain common sense. When I have referenced other works, it has been to illustrate that my view is historical, having precedent in the early Church writers who were influenced by Apostolic oral tradition. And more particularly, I

have tried to show that certain key elements of Couch's view were actually opposed by the early orthodox Church as false doctrine. I have quoted no one in an attempt to rest the weight of my arguments on their name or reputation, as Couch has routinely done.

On Evolving Theology and the Early Church

It seems Couch views modern dispensational scholarship as superior to the theology handed down to the early Church by the Apostles. While the Apostles actually wrote the New Testament documents, handed them down to the next generation, and personally disciplined the next generation of Christians over their lifetimes, they were complete failures in transmitting *"the Faith once delivered to the saints."* Therefore, the testimony of the early Church is rubbish, and represents a thoroughly mixed up theology and eschatology.

But, one must ask, what does today's "scholarship" as a whole represent? Can we not find opposing positions on every topic from A-Z in modern "Christian" scholarship? Sure we can. In fact, a lot of it is apostate to the bone, seeking to deny via "scholarship" all the fundamentals of the Christian Faith!

Couch attempts to characterize ALL early Church writings, from a period of over 500 years, as "confused." Well, of course! You can't even find two Baptists who agree, never mind scores of writers, from Gaul to Persia, from Rome to Africa, over hundreds of years of Church history!

Does Couch have a problem quoting modern writers, despite the mass confusion of "Christian" opinion in modern works, when the majority of "Christian" scholarship is totally apostate? No! He selectively quotes those with which he agrees and ignores the "confusion" of opinion from all the rest.

When one studies the early Church writings as a whole, there is much more unity of opinion among the early Church than there is today among modern scholars. And the farther one goes back in the early Church, until we get to the first century after the Apostles, the more united in theology we find them! But, this is to be expected, since the Church, under the leading of the Apostles, possessed the WHOLE TRUTH of God's revelation to man. False doctrines entered slowly over time and gained a foothold with the passing of time. In Paul's last address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he did not tell them to systematize his teaching to them. He warned them of false teachers who would pervert the Faith. In 2 Tim. 2:2, Paul told Timothy to train other "faithful men" in the things Paul taught to Timothy. And Jude warns us to *"contend for the Faith once delivered to the saints."*

My working premise has been that the Apostles passed on the pure Christian Faith to the next generation. The Apostles were successful in transmitting *"the Faith once delivered to the saints,"* and that overall the earliest Christian writings display the closest adherence to the "Apostles' doctrine." False doctrines can be traced back through Church history to a point in time when they entered the Church. And when they did there is often traceable opposition recorded in the writings of the Church.

Dr. Couch's working premise has been that the Apostles were miserable failures in passing on sound doctrine to the next generation, and the early Church was a flop. The writings of the early Christians, who were discipled by the Apostles and their followers, are hopelessly confused to the point of being useless. Also, the theology passed down by the Apostles was crude, and in need of refinement and being "systematized." This implies that modern dispensational scholars can actually develop a better understanding of the Scriptures than what the Apostles possessed, who wrote them. Never mind that the Apostles were instructed by Jesus Himself! This is why Dr. Couch relies so heavily on modern scholarship and your being impressed by the names of those he cites. Those names are supposed to carry more weight than the names of those taught by the Apostles.

Dr. Couch wrote that he wouldn't be surprised if I believed in baptismal regeneration, implying that this is what the early Church Fathers believed. While that is true of some of them, it is not true of the earliest writers. And no, I do not believe in baptismal regeneration. Contrary to what Couch claims, my theology is derived from the Bible alone. But, it is also much closer to what the early Church taught than Couch's dispensationalism.

You must decide which working premise is correct, and then evaluate both sides' arguments with that in mind.

On Warner's Motives

Dr. Couch made several comments in his response regarding my motives. He wrote that I am trying to "brainwash" and "confuse" you. He says I am using "smoke and mirrors" to deceive you. He claims that my real intent is to "sneak up on you" the reader, and spring a post-trib rapture on you. That would be quite a feat, since in the opening statement of this debate, I made it perfectly clear to all that my eschatology was post-trib, pre-millennial regarding the rapture. It would be pretty difficult for me to sneak up on you after giving you fair warning. My intentions in this debate are to discuss the dispensational issues, not engage in "Warner trickery" as Dr. Couch has charged.

The dispensational issues certainly have ramifications regarding the rapture timing. But the rapture issue has several other eschatological factors to consider beyond the dispensational issues. My intention is to deal with the dispensational foundational issues without getting sidetracked into a rapture debate. I am not the one who keeps bringing up the rapture issue.

It seems to me that Dr. Couch is using the rapture timing and my post-trib stance to scare the reader away from progressive dispensationalism by using your fear of the tribulation as a tool. He is counting on your being driven by fear and feelings. I am counting on your being driven by a search for truth, and that you will put your God-given reasoning powers above your fears. I am counting on your having a Berean attitude, and searching the Scriptures to see if these things are so, regardless of the ramifications regarding the rapture.

I also made it clear in the first round that many progressive dispensationalists are pre-trib. While I admit that progressive dispensationalism seems to fit best with a post-trib rapture, it is possible to be PD and still be pre-trib. In fact, to my knowledge, most PDers are pre-trib.

On "Destinies" and "Inheritance"

In this debate, we have discussed the "destiny" and "inheritance" of Israel and the Church. **These two words have to do with the realization of the promises God has made to us, and not only with location.** For example, the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are exclusively related to the Kingdom. Even Dr. Couch would agree that the Old Testament nowhere speaks of any kind of "heavenly destiny" for Israel or Old Testament saints. There are no promises that Israel will be raptured to heaven. The promises of the resurrection are all related to the coming Kingdom. There are no promises that Israel has any kind of abode or "mansions" in heaven. All agree that the Old Testament saints of Israel are now in heaven in the presence of the Lord awaiting the resurrection. But, heaven is not their "destiny" or "inheritance." Heaven is NOT what was PROMISED to these saints. Rather, their inheritance will be the Kingdom of Messiah. The question is, does the New Testament introduce a "heavenly destiny" concept for the Church? Or, does the New Testament continue to build on the Old Testament promises of a Kingdom inheritance for Christians? My position is that the New Testament does NOT introduce a separate "elect" with a separate "destiny" or "inheritance." The "elect" of the New Testament are the very ones who receive the promises to Israel in the Old Testament, first to the Jews to whom the promises were made, and then expanded to the Gentiles who embrace the New Covenant by faith. The ultimate goal is to bring about Christ's Kingdom on earth at the end of this age.

Continuity vs. Dichotomy

This is where the "continuity" issue comes into the picture. In the first round of this debate, I argued from Scripture that the New Testament Church is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy to Israel. When Moses was given the Law for Israel, God also told him that He would raise up another prophet like Moses, and whoever would not listen to that prophet would be cut off from among the people of Israel. The New Testament portrays "that prophet" as Jesus Christ. Likewise, the "New Covenant" prophesied by Jeremiah, that would replace the "Old Covenant" given through Moses, has come according to several New Testament passages we have already discussed. The Jewish disciples, who made up the core of Jesus' Church, were Jews who received the New Covenant God promised to the nation of Israel. As the believing REMNANT of Israel, they received the promise of the New Covenant, and became Jesus' Church. The Jews who would not listen to "that prophet" were cut off from the covenants and promises to Israel (Acts 3:22-26). Those who received "that prophet" retained the covenants and promises and became the "Church" (Heb. 6:12-19, Heb. 8:6, Heb. 11:13,39-40). Paul said plainly that he was arrested for proclaiming the Gospel which he called the "hope" of the 12 tribes of Israel, that is, what Israel sought based on the prophetic Scriptures (Acts 26:6-7, Acts 28:20). Even the events of the Day of Pentecost were clearly prophesied by Joel. All of these things prove that the birth of Jesus' "Church" is the fulfillment of Old

Testament prophecy given to Israel. In support of the continuity in program between the Old and New Testaments, I have also argued that the "mystery" Paul spoke about was contained in the Old Testament in enigmatic form, and revealed by Christ and the Apostles to the nations for the "obedience of faith." If the Church is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and was the hope of Israel's salvation, then the destiny and inheritance of the Church cannot be severed from the clear "Kingdom" hope of Israel also contained in Old Testament prophecy.

Dr. Couch's position is that Israel was set aside by God, the covenants and promises to Israel in the Old Testament were placed on hold, and that God began a completely different program for the Gentile "Church." His referring to the Church as being a "heavenly" people, is meant to distinguish them from the people of God from the Old Testament and future "tribulation saints." In order to maintain this dichotomy between two separate "elect" or redeemed peoples, Couch must demonstrate a clear distinction between the promises (inheritance / destiny) of these two alleged radically distinct groups of people. The problem Couch faced in the first round of the debate was that the New Testament writers quoted many Old Testament promises as being fulfilled in the Church, thereby violating the alleged dichotomy and demonstrating continuity between the Old and New Testament programs. In the second round, Couch faces a similar problem with all the New Testament references to believers (including Gentiles) inheriting the "Kingdom" prophesied in the Old Testament. (And also his difficulty in producing Scripture, properly interpreted, for his "heavenly destiny" ideas.)

We can also add to the mix another problem, that has yet to be discussed. The alleged dichotomy of traditional dispensationalism demands that God stopped dealing with Israel as a national entity when the "Church" began. And that God cannot deal with the nation of Israel until the Church is removed. Yet, even in his latest reply, Couch senses the problem, and begins to speak of the "beginning of beginnings" of God's dealing NOW with the nation of Israel while the Church is still here! Did God stop dealing with Israel as a national entity over the last 2000 years? Hardly! Some 37 years after Pentecost, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews scattered in fulfillment of Dan. 9:26 as well as Jesus' prophecy in Luke 19:41-44. If the "Church age" began on the Day of Pentecost, and God stopped dealing with Israel as a nation, why is He fulfilling prophecy about Israel during the "Church age?" Couch attempts to skirt the problem by saying that the present regathering of Israel as a nation since 1947 is just "the beginning of the beginning" of God's dealing with the whole nation of Israel. But, this is a huge breach in his dichotomy! It demonstrates that God is NOT observing the boundaries that traditional dispensationalists have erected! Furthermore, Paul informs us in Romans 11 that the present salvation of Gentiles is intended to "provoke them (the Jews) to jealousy." Again, unbelieving Israel is still being dealt with by God at the same time He is dealing with the believing portion of Israel and the Gentiles (the Church). The goal of this dispensation is to bring a large Gentile remnant into the Church along with the initial Jewish remnant, and eventually to bring "all Israel" into the Church by their acceptance of Jesus as Messiah at His second coming. Then, "all Israel" along with the believing remnants of the Gentile nations will inherit the Kingdom of God, and Jesus will sit upon the Throne of David and rule the nations from Jerusalem.

In my opinion, Dr. Couch has failed to prove that the Church is a completely separate "elect" not related to Old Testament prophecy given to Israel. The most obvious and serious failures concern whether the "mystery" was completely unmentioned in Old Testament prophecy, his attempt to show that the Church's destiny is "heavenly" and radically different from the Kingdom promises to Israel in the Old Testament, and his misinterpretation of Eph. 2:11-16, claiming that the "one new man" means separate from Israel's promises and covenants (despite the context which reveals exactly the opposite).

The Mystery

The Bible repeatedly says that the "mystery" was hidden in ages past, and is now revealed. No one questions this fact. Couch takes this to mean that the "Church" or the present age was not prophesied at all in the Old Testament, thereby establishing a dichotomy between Israel (which has many OT prophecies) and the "Church" (which according to Couch has no OT promises). Based on this, he claims that the "Church" must be completely distinct from God's program for Israel.

However, Couch simply continues to base his argument on his unproven presupposition, that "hidden" means not contained at all in the Old Testament. While he cites several commentators who agree that the "mystery" was "hidden" and is now "revealed," with the possible exception of Godet none of them necessarily agree with Couch's definition of "hidden" (not contained at all in Scripture), as opposed to my definition. I define the "mystery" as something contained in the Old Testament in enigmatic form, so it could not be understood until it was "revealed." So, while in Couch's estimation his list of quotes support his conclusion, it is apparent that he is assuming that these writers understood "hidden" and "mystery" in the way that Couch defines the terms. Therefore, Couch is really reading his meaning into (at least some of) his supporting commentaries because of his faulty definition of the word "mystery."

Dr. Couch ridicules my use of Webster's dictionary to show that "mystery" is not a good word for the concept he proposes. Couch says we should stick to Greek lexicons. Couch quotes Thayer as defining "mystery," *"God's plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden but now is revealed."* But, Couch completely overlooks Thayer's primary meaning of the word in the NT. Thayer writes of the word "mystery," *"in the Scriptures, a hidden or secret thing, **not obvious to the understanding.**"* Thayer also points out that in rabbinic writings, *"it denotes the mystic or hidden sense: of an OT saying, Eph. 5:32."* Thayer was not claiming that "mystery" cannot be contained in the Old Testament Scriptures in the form of an enigma. And he adds no support at all to Couch's view.

While Couch finds it necessary to marshal the names of commentators to support his conclusion (some of which do not necessarily support his conclusion), he completely ignores my very detailed exegesis of Rom. 16:25-26. First, I showed why Godet is simply wrong, by comparing other cases where the word "Scriptures" is used without the article. Then I gave two important grammatical reasons why this passage cannot mean what Couch says it means. Yet, Couch has completely ignored the grammatical arguments in

favor of citing more commentators who agree with him, but who also do not address my points from the grammar. He has also chosen to ignore the clear parallel to Romans 1:1-5. Therefore, my argument (that the mystery was contained in the "prophetic Scriptures," and was first revealed by Jesus to His disciples from Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms) still stands unrefuted.

Couch used John Gill's commentary to try to support his definition of "glory" as being heaven. Apparently Couch thinks Gill's opinion must be correct. So, let's take a look at Gill's opinion of Rom. 16:25-26.

*"The apostle calls the Gospel his, not because he was the author of it, or the subject of it; but because he was the minister of it; it was that Gospel which he was sent and qualified to preach, and did preach fully and faithfully, and which he explains by the following clauses: **and the preaching of Jesus Christ: being that Gospel which Jesus Christ himself preached**, for which he was anointed and sent, and which first began to be spoken by him in its power and purity, and in such a manner as it never was before or since: and of which he also is the subject; it treats of his person, offices, righteousness, blood, sacrifice, and salvation; and which when preached aright is done in his name, by his authority, through gifts, grace, and strength received from him, and with a view to his glory: it follows as a further explanation of it, **according to the revelation of the mystery**; by which is meant, *not, as some think, only the calling and conversion of the Gentiles* through the preaching of the Gospel, though what is said of it well agrees with it; see (Ephesians 3:3-5) ; nor merely the mystery of Christ's incarnation and redemption by him; *but the whole Gospel, and all the truths of it, which is often in Scripture called a "mystery".*"*

It seems that John Gill agrees with me and not with Couch. Couch has twice agreed that the Gospel was contained in the Old Testament in enigmatic form. But, he will not accept that the "mystery" kept secret but now revealed in Rom. 16:25-26 refers to the Gospel. Yet, Paul plainly equates the "mystery" with the Gospel in this very passage!

Rom 16:25-26

*25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to **my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ**, according to **the revelation of the mystery** kept secret since the world began*

*26 **but now has been made manifest**, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been **made known to all nations**, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith--***

(NKJ)

The "mystery" here is what has been made known to all nations for obedience to the faith. Is it not the Gospel which has been made known to the nations? Was Paul speaking of "dispensationalism" and Couch's "mystery program" and secret "Church age" being made known to the Gentiles for obedience to the Faith? As I pointed out in my last paper, this passage is clearly meant to restate what Paul wrote in the opening verses to the Roman Epistle.

Rom 1:1-5

*1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, **separated to the gospel of God***

*2 **which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,***

3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,

4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

*5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship **for obedience to the faith among all nations** for His name,*

(NKJ)

In order for Couch's view to be correct, he must disconnect Rom. 16:25-26 from the above passage. He must ignore the Greek grammar. And he must force his presupposition that "mystery" means that no hint of the "Church" or the present age is contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. Yet, that cannot possibly be the case when the New Testament writers frequently quote Old Testament promises to Israel and apply them to the Church. See 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1 for a good example. Not to mention the passages we already dealt with in the first round.

The other verses Couch cites that refer to the "mystery" work just fine with my theology if we assume my definition for the word "mystery" (which I have clearly illustrated from other occurrences as well as Rom. 16). Couch has admitted that "mystery" does mean something not understood in some contexts. But, his insistence that it does not mean this in Rom. 16:25-26 or the other passages he cited is not based on any textual or grammatical evidence, but only on his own dispensational presuppositions. Since Paul clearly wrote that the "mystery" that was not revealed in the past is the Gospel that Jesus Himself preached, Couch cannot rightly claim that other verses that mention the "mystery" being hidden in ages past means the "Church" or the "Church age" is uniquely the "mystery," and the Old Testament Scriptures contain no hint of it. The "mystery" is the Gospel, which was proclaimed to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. It was contained in the Old Testament in enigmatic form. It was taught by Jesus in parables prior to the crucifixion, and it was fully revealed by Jesus to His disciples the day of His resurrection (Luke 24:25-27,32,44-49).

Mark 4:11-12

*11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know **the mystery of the kingdom of God**: but unto them that are without, all these things are done **in parables**:*

12 That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

(KJV)

Matt 13:34-35

*34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude **in parables**; and without a parable spake he not unto them:*

*35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, **I will open my***

mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

(KJV)

Paul is not the only one to speak of the "mystery" hidden since the foundation of the world. Even David prophesied that Jesus would reveal the mystery. In the above passage, Matthew wrote that Jesus' speaking to the crowds in parables, uttering secrets from the foundation of the world, was the fulfillment of Psalm 78:2 (LXX). How is this any different than "*the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began*" (Rom. 16:26)?

Couch writes, "*The MYSTERY is not about the gospel but HOW THE GOSPEL will play out in this DISPENSATION.*" But, Paul says otherwise.

Eph 6:19-20

*19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known **the mystery of the gospel,***

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

(KJV)

Col 1:25-27

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

*26 Even **the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations,** but now is made manifest to his saints:*

*27 To whom God would **make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles;** which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

(KJV)

The last statement above, "*the **riches** of the glory of this mystery*" is Christ in you (Gentiles). Notice, the "mystery" itself is not Christ in the Gentiles. Rather, the RICHES of the mystery among the Gentiles is "Christ in you" (Gentiles). "Riches" is in the nominative case, meaning it is the subject of the verb. "Mystery" is in the genitive case, meaning that the "riches" belong to the "Mystery." In short, Paul was NOT saying that "Christ in you" (Gentiles) is the Mystery. Rather, he was saying that the "riches" or the "bestowed benefit" (of the mystery) to the Gentiles was "Christ in you." In other words, the benefit that the Gentiles receive from the "mystery" is "Christ in you." The "mystery" itself is not "Christ in you."

The bottom line is this: Paul plainly says that the "mystery" is the Gospel. He wrote that it was revealed by "my Gospel" as well as Jesus Christ's own preaching, and carried to the Gentile nations for the obedience of faith. Paul wrote that it was revealed by the prophetic Scriptures. All of these things prove that the "mystery" is not some secret "Church age" or separate body of "elect." It was the whole plan of God to redeem mankind, not only the Jews, but the Gentiles as well. And that all of the redeemed would be joined in one body, "in Christ."

"Glory" & the "Heavenly Destiny"

Couch continues to claim that "glory" means "heaven," in Col. 3:4.

Col 3:4

4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

(NASB)

He writes, *"But even non-dispensationalist Greek scholar A. T. Robertson retains the normal force of the preposition "en" by translating the phrase "in glory," a locative, or location, in heaven!"*

Robertson's entire note on this verse from his "Word Pictures" is as follows.

*"When Christ shall be manifested (otan o cristov fanerwyh). Indefinite temporal clause with otan and the first aorist passive subjunctive of fanerow, "whenever Christ is manifested," a reference to the second coming of Christ as looked for and longed for, but wholly uncertain as to time. See this same verb used of the second coming in #1Jo 3:2. Ye also together with him (kai umeiv sun autw). That is the joy of this blessed hope. He repeats the verb about us fanerwyhsesye (future passive indicative) **and adds en doxh (in glory)**. Not to respond to this high appeal is to be like Bunyan's man with the muck-rake."*

Note that Robertson did not agree with Couch at all, that "en doxh" means "in heaven" or that the preposition "en" is used as a locative or location. He merely translated "en doxh" as "in glory," just as most translations do, without comment.

Couch would have you believe that the preposition "en" (in) means that glory must be a place. But, his claim is easily refuted from both the context as well as other occurrences of "en doxh" in the New Testament, and with many other places where "en" is used with non-tangible nouns. Here are a few examples, from Romans alone: "in power" (Rom. 1:4), "in darkness" (Rom. 2:19), "in the Spirit" (Rom. 2:29), "faith in His blood" (Rom. 3:25), "in circumcision" and "in uncircumcision" (Rom. 4:10), "in grace" (Rom. 5:2), "in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5), "in life" (Rom. 5:17), "in death" (Rom. 5:21), "in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1), "in Isaac" (Rom. 9:7), "in teaching" (Rom. 12:7), "in exhortation," "in simplicity," "in diligence," "in cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:8), "in believing," "in hope," "in the power" (Rom. 15:13), "in the fullness of the blessing" (Rom. 15:29), "in your prayers" (Rom. 15:30), "in joy" (Rom. 15:32), "in Christ" (Rom. 16:11), "in the Lord" (Rom. 16:12). None of these verses refer to a specific location! So, why should "in glory" refer to a location?

In the context of Col. 3:4, Paul was speaking of Christ's being "manifested" or "revealed." The Greek word means to be rendered apparent or shown. It does NOT mean to "arrive." It is used of the second coming (appearing) of Christ in several passages including, 1 Pet. 5:4, 1 John 2:28, & 1 John 3:2. The context is Christ's being made manifest, or shown, or seen. That is, the second coming where Jesus Christ will be

revealed. Paul then says that at the time Christ is made manifest (or seen), we also will be made manifest (or be seen) with Him. The question is, made manifest to whom? It is obvious that Paul was not speaking of a location at all. He was speaking of an event. Christ will be made manifest to the world, and we also will be made manifest with Him **in glory** (a state, not a location).

The Bible makes it plain that Jesus is going to be revealed "in glory." Titus 2:13 calls His coming the "glorious appearing." Does this mean Jesus appears in heaven? No. It is referring to the following:

Matt 16:27

*27 For **the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father** with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.
(KJV)*

Mark 8:38

*38 Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when **he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.**
(KJV)*

II Thess 1:9-10

*9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from **the glory of his power;**
10 **When he shall come to be glorified in his saints,** and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.
(KJV)*

Matt 24:29-31

*29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:
30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and **they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**
31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.
(KJV)*

Also, other occurrences of the words "en doxh" (in glory) do not refer to a location or heaven in particular.

Luke 9:30-31

*30 And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah,
31 **who appeared in glory** and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.
(NKJ)*

1 Cor 15:42-43

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

43 It is sown in dishonor, **it is raised in glory**. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

(NKJ)

If Couch is correct that "en doxh" refers to heaven, then in the above passages, Moses and Elijah appeared "in heaven" while the disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration. Also, at the resurrection, our bodies will be raised "in heaven." Of course, such a conclusion is preposterous. It is obvious in the above verse that "glory" is a condition, and not a place. Paul says that our bodies are sown in "dishonor" (a condition) but are raised "in glory" (a condition). He then restated the same point using different words. It is sown in "weakness" (a condition) and it is raised "in power" (a condition). The preposition "en" (in) is used four times in this verse. Not once referring to a location, because the words it is connected with are nouns of condition and not location.

Couch quotes John Eadie to support his attempt to define "en doxh" as "in heaven." But, Eadie does not indicate that "en doxh" specifically refers to heaven, as Couch's truncated quotation suggests. In fact, he sees these words as a condition also. "**Nor is our appearance in glory with Christ a momentary gleam; it is rather the first burst of unending splendor.**" Even Eadie agrees that "en doxh" is a condition. While Eadie goes on to say that this condition of "glory" continues in an "endless abode in heaven," this is merely his own opinion based on his eschatology, not something gleaned from the context. Claiming to live in "an endless abode in heaven" forever is typical of many a-mill and dispensational writers. But even Couch cannot agree with that, because he has already admitted that the Church has a secondary role in the Millennium on earth. Eadie is not suggesting that "en doxh" itself refers to heaven. According to Eadie, "en doxh" is simply a "burst" of "splendor." It is not a location as Couch insists. And Eadie adds no support to Couch's claim that "en doxh" specifically refers to heaven.

Couch also cites John Gill in support of his unorthodox usage of "in glory" in Col. 3:4. Couch writes, "*The old Baptist Calvinist language scholar John Gill, who was fast becoming a premillennialist, saw this passage as relating to the rapture of the Church. He quotes 1 Thess. 4 and repeats that the saints will appear 'in glory' and be 'where He is.'*" But, once again, Couch is badly misrepresenting his sources! Here is what Gill wrote about this verse.

"then shall ye also appear with him in glory: the dead bodies of the saints will then be raised and united to their souls, which he will bring with him, when he appears; and living saints shall be changed, and be caught up together with the raised ones, into the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so they all shall be with him together, wherever he is, whether in the air, or on earth, or in heaven, and while he is in either; and shall be for ever with him, enjoy communion with him, be made like unto him, and behold his glory: yea, they shall "appear in glory" too; with a glory on their bodies, which will be raised in glory like unto the glorious

body of Christ; and on their souls, being in perfect holiness, having on the wedding garment, or robe of Christ's righteousness, being clothed upon with their house from heaven, and appearing in the shining robes of immortality, incorruption, and glory; having the glory of God upon them in soul and body, and such a glory revealed in them, as the sufferings of this present life, and all the enjoyments of it, are not to be compared with."

It is quite apparent that Couch's very truncated citation of Gill is meant to convince you that John Gill supports Couch's argument that "glory" refers specifically to "heaven" in Col. 3:4. Yet, when we examine the context of what Gill wrote, he was saying precisely the opposite of what Couch is saying, and he actually agrees with my point! Is this merely an oversight on Couch's part? You decide.

Not only does Couch badly misrepresent the Scriptures that contain the word "glory," but he even misrepresents his own sources to make it appear that they agree with him! Couch reads his opinion into Paul's words, and then into John Eadie's, John Gill's, and A. T. Robertson's! Is this the kind of superior exegesis of Scripture that Couch said he would demonstrate in this debate?

It is very likely that Paul's reference to Christ's appearing in glory, and our appearing with Him in glory, was actually based on to the following Psalm, as well as the other New Testament passages I have already listed.

Psalm 102:16

*16 When the LORD shall build up Zion, **he shall appear in his glory.***

Col 3:4

*4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall **ye also appear with him in glory.***

(KJV)

Many Mansions

I have been wondering when Dr. Couch would bring up John 14:1-3. This is the standard "heavenly destiny" passage used by both pretribulationists and amillennialists alike. But, just as Couch misinterprets "glory," using the term in a way completely foreign to biblical precedent, so too does he interpret "My Father's House" in a way foreign to biblical precedent. The Gospels record Jesus' using the expression "My Father's house" two other times. Neither time does Jesus refer to heaven. Traditional dispensationalists and amillennialists ignore these references and invent a definition completely foreign to Scripture.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to do this passage justice. May I refer you to an in-depth article written by me on this topic found at the following address: http://www.geocities.com/lasttrumpet_2000/john14.html

However, let me whet your appetite by quoting a small part of that article showing the other passages where Jesus referred to "My Father's house."

"The words "my Father's house" do not refer to heaven. We cannot arbitrarily assign a meaning to this phrase without biblical precedent. It must be interpreted in the same manner we interpret any other biblical phrase, by looking at other occurrences of this and similar phrases. I can find no precedent in Scripture for supposing "my Father's house" means heaven. In the numerous Old Testament passages which mention the "house of the Lord," the Temple is always in view. This includes the Tabernacle [1 Samuel 1:24], Solomon's Temple [2 Chronicles 2:1, 7:16], as specifically to the Millennial Temple and Kingdom [Isaiah 2:2-4, Joel 3:18]. The biblical writers never referred to heaven as the Lord's house. The "house of the Lord" is always earthly and related to one of the Temples, or the Millennial Temple of Christ, which will be the locus of Christ's Kingdom. Here is one example.

Isa 2:2-4

*2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of **the LORD's house** shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.*

*3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to **the house of the God of Jacob**; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

(KJV)

In the New Testament, occasionally the "Church" is called the Lord's dwelling in a metaphorical sense, Eph. 2:19-22. But, the disciples were not familiar with this metaphorical usage by Paul, and would certainly not understand Jesus' words as a metaphor. They would understand His words in light of their familiarity with the Old Testament usage, and Jesus earlier usage of the phrase "my Father's house."

John 2:15-17

*15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them out of **the Temple**,...*

*16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not **my Father's house** an house of merchandise.*

17 And the disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

(KJV)

Here Jesus unquestionably referred to the Temple in Jerusalem as "my Father's house." Verse 17 shows the disciples associated Jesus' expression with an Old Testament reference to the "house of the Lord," [Psalm 69:9]. Therefore, it is natural they would understand the same expression in John fourteen in the same way.

There is also a textual variant reading in Luke 2:49, which if correct, adds more support. The KJV reads "my Father's business" but most modern versions read "my Father's house."

Luke 2:46,49

*46 After three days they found him in **the temple** courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions....*

*49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in **my Father's house?**"*

(NIV)

The disciples expected the Kingdom of God to be centered in Jerusalem, specifically in the Temple, [see: Isaiah 2:1-5, Psalm 68:29]. In the Olivet Discourse, only two days before, Jesus emphasized their waiting and watching for the coming of His Kingdom, [Matt. 25:31, Luke 21:31]. This was the focus of their hope. Since the disciples were familiar with both the Old Testament usage, and Jesus' previous usage of the phrase "my Father's house," it is virtually certain they understood Jesus to mean He was going to prepare a place in His Kingdom for them, more specifically in the Temple from which Jesus would rule. When He returned they would accompany Him to His Kingdom. "And if I go away, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.""

This article also explains the "many mansions" that were connected to the Temple structure for the priests, giving references from the Old Testament, as well as an eyewitness account of Herod's Temple in Jesus' day by Josephus, describing these many mansions. It also shows from Luke's account of the Upper Room Discourse that Jesus was referring to His Kingdom, and not to heaven. I encourage you to read the entire article.

That Couch can cite commentaries that interpret "My Father's house" as heaven does not prove he is right. It merely shows how deeply Greek mystical thought has penetrated Christian scholarship, both amillennialism and traditional dispensationalism.

One of the key elements of grammatical historical interpretation, which Couch claims to champion, is to interpret passages in their historical setting, in the way the intended audience would have understood them given their historical background and knowledge of Scripture. In this case, the disciples had been to the Temple many times. They had seen the "many mansions" attached to the Temple structure for the priests. And they were familiar with the prophecies of Ezekiel regarding these dwellings in the Millennial Temple during Christ's coming Kingdom. Also, they heard Jesus use the expression "My Father's house" before, in reference to the Temple when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers. And finally, as Jews, they had absolutely no concept of the "heavenly destiny" ideas of amillennialism and traditional dispensationalism, gleaned from Greek mysticism. Therefore, if we are to be consistent with the grammatical historical methodology, we cannot inject a "heavenly abode" concept into this passage unless that is the only possible explanation. But, in the Jewish setting, there is a perfectly natural

explanation that is consistent with what Jesus had just told these same disciples 2 days earlier on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24).

On the Rapture Escalator

Dr. Couch attempted to support his heavenly destiny ideas by implying that the "rapture" itself demands a "heavenly destiny." He spoke of a post-trib rapture as an escalator ride for Christians, being caught up, only to turn around and come back down. However, Couch cannot produce a single passage of Scripture that indicates that raptured believers go to heaven. According to 1 Thess. 4, Jesus will descend **from** heaven with the "dead in Christ," they will be resurrected first, and then the living believers will be "caught up" to meet Jesus and the risen saints "**in the air**." In other words, the union of the living and resurrected believers and Jesus Christ will occur within the atmosphere of this earth. Paul goes on to say "so shall we ever be with the Lord." But where? Paul does not say. He leaves Jesus and the believers "in the air" in this passage.

Dr. Couch must ASSUME that the whole group goes to heaven at this point, but it is certainly not stated or implied by the grammar or context. Couch makes fun of the post-trib rapture as an "escalator." Apparently Couch thinks that the rapture would be completely unnecessary if we were not going to heaven at Christ's coming. But, how then would all believers, who are living all around the world, join Jesus in Israel when He sets up His Kingdom? Would we take a bus to Jerusalem? Paul's point in 1 Thess. 4 is not that we go to heaven, but the manner in which we MEET the Lord and the resurrected saints.

According to the Olivet Discourse, it is the angels who are dispatched to gather together the living believers from the ends of the earth, when Jesus sounds the trumpet. Does Dr Couch wish to make fun of this "gathering" as an "escalator ride" for Jesus' elect?

Matt 24:29-31

*29 **"Immediately after the tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

*31 **"And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

(NKJ)

Interestingly, the same Greek word for "meet" in 1 Thess. 4 is also used in Acts 28:15. In this case, Paul was being brought to Rome to stand trial. When the brethren of Rome heard that Paul was approaching, then went out to a place called the "Three Taverns" to "meet" Paul and escort him into Rome.

When Jesus comes in glory, we also will "appear with Him in glory." We will be caught up to "meet" the Lord in the air, being gathered by the angels from the four points of the compass. And then we will be "manifest" with Him in glory.

As you can see, these passages do NOT require a "heavenly destiny," as Couch implies, or even a temporary pit-stop in heaven. And, IF the rapture is post-trib, there would be a very good reason for the "escalator ride" that Couch attempts to mock.

On Grant Jeffrey's Pseudo-Pseudo-Ephraem

In an attempt to turn the tables on my use of the early Church Fathers, Couch cites Grant Jeffrey's "discovery" of an alleged pre-trib statement in Pseudo-Ephraem. I have two articles on my website about Jeffrey's misrepresentations of the early Church writings. The first one chronicles his claims in his "Apocalypse" book, and illustrates how he selectively quotes excerpts out of context in order to give the false impression that the Church Fathers were pre-trib. You can read this article at the following address: http://www.geocities.com/lasttrumpet_2000/timeline/jeffrey.html

In a second article I have dealt with Jeffrey's claims regarding Pseudo-Ephraem. It can be found at the following address:

http://www.geocities.com/lasttrumpet_2000/timeline/ephraem.html

In short, Jeffrey badly misrepresents Pseudo-Ephraem. The one statement Jeffrey thinks refers to a pre-trib rapture does sound like a pre-trib statement out of context. *"For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."* However, as we read the entire sermon, Pseudo-Ephraem tells us what "taken to the Lord" means, and it is not being taken to heaven. Pseudo-Ephraem was referring to Revelation 12, where the woman (which he saw as the Church) was preserved in the wilderness during the tribulation. He says, *"Then gold and silver and precious clothing or precious stones shall lie along the streets, and also even every type of pearls along the thoroughfares and streets of the cities, but there is not one who may extend the hand and take or desire them, but they consider all things as good as nothing because of the extreme lack and famine of bread, because the earth is not protected by the rains of heaven, and there will be neither dew nor moisture of the air upon the earth. But those who wander through the deserts, **fleeing from the face of the serpent, bend their knees to God, just as lambs to the adders of their mothers, being sustained by the salvation of the Lord, and while wandering in states of desertion, they eat herbs.**"* Pseudo-Ephraem saw the Lord's protecting and sustaining the elect in the wilderness, and nursing them as lambs. So, the elect would be in the presence of the Lord in the wilderness, not in heaven. Here is a side by side comparison of excerpts from Pseudo-Ephraem and Rev. 12. I have color coded key ideas to make comparison easier.

Revelation 12:6,14

6 And the woman **fled into the wilderness**, where she hath **a place prepared of God**, that **they should feed her there** a thousand two hundred and threescore days.
 14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might **fly into the wilderness**, into her place, **where she is nourished** for a time, and times, and half a time, **from the face of the serpent**.

Pseudo-Ephraem

"For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are **taken to the Lord** lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."

"But those who wander **through the deserts, fleeing from the face of the serpent**, bend their knees to God, **just as lambs to the adders of their mothers, being sustained by the salvation of the Lord**, and while wandering in states of desertion, **they eat herbs**."

The phrase "*fleeing from the face of the serpent*" is a dead give-away that our author was referring to Revelation 12. And Rev. 12 certainly is not referring to a pre-trib rapture in anybody's eschatology! Pseudo-Ephraem was most likely referring to this very passage when he wrote that the elect are "*taken to the Lord*" prior to the tribulation (which he saw as 3.5 years), and "*as lambs to the adders of their mothers, being sustained by the salvation of the Lord*."

Couch cites a few excerpts from Pseudo-Ephraem, to give the impression that he thought the rapture was imminent. Couch writes, "*The rapture occurs before the tribulation and is 'imminent.'*" Couch then quotes the following from Pseudo-Ephraem to support the rapture being imminent in Pseudo-Ephraem's sermon. "*We ought to understand thoroughly therefore my brothers what is imminent and overhanging.*" But, Pseudo-Ephraem was not referring to the rapture with that statement, but the appearing of the Antichrist! Here is the statement in context.

*"We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, **what is imminent or overhanging**. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and signs, which have been predicted by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled (consummated), **and there is not other which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom.**"*

In context, Pseudo-Ephraem was comparing current events to Jesus' words in Matthew 24. Jesus mentioned famines, plagues, earthquakes, and wars among the nations. Pseudo-Ephraem said that these were already taking place in his day. He then said that what remained was the appearing of the Antichrist. It is obvious he still had Matt. 24 in view. Right after Jesus' mention of the wars, famines, earthquakes, He spoke of the "abomination of desolation." Pseudo-Ephraem said that this is what was "imminent" or "overhanging," NOT the rapture. Jeffrey has shown the same disregard for context in Pseudo-Ephraem's sermon as he does with Scripture.

Finally, at the end of his sermon, Pseudo-Ephraem clearly placed the resurrection of Christians at the trumpet sound after the tribulation. He writes;

"And when the three and a half years have been completed, the time of the Antichrist, through which he will have seduced the world, after the resurrection of the two prophets, in the hour which the world does not know, and on the day which the enemy of son of perdition does not know, will come the sign of the Son of Man, and coming forward the Lord shall appear with great power and much majesty, with the sign of the wood of salvation going before him, and also even with all the powers of the heavens **with the whole chorus of the saints**, with those who bear the sign of the holy cross upon their shoulders, as the angelic trumpet precedes him, which shall sound and declare: Arise, O sleeping ones, arise, meet Christ, because his hour of judgment has come! Then Christ shall come and the enemy shall be thrown into confusion, and the Lord shall destroy him by the spirit of his mouth. And he shall be bound and shall be plunged into the abyss of everlasting fire alive with his father Satan; and all people, who do his wishes, shall perish with him forever; **but the righteous ones shall inherit everlasting life with the Lord forever and ever.**"

In all fairness to Dr. Couch, I don't think he intentionally misrepresented Pseudo-Ephraem. It is obvious he was relying on the work of Grant Jeffrey, his partner at the Pre-Trib Research Center.

On the Pre-Trib Rapture

Dr. Couch brings several other issues to the table regarding the timing of the rapture. For example, the Church's not being "appointed unto wrath." While I am prepared to address all the rapture issues at length, to do so in this response would make it far too lengthy. I agreed to debate Dr. Couch on the differences between traditional dispensationalism and progressive dispensationalism. I realize that he wants to steer the debate into the rapture timing, probably because he can use my post-trib position, and draw on your fears of the tribulation, to discount progressive dispensationalism. However, let me remind you that many progressive dispensationalists are pre-trib, and have no apparent problem holding to a single people of God while still affirming a pre-trib rapture. Partial rapturists have for many years seen no problem with part of the Church being raptured while some of the Church goes through the tribulation. So, progressive dispensationalism does not demand a post-trib rapture. Nor does 7 years in heaven necessarily indicate that our inheritance or destiny is heaven (any more than the deceased Old Testament saints being in heaven now awaiting the resurrection means that heaven is their inheritance). In order to keep the debate focussed on the dispensational issues, I will refrain from addressing Dr. Couch's points on the rapture timing for now.

Dr. Thomas Ice, executive director of The Pre-Trib Research Center, has accepted my invitation to debate the rapture timing. That should occur early next year, at Dr. Ice's convenience. I encourage you to watch for that debate where we will get into the nuts and bolts of the rapture timing, and tie up any loose ends that Dr. Couch has introduced

into the debate regarding the rapture timing. But I would like to point out one thing by way of observation. Dr. Couch is trying to use an assumed pre-trib rapture to support his version of dispensationalism, particularly the alleged dual destinies. However, dispensationalists base their theory of a pre-trib rapture largely on the assumption of dual destinies, and the alleged dichotomy between God's program for "Israel" and a separate program for the "Church." What that means is we have a circular argument being employed here. They assume a pre-trib rapture to heaven in order to imply separate destinies, and then assume separate destinies to imply a pre-trib rapture. Keep this in mind please as you read the upcoming debate on the rapture timing with Dr. Ice and myself.

On the Church in Heaven in Revelation

Dr Couch makes an appeal to the 24 Elders in heaven, as a reference to the raptured Church. He writes, *"Since the tribulation begins in Revelation 6, who is this great company in heaven singing God's praises? 'Worthy are thou [Christ] to take the book and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain and did purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation' (5:9). Who are these people? Most likely church saints who were raptured just before the tribulation and the WRATH begins, as described in chapter 6."*

But, Couch is not careful with the context. The passage tells us plainly who is singing these words. It is the 24 Elders and the 4 Creatures in a joint chorus. And they are singing in the third person about ANOTHER GROUP who are NOT mentioned as being in heaven. They are NOT singing about themselves. Otherwise, the 4 Creatures are claiming to be redeemed "men from every tribe, etc."

Rev 5:7-10

7 And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

10 "And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

(NASB)

The "saints" are only mentioned in the possessive sense (genitive case). That is, the prayers being offered to God by the 24 elders and 4 creatures are said to BELONG TO the "saints." The saints themselves are not present. Since the 24 elders and 4 creatures are acting on behalf of the saints, offering their prayers to God as incense, it is obvious that the "saints" are not in heaven whose prayers are being offered. If they were, why pray? And even if people in heaven pray, why must someone else offer their prayers for them to the Father?

Revelation 5 continues describing the great multitude in heaven, who join in with the singing of the 24 elders and the 4 creatures. While John tells us this great multitude consists myriads and thousands of angels, there is no mention of the "Church." They are conspicuously missing!

Rev 5:11-12

*11 And I looked, and I heard the voice of **many angels** around the throne and **the living creatures and the elders**; and the number of them was **myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,***

12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

(NASB)

In the book of Revelation, the ONLY people specifically mentioned as being in heaven are the slain martyrs of the tribulation, and the 144,000 in Rev. 14. Couch has to force a meaning on the 24 elders that is not stated or implied in the text in order to find the "Church" in heaven. And, he has to invent a pre-trib rapture in Revelation in order to place them there. There simply is no pre-trib rapture in Revelation - that is, using the grammatical historical method of interpretation. (Of course I am sure Couch can find one if he abandons the grammatical historical method, and spiritualizes John's being caught up in 4:1.) Couch is demonstrating for us more forcing of the text to conform to his presuppositions, and abandonment of the grammatical historical hermeneutical principles.

Are Old Testament Saints "In Christ?"

Dr. Couch has repeatedly tried to separate the saints of Israel from the "the Church" by claiming that the Israel saints who will inherit the Kingdom are not "in Christ." In his opening paper in this second round, Couch writes, "**THE JEWS WHO WILL BE WITH HIM IN THE KINGDOM ARE NEVER DESCRIBED AS THOSE IN CHRIST.**" (all caps his). But, Couch is simply wrong. All saints are now "in Christ," regardless of dispensation.

Eph 1:9-10

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

*10 That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might **gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him**:*

(KJV)

Eph 3:14-15

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

*15 **Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,***

(KJV)

The summing up of all things "in Christ" is no doubt the ultimate goal of redemption. However, in Eph. 3:15, Paul indicates that those in heaven and those on earth are already united in one family in Christ. Who was already in heaven in the first century when Paul wrote this? The Old Testament saints of Israel! Who was on earth? Saints of Israel and the Gentiles who had believed on Jesus Christ. When were those in heaven and earth joined "in Christ" in one family? Paul puts this union in the past, by saying that the whole family in heaven and earth was already (present tense) named after Christ. Part of the mystery concerns the joining of Jew and Gentile in one body, as Dr. Couch claims. But, there is more to the mystery than just Jew and Gentile on earth in this dispensation being joined in Christ. Paul also spoke of the joining together of the *"whole family in heaven and earth."* It is very obvious here that the Old Testament saints in heaven are now "in Christ," and are part of one family of which we are also a part. This is the "Church," named after Christ. In the next round of this debate I intend to develop this theme further, and show that the Church is the entire body of the redeemed, from all nations and dispensations.

Conclusion

Dr. Couch has not produced a single passage of Scripture that indicates the Church's inheritance or destiny is heaven (using the grammatical historical approach to exegesis). He has produced passages that say when a Christian dies his soul goes to heaven. He has produced passages that say our rewards are being stored for us in heaven. But, he has produced nothing showing that our inheritance is something other than (or in addition to) the same Kingdom promised all throughout the Old Testament. In this round, Dr. Couch has repeated some of the verses he used in the first round. However, I showed from those very passages why they do not refer to our inheritance being heaven. Rather than countering my arguments, showing why I am wrong, he instead just repeats them, claiming that *"all solid Bible interpreters can clearly see"* that he is correct.

Couch has conceded that the Church does have an "inheritance" in the Kingdom, but insists on an additional heavenly inheritance. He reduces the "Church" to a secondary role in the Kingdom. Earlier Couch claimed that the Church does not rule in the Kingdom. I have shown with quotes from Revelation that ruling with Christ was promised to the overcomers of the churches.

Dr. Couch has not even attempted to counter the grammatical proof I have presented from Rom. 16:25-26, that the "mystery" was contained in the Old Testament in enigmatic form. He tries to get me to move on to something else to prove my point. But, until he can counter the grammatical proof, his argument stands refuted. Couch repeats other verses that speak of the "mystery," but simply makes a circular argument by once again imposing his presuppositions on Paul, assuming his definition of the word "mystery" (but never proving it). If my definition of "mystery" is assumed, which I have clearly demonstrated from the usage of the word in other contexts (and Couch has actually admitted is valid in Scripture), then Paul's other statements about the mystery work fine in the scenario I have outlined. He has not shown anything from the contexts that refute what I have written. Therefore, Couch has not proven anything by citing the other verses that speak of the "mystery." Couch is still faced with Rom. 16:25-26 which

solidly refutes his position, regardless of the opinions of Godet or any other commentator he wants to cite.

Our inheritance, our destiny, is the realization of the promises God has made TO US. Has God promised us heaven? (Dr. Couch has not come up with a single promise of "heaven" as the inheritance of the Church, using the grammatical historical hermeneutic. Every passage he has put forward to prove his "heavenly destiny" has been forced. That is, he has read his interpretation into the text {eisegesis} rather than deriving the meaning from the text {exegesis}). Or has God promised us the Kingdom of Christ? I have shown several clear **PROMISES** to believers regarding our "inheritance" in the Kingdom. (Matt. 8:11-12, Luke 19:11-26, Acts 14:22, 1 Cor. 15:50, 2 Thess. 1:5, Heb. 12:28, James 2:5, 1 Pet. 1:11, Rev. 2:26-27). Is our inheritance radically different than what was promised by the prophets? Is the "Church" something nowhere mentioned by the prophets? Is the "mystery" something not at all contained in the Prophets? Peter says no to all these questions in the passage below.

1 Pet 1:6-13

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

9 receiving the end of your faith-- the salvation of your souls.

10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come TO YOU,

*11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when **He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.***

*12 To them it was revealed that, **not to themselves, but TO US they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you** through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things which angels desire to look into.*

13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

(NKJ)

Are we, as Christ's Church, a radically separate "elect" from the saints of Hebrews 11? Or is there only one body of the redeemed, from both Israel and the nations? Hebrews 11:39-40 says that Old Testament saints are joined to us. Eph. 3:14-15 says we are "one family" named after Christ. Matt. 8:11-12 puts the Gentile believers sitting down with the Jewish Patriarchs in the Kingdom. Jesus promised His disciples, who are the elders of the Church, that they would sit on thrones in His Kingdom ruling the twelve tribes of Israel. And Jesus promised the "overcomers" in Revelation that they would rule the nations in His Kingdom. Is God orchestrating two parallel independent plans for

segregated redeemed people? Or does the Bible portray a single progressive plan of redemption, to bring both Israel and the Gentiles into His Kingdom? These are the core issues of Progressive Dispensationalism. These are the questions that you must decide based on the consistent use of the grammatical historical (literal) method of interpretation. Traditional dispensationalists have constantly claimed to be "consistent" with the grammatical historical (literal) method of interpretation. Yet, as I hope you can see from this debate, in practice they are anything but "consistent." I agree that the consistent grammatical historical approach (aided by the Holy Spirit) is the ONLY way to arrive at the truth. If so, then the side who is more consistent will be closer to the truth.

Your Brother In Christ, Tim Warner