

The Nature of the Kingdom in Both Testaments

Response to Rebuttal

Mal Couch 12-05-2002

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Tim Warner continues to grind us through “stuff” he put forth in our first round of debate. By continual repetitive noise, he holds out believing he can shoot down what is obvious.

Let’s review:

1. Warner has created his Theology of the Church Fathers. It would not be surprising if he believed in baptismal regeneration and other such doctrines because he is so high on the “mixed up” views of what the Fathers teach.
2. Warner is sneaking up on the readers of this debate. He is a post-tribulationist who is about to spring on us the view that the church goes through the tribulation, and then is raptured upstairs at the end, gets to the other side of the escalator and comes right back down! But he is holding this card in his hand for a later date.
3. Years ago, Dr. Walvoord clearly had Warner and others like him in his sights when he wrote in his “Millennial Kingdom,” “Generally speaking, posttribulationists are content to attack other points of view rather than setting forth their own arguments. Actually the church is never found in any portion of Scripture dealing with the time of the tribulation, and the translation of the church is never mentioned in any passage picturing the return of Christ to set up His millennial kingdom. Posttribulationism is basically built principally upon the identification of the church with tribulation saints, a conclusion which is without substantiation in Scripture.”

Warner is also bashing all believers in Christ who are looking forward to heaven someday. If Warner can say our destiny is almost exclusively the kingdom, and not heaven, he can tie the church tightly together with Israel and try to make a case against biblical dispensationalism. He will then spring his posttribulationism on us, saying, “see the church doesn’t go through the tribulation! Our destiny is only the kingdom!”

What a shame that Warner says that those of you reading this, who have a heavenly hope and destiny, that you have been influenced by Greek thought and Gnosticism! How this must grieve the Lord! Yes, this is what Warner says! Shame on us for being so influenced by the Gnostics and the Greek philosophers!

Notice as I deal with what he wrote last, how he just grinds the same arguments. He will continue to mix apples and oranges, and he will continue to use smoke and mirrors to prove his case.

[**My mistake:** I did say in my last proposition “a nation come[s] forth from Solomon.” That was wrong. I meant to say “From David and Solomon a king would come forth who would rule the nation of Israel.” I stand corrected.]

Kingdom in the Old Testament: Warner criticizes me and says:

Couch implies that since “Church” is not mentioned by name in the Old Testament passages he cites, the Kingdom is not the destiny of the Church! That the Church (by Couch’s definition) is not explicitly mentioned proves nothing at all. This absence can be explained by the fact that Couch’s definition of the Church is incorrect. He is assuming that the Church is something completely distinct from God’s promised dealings with Israel.

I am so glad Warner wrote this. He will prove more and more how bad his hermeneutics really are. **Of course it means something if one cannot find the church in the Old Testament. He blasts my hermeneutics! Does he not know that good “observation” is the KEY to interpretation. IF THE CHURCH IS NOT THERE, IT IS NOT THERE!**

Now watch what Warner will do. He will claim, “Then Couch is being inconsistent because he talks out of both sides of his mouth, saying the church will be in the kingdom! Couch can’t have it both ways.”

Warner himself misses the point. We have said from the beginning the church will ultimately end up in the kingdom. The church is mentioned in the NT as “being” in the kingdom—we have never denied this. The church does have an inheritance and a place in the kingdom, but all the New Testament passages that say so, do not give any details, specifics, or heavy verse treatment. But when one goes to the Old Testament, there are thousands of specific verses and chapters about what the kingdom will be like for Israel! Great detail is the order of the day concerning her return to the land, her blessings, and how the remaining Gentiles from the tribulation will relate to her. The church, the unique body of Christ, is not mentioned in all of the Old Testament passages!

One can easily get the point. The “kingdom” people will be the nation of Israel, restored to her ancient land, with her Messiah reigning. By lack of detail in explanation, we can see that the church has a lesser role.

In a weak moment, Warner agrees with me. He writes

“Most of the specific promises to Israel in the OT, about the coming Kingdom, are limited in scope to that one nation rather than a broad

Panoramic view of Christ's world-wide Kingdom.”

Hello! Is anyone at home? THAT'S WHAT I HAVE BEEN SAYING ALL ALONG! Could it be that Warner is going to finally become biblical and be a biblical dispensationalist rather than a loyal fan of the church Fathers. We could have saved a lot of time debating if Warner had simply come clean at the beginning and remained biblical as I have argued!

More Warner trickery: He writes of me

Couch attempts to show that the Church (by his definition) has no destiny in the Kingdom, based on its alleged absence in the Old Testament passages he cites, is completely negated by his own admission a few pages later. ... One wonders why the Old Testament passages he cites did not mention this church (that he now admits is In the kingdom)!

I did not say the church has no destiny in the kingdom. When we first began I said the church will be in the kingdom. The point is, who are the on-stage people in the kingdom? Who are the most prevalent people who are honored and stand forth as the people of the land? It is not the church, it is Israel! I made that clear. And so does the Bible.

Warner is clearly challenging the Word of God. He needs to ask the Lord “why the church is not mentioned in the OT.” The fact of the matter it is NOT! Warner needs to show us the OT verses that clearly speak of this new body, “those IN Christ,” Jew and Gentile united as ONE now in this dispensation! Where is this in the OT?

Warner writes: “This makes me wonder what Couch will do with the saved prior to Abraham!” **Mercy, give us a break!** I answer what all Bible teachers of all generations have said! More than likely they will join all the saints of all ages to enjoy the kingdom reign of Christ. I believe this as Warner may also. But even Warner cannot find a verse that may prove this. But I nor any other true biblical dispensationalist would deny this. His statement is clearly argumentative. It is not me who is making strange new doctrinal statements. It is Warner.

Warner writes: “To Couch, Israel is now on standby while God does something entirely different with the Church. But in the Kingdom, the Church will be on standby while God does something with Israel for 1000 years.”

Warner again misses the point. The church now is made up of Jew and Gentile. The role of national Israel is not now being carried out, though we are seeing what I call “the beginning of the beginnings.” Just look at the Middle East. The nation of Israel as a people trusting and lifting up their Messiah in His earthly reign is not now happening—but I believe we are coming very close to end-time events. The nation of Israel is “on standby.”

Warner just keeps fishing in a dry hole!

Ephesians makes it clear what biblical dispensationalists have always taught,

“God made the two into one new man, ... reconciling them (Jew and Gentile) both in one body to God through the cross ... through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father” (2:15-18).

Warner uses the term “standby” for Israel as a nation now, not me. It is God who will someday restore the national entity for the Jewish people.

This is not Warner’s standby language:

.If their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their

acceptance by but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15).

.[Someday] how much more shall these who are the natural branches be

grafted into their own olive tree? (v. 24).

.A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles

has come in (v. 25).

Using sound hermeneutics, and collecting all the data about the kingdom, from OT and NT, one must conclude that Israel as a national ethnic people, has the far greater role in the kingdom.

Here it comes again! Warner fish-tailing about the “heavenly destiny” point over and over. He writes, “I have repeatedly challenged Couch to produce these passages that speak of a ‘heavenly destiny’ for the Church. So far, all he has done is given some vague references that have no bearing on the subject”!

[Note: the references are vague to Warner, not to everyone else. Warner comes to the Bible with an agenda. Therefore, he must continually tell us “what a passage DOES NOT MEAN”!]

Warner can only shoot down the verses I give and continues to say, “but they don’t mean what they sound like.”

So let’s do this once more:

**THE HOPE LAID UP FOR YOU IN HEAVEN, OF WHICH YOU
PREVIOUSLY HEAR IN THE WORD OF TRUTH, THE GOSPEL
(COL. 1:4).**

**ABSENT FROM THE BODY, AT HOME WITH THE LORD
(2 COR. 5:8).**

OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN (PHIL. 3:20).

On this Philippians 3:20 passage, Paul goes on and cites a pretribulation rapture truth that all biblical dispensationalists can clearly see. Only those with axes to grind will deny what the passage is saying. And guess what, that's exactly what Warner will probably do, because remember he has AN ULTIMATE AGENDA IN VIEW. HE CAN'T JUST LET THE BIBLE SPEAK FOR ITSELF!

Paul goes on and says:

**“From (heaven) we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ
who will TRANSFORM THE humble body into
conformity with the body of His glory” (v. 21).**

Paul also writes to the Thessalonians:

**“You are our hope ... even you IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR
LORD JESUS AT HIS COMING” (1 THESS. 2:19).**

AND

**“HE MAY ESTABLISH YOUR HEARTS UNBLAMABLE IN
HOLINESS BEFORE OUR GOD AND FATHER AT THE COMING
OF OUR LORD JESUS WITH ALL HIS SAINTS” (3:13).**

The context that all solid Bible interpreters can clearly see is the premillennial rapture of the church, Paul focuses on in chapter 4.

When do the last two verses come about? When Christ comes with His saints. What does Paul say about that?

“Jesus will bring the souls of those who are to be resurrected with Him WHO ARE IN CHRIST at the rapture.” They will receive their new body and then be caught up “to glory” with us joining them with our new body.

**“Even so God will bring with [Jesus] those who have fallen asleep
IN JESUS. ... He will descend from heaven with a shout, ... and the
Dead IN CHRIST [the church dispensation] will rise first. Then
We who are alive shall be CAUGHT UP (arpadzo) in the clouds
TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR” (4:13-17).**

This is Christ’s coming for His own BEFORE THE WRATH OF THE TRIBULATION!

Paul writes:

“We wait for His Son from heaven, ... who is our Deliverer from the WRATH coming” (1:10).

“You brothers are not in darkness that (the day of the Lord) should overcome you like a thief. You are sons of light” (5:1-5).

“God has not set us forth for WRATH but for obtaining deliverance by means of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 9).

The WRATH, the TRIBULATION begins in Revelation 6. As it begins, notice what the Greek text says: ALL men BE BEGGING TO BE SPARED the horrors of the Tribulation. They “are continually saying to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘begin falling (Aor Imper) on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, AND FROM THE WRATH OF THE LAMB, FOR the great day of THEIR wrath CAME (Aor T.); AND WHO can stand [under it]?” (Rev. 6:16-17).

[The church will not be around. This wrath falls on the world. However, there will be those who are saved during the tribulation but they are not “technically” described as church saints. Those who are saved are not said to “be in Christ,” not called “the body of Christ,” etc.

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 notice:

There is another great company in heaven as described in 7:9 who are uncountable “from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

Who are they? Tribulation saints who “are coming out of the great tribulation” who were probably martyred because they “shall never hunger anymore, neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat, and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes” (vs. 16-17).

These are tribulation redeemed, but they are not in the technical sense called CHURCH SAINTS.

What makes the difference between the great company described in chapter 5 and that described in chapter 7? THE BEGINNING OF THE TRIBULATION, THE WRATH in chapter 6!

While a remnant of tribulation saints will be spared, many if not most will perish. The prayers of the tribulation saints in chapter 7 are placed in a censer (8:3) and cast onto the earth with peals of thunder and a terrible earthquake following (v. 5). This is retribution for their martyrdom on earth.

Warner’s Double-Speak:

“Couch is using faulty reasoning in order to maintain his dichotomy between Israel’s “Kingdom destiny” and the Church’s alleged “heavenly destiny. ... His fabricated “Church” is not found in certain OT passages, and then concluding that the Church’s destiny is not Christ’s Kingdom.”

“Most of the specific promises to Israel in the OT, about the coming Kingdom, are limited in scope to that one nation rather than a broad

Panoramic view of Christ's world-wide Kingdom.”

“I also agree that the Kingdom concerns the “age to come” and NOT this present dispensation.”

Those of you reading this do not need to have your glasses checked! You are reading correctly and you can see Warner's own confusion. Because we all do not see the church in the OT, even Warner, this does not mean the church will not participate in the kingdom. **And I have agreed on this point dozens of times. Warner is trying by repetition to brainwash and confuse you the reader! I do not have to conclude the Church's heavenly destiny from the OT, all the passages have already been given on the subject, and, according to Warner then, THE DEBATE IS OVER!**

The point the Bible makes:

THE CHURCH IS RAPTURED PRIOR TO THE COMING WRATH ON EARTH AND THUS HAS A HEAVENLY DESTINY. THE CHURCH RETURNS WITH CHRIST AS HAS A ROLE IN THE KINGDOM, THOUGH SPECIFICITY IS NOT GIVEN AS TO WHAT THEIR ROLE IS. BUT SPECIFICITY OF ISRAEL'S PLACE IN THE KINGDOM FILLS THE OT PROPHETIC WRITINGS.

On John 3:3-7 Warner says that Jesus did not tell this educated Jew Nicodemus to abandon his hope in the coming eschatological kingdom promised to Israel in the prophetic Scriptures. He explained the **ONLY WAY** that he, as a Jew, could realize his inheritance in the kingdom would be to be born again.

Warner adds, “It was not merely being born a Jew (as Couch's view implies).

It was being ‘born again’ of the Spirit, becoming a Messianic believer! This is the ONLY WAY any Jew can have an inheritance in Christ's coming Kingdom, and the ONLY WAY that the Jews to whom those prophecies were made will be resurrected to inherit the land God promised to Abraham (Heb. 9:15, 11:39-40).

This is about the new covenant that will be the dynamic for kingdom salvation. While it is now in operation, it benefits the church. It is the way believers now are saved and “born again.” And it is this work of the Spirit that saves Jews in the eschatological kingdom. **In no place have I said that Jews just get into the kingdom by being a natural Jew. They must be born again!**

This repeated argument of his clearly shows what he is all about. We have long ago passed this point and basically have agreement on it. But Warner clearly has some other agenda in this debate.

SMOKE ALERT! SMOKE ALERT!

Why does Warner work so hard to get rid of our heavenly destiny that takes us into the glory of God and heaven?

BECAUSE HE WANTS TO GET RID OF THE PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE AND REPLACE IT WITH HIS WEAK POSTTRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE!

Again, to do this he must tell you WHAT THE VERSES DO NOT MEAN!

To prove his point, he must overlook CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT. He says the glory of Christ’s Second Coming (Matt. 24:30) is the same as any glory passage Paul may speak of in his epistles. This way, Warner can bypass the rapture and the resurrection of the church, put the church through the tribulation wrath, and shove everything about the church into kingdom passages.

Certainly the Bible speaks of glory in different ways. But Warner is not trained well enough to notice the shifts in CONTEXT. I am not sure he knows what this means. The Bible indeed speaks of heaven, and our being with Christ, as glory.

Warner again has poor hermeneutics and observational skills!

To do his smoke and mirrors he ties Matthew 24:30, which is about the appearance of the King to come to rule, with a clear rapture passage like Titus 2:13. In a weak moment, Warner writes “We can rightly infer from these passages that the saints will continue to share in Christ’s glory no matter where He is.” Of course! But Warner says this to confuse the two comings and also to escape the pretribulational rapture.

Let’s look at the verses AGAIN!

Warner quotes Romans 8:23 that speaks of “the redemption of our body.”

Questions:

When does this redemption or resurrection of the body take place for the church saints?

Answer:

The pretrib rapture/resurrection of “those in Christ.”

GOD BRINGS WITH JESUS

THOSE ASLEEP IN JESUS

THE DEAD IN CHRIST

RAPTURED AND CHURCH RESURRECTED MEET THE LORD

IN THE AIR!

(1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18)

This takes place before the “day of the Lord” (5:1) and the “sudden destruction

falls on them (the lost),” for “God has not destined us to wrath” (v. 9).

DID YOU GET IT? Those “in Christ,” coming “with Jesus,” “asleep in Jesus,” “the dead in Christ.” THIS IS NOT OT KINGDOM LANGUAGE! Hello, Hello, Hello!

THIS IS THE REVEALING OF THE SONS OF GOD Paul speaks of in Romans 8:19).

And again, Warner denies Colossians 3:4, that reads:

“When Christ shall appear, then you also will be revealed with Him, in glory.”

Warner says this is not heaven.

But even non-dispensationalist Greek scholar A. T. Robertson retains the normal force of the preposition “en” by translating the passage “in glory,” a locative, or location, in heaven! What is the CONTEXT of this entire section 3:1-4?

Answer:

On “If then you have been raised up with Christ” is a first class condition in Greek, meaning that being risen with Christ is fact. “SINCE YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED” keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (v. 1). IN HEAVEN, THAT IS!

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

Thessalonians 4 and repeats that the saints will appear “IN GLORY” and be “where He is.”

The outstanding Greek scholar John Eadie says about the entire CONTEXT of Colossians 3:1-4:

The passage speaks of a “union to be realized yet more vividly when He

shall bid them ‘come up hither;’ therefore should their desires stretch

away UPWARD AND ONWARD TOWARDS Him and the scene He occupies ‘on the right hand of the glorious majesty.’”

“Our life hidden with Him “is so hidden with Him shall also appear with

Him in glory.”

“We too shall appear with Him in glory.”

“Ye, too, shall appear with Him,” and that—‘en doxa.”

“Nor is our appearance in glory with Christ a momentary gleam;

it is rather the first burst of unending splendour. ... final freedom

from the sins and sorrows of earth; perfect holiness beyond the

possibility of loss, with unmingled felicity beyond the reach of forfeit;

AN ENDLESS ABODE IN HEAVEN.”

--Eadie

NOTICE: As a biblical dispensationalist I don't have to tell you the reader what these verses DO NOT MEAN! Honest interpreters can see the CONTEXT and get the point! WATCH WARNER! HE WILL AGAIN TELL YOU WHAT THE PASSAGES DO NOT MEAN! [Walvoord predicted fifty years ago that a posttribulationist like Warner would do that!]

Remember, Warner did not like the fact that my dear uneducated Grandmother read these verses and got the point, along with very educated Greek scholars like Robertson, Gill, and Eadie. Despite what Warner thinks with his new theories, the Church has a “heavenly destiny.”

A PASSAGE THAT HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME ON THE “HEAVENLY DESTINY” OF BELIEVERS is John 14:1-4. Jesus says

.In My Father’s house.

.I go to prepare a place for you.

.I will come again and receive you unto Myself.

.Where I am you may be also.

Some who want to avoid the “heavenly destiny” of the church try to tell us Christ is referring to the temple when He speaks of “My Father’s house.” Some will do anything to avoid the obvious. They have limited observational skills and wish to impose a meaning on the text that is not there. No commentator would hold any other view than the one that recognizes this as heaven.

BUT RECALL WHY WARNER WANTS TO REFUTE such a heavenly destiny. He sees the rapture taking place AFTER the church has passed through the wrath of God, and snatching the body of Christ into the heavens and instantly returning the believers to earth—like riding an escalator. Quite silly, is it not?

WE’VE ARRIVED!

Warner says that my Achilles’ heel is my view of the “Mystery program” that I say is totally absent from the OT.

Warner adds that in his Church Father theology, his posttribulationism, and his progressive dispensationalism, the word “mystery” implies something enigmatic, but contained in the OT Scriptures in cryptic language, with the meaning withheld until Christ revealed it to His disciples.

I agree that in CERTAIN CONTEXTS the word mysterion may mean that, but the issue is not about the word mysterion per se but about how it is used in the CONTEXT to describe the nature of the church, as it now is in this present dispensation.

Warner then goes to his Webster’s dictionary to show the definition of “mystery.” He thinks Webster’s will add to his argument. But it does not. Thanks to Warner we can see what Webster says: “Something not understood, beyond understanding.” “Profound, inexplicable, or secretive quality or character.”

Warner tries to say that by definition, a mystery is something that has been written but just not understood. While this may be in some contexts, this is not Paul's point as he uses the word, in relation to **THE MYSTERY OF THIS DISPENSATION!** Too, the issue is not simply about the revelation of the gospel. The gospel was seen in the OT, i.e., that the Messiah would die for sins (Isa. 53). But again, Warner does not get the point!

The **MYSTERY** is not about the gospel but **HOW THE GOSPEL** will play out in this **DISPENSATION**, and this Dispensation is not the Kingdom!

Before going on, let's go to Greek lexicons for our definition of *mysterion*, and **NOT SIMPLY TO WEBSTER'S** dictionary!

BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONALISTS hold that the greater mystery is that the Gentiles can now receive salvation, and that they will be joined in this new entity, the body of Christ, the Church!

1. This is what Arndt & Gingrich take note of. They sound like biblical dispensationalists, and they refer to the verses we point to: "God's secret or mystery (Col. 2:2), hidden ages ago (1:26), but now gloriously revealed **AMONG THE GENTILES** (v. 27) to whom the secret of Christ, i.e., his relevance **FOR THEM IS PROCLAIMED** (4:3)."

2. Balz & Schneider (the EDNT lexicon) write: "The fully developed plan of

Revelation which was once hidden but now has been revealed, is made known in the **DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE TWO AGES (LAW & GRACE)**.

In Col. 1:26 the "mystery" stands in the **CONTEXT** of the whole saving activity of God directed toward the entire world, 'hidden for eons and generations,' the plan of salvation, but now revealed to Christians."

3. Thayer: "God's plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden but now is revealed."

4. **THE ULTIMATE:** Colin Brown's "The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology," Vol. 3:

"By his office the apostle Paul 'fulfills' (Col. 1:36) 'the mystery of Christ' (4:3), ... summed up as 'Christ in you,' i.e. the world-wide church with Christ as its head. This was concealed from earlier generations (1:26)."

“In Ephesians, too the mystery of Christ is essentially the fact that through Christ the Gentiles have been given access to the Father of all creation (Eph. 3:15; cf. 2:18). They are members of the world-wide church of Jew and Gentile, described in 2:20-on as a building whose head or corner-stone is the pivot of all creation. This was God’s will before time began (3:9; cf. 1:9) and was all part of his great purpose (3:6). It was kept secret from men in the past, but now, since the time is fulfilled (1:10), God has made known his will.”

Is COLIN BROWN A BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONALIST? He and the other men quoted above say what true, solid, and consistent biblical dispensationalists say.

NOTICE FOR THE SECOND TIME THAT COLIN BROWN SAYS THE ACCESS OF THE GENTILES IS “TO THE FATHER” AND NOT to the commonwealth of Israel, as Warner says.

While it is true that there are occasions when “mystery” can mean something simply not clarified, that is not what we are dealing with when we speak of the mystery of the church.

Let’s let Paul speak for himself in Ephesians and Colossians:

You heard of the DISPENSATION of GOD’S GRACE

Given to ME

That by REVELATION there was made known TO ME

A MYSTERY, as I wrote in brief,

WHILE REFERRING TO THIS ... you can understand my insight

INTO THE MYSTERY OF CHSIT

WHICH IN OTHER GENERATIONS WAS “NOT MADE KNOWN”

**To the Sons of men , AS IT NOW HAS BEEN REVEALED
TO HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND PROPHETS IN THE SPIRIT**

That is,

**THAT THE GENTILES ARE FELLOW HEIRS AND FELLOW
MEMBERS OF THE BODY [OF CHRIST, NOT ISRAEL]**

TO PREACH TO THE GENTILES THE RICHES OF CHRIST

**And to bring to light what is the DISPENSATION of the MYSTERY
Which for ages has been hidden in Christ. (Eph. 3:1-9)**

What does Paul say in Colossians 1:24-29?

**“I was made a minister ACCORDING TO THE DISPENSATION from
God, ...**

That is, the mystery which has been HIDDEN FROM THE PAST

AGES and Generations; but HAS NOW BEEN MANIFESTED

TO His saints.

Christ made know the glory of this MYSTERY among the GENTILES,

Which is CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY.

Warner loves to try to prove his point, by referring to Romans 16:25-26, that the mystery of the gospel was simply hidden, that it was there all the time in the OT prophets and writings. Warner says it was just hidden as a mystery but now it is revealed. While it is true that the essence of the gospel was in the Old Testament, we come back and ask, “but what about the gospel is Paul trying to get over to us?”

Much is said in the OT about the death of the Messiah. The mystery is not about the gospel per se but about the larger fact that both Jew and Gentile would be in the same spiritual body, “in Christ,” and that the gospel would go to the Gentiles. While not stated in the Ephesian and Colossian contexts, one can see a postponement of the earthly Messianic kingdom and the fact that we are now in the church age.

This church age, Jew and Gentile being in the same body, was absolutely not in the OT. Paul’s point is not simply about the gospel, in what he says in these passages. As Paul uses gospel here he has a broader view. He is talking not about its essence but its reach, its nature as placing Jew and Gentile into the “body of Christ.” **This idea was totally foreign to the OT!** The verses in Romans 16:25-26 read:

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 which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made know to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.

Notice that Paul refers to the “preaching of Jesus Christ ACCORDING TO THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY given to him”, not simply the preaching of the gospel!

Warner goes to Romans 16:25-26 in an effort to show that the gospel was there in the OT but now had to be specially revealed because the early church could not see it. Warner misses the point, but the great Greek scholar Godet seems to understand the dynamics in the passage with compelling logic. He writes:

“The apostle is alluding to the use made of the writings of the prophets in apostolic preaching. He has just said the mystery had been kept secret up to the present time. But though these writings were a means of demonstration, they were not a means of making known, and yet this is what

is expressed by the participle ‘being revealed.’ And, besides, why in this case reject the article which was necessary to designate these prophetic books as “well-known” writings; why say: ‘by writings’ ... and not: ‘by the writings of the prophets?’ ... These writings mentioned here in chapter 16 are represented as the means of propagating a new revelation, and should consequently designate new prophetic writings. I think that the only explanation of this term in harmony with the apostle’s thought is got from the passage which we gave already quoted, Eph. 3:3-6: ‘For God by revelation made known unto me the mystery, “as I wrote before in few words, whereby when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets, by the Spirit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise IN CHRIST BY THE GOSPEL.’”

It is absolutely unbelievable that an older scholar like Godet (1812-1900) would see what later biblical dispensationalists would see! **Godet ends up quoting and focusing on the very passages that true biblical dispensationalists focus on.**

Godet makes sense and points out how Romans 16:25-26 work with Ephesians 3 and Colossians 1, and does not contradict what they are saying. Please, Warner, go to some other passages to attempt to get across your point!

Finally, you the reader can see that I generally only quote biblical scholars, and avoid quoting the church Fathers who are susceptible to contradictory ideas. But I am going to make an exception because of false accusations that the pretribulational rapture was unknown in earlier times. This is not true. And to show this I wish to quote from Ephraem the Syrian who wrote possibly around 373 AD.

[He is quoted in an article by Grant Jeffrey in *When the Trumpet Sounds* (Harvest House, 1995). A translation from his work has only recently published, having been translated from the Latin. Four Latin manuscripts ascribe this work to St. Ephraem or to St. Isidore (the Parisinus, the Augiensis, the Barberini, and the St. Gallen manuscript). In 1890 C. P. Caspari wrote a German commentary on this Latin manuscript.]

Here is a summary of what we have in Ephraem's treatise

1. The rapture comes first, followed by the Great tribulation and the coming of the Antichrist's rule, followed by the second coming of Christ to reign on the earth with His saints and to defeat Antichrist.
2. The rapture occurs before the tribulation and is "imminent." "We ought to understand thoroughly therefore my brothers what is imminent or overhanging."
3. "Because all the saints and the elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world."
4. God's purpose in rapturing the church "before the tribulation" is so that they may not be confused which overwhelms the world because of our sins." (A reference to the apostasy of the church just prior to the rapture.)
5. "We neither become very much afraid of the report nor of the appearance, because the rapture will occur prior to the tribulation.
6. The great tribulation is the last half of the seven years.
7. "There will be a great tribulation as has not been since people began to be upon the earth."
8. Some tribulation saints who reject the Antichrist during the tribulation will bend their knees to God, "while not yet tasting death, are the servants for the heralding of the second coming of Christ."
9. "When the tribulation is completed, and the Antichrist has seduced the world, after the resurrection of the two prophets, then will come the sign of the Son of Man, and coming forward the Lord shall appear with great power and much majesty."

Jeffrey points out that in reading Ephraem, he clearly holds to a "gap" or "parenthesis between the sixty-nine and seventieth week of Daniel 9:24-27. This is what biblical dispensationalists believe the Scriptures are saying.

As already mentioned, John Gill was seeing many premillennial truths in the Bible, though he was still working his way out of amillennialism. In his commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:17 he tells us:

There will be the rapture of the living saints, with the dead in Christ raised, so that the one will not prevent the other. They will be changed and be joined in one company and general assembly, and be rapt up together, in the clouds.

They will be carried out of sight of men, up in the clouds of Heaven, to meet the Lord in the air, while He will then clean the regions of the air of Satan, who do mischief on earth. When the thousand years are ended, He will descend on earth. Then they will ascend up again while the final conflagration takes place on earth. Then follows the new heaven and earth.

Summary

Thank God for the clear Word of God, and for the Blessed Hope of salvation from the wrath that will overtake the earth. True biblical and observing dispensationalists practice OBSERVATION, OBSERVATION, OBSERVATION in CONTEXT. What we find is that the nation of Israel has been set aside, while the gospel is reaching out to Jew and Gentile and placing in the spiritual body of Christ.

The new covenant has been launched with the church benefiting from it. The new covenant is the dynamic also of the kingdom, but in no form or fashion are we now in the kingdom period. That kingdom has Israel as the central people who will enjoy a regathering nationally back in their own land, with the Son of David reigning. Believers of all generations will be there, including those from the church age.

The rapture is pretribulational according to a clear understanding and consistent hermeneutic. Post-tribulationalism does not make sense and has only a few who attempt to hold on to it. They generally fade into the sunset and have had only limited influence on the church.

Making the church Fathers out as final doctrinal authorities is dangerous. And only those so influenced by Greek orthodox thought would dare go that way.

This debate has gone full circle with endless repetition by Warner. The Scriptures are clear. But an agenda and a trap was being set in order to convince the readers that the church is going through the tribulation.