ROBERT GOVETT:
HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE MILLENNIUM AND ITS REWARD
WITH EMPHASIS UPON HIS IMPACT ON THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF
DISPENSATIONALISM

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The study of dispensationalism has undergone much discussion in modern times to include challenges within its ranks as to its classical teachings and understanding. Once C. I. Scofield published his now famous Scofield Study Bible,\(^1\) in 1909, his footnotes became the ground upon which the arguments for and against its central tenets ensued.\(^2\) Contemporary debates tend to ignore those who preceded Scofield and upon whose dispensational shoulders he stood. In this context, its early and most ardent contributor, H. Robert Govett, has lost his place in history. This research seeks to reintroduce Govett as a principle contributor to the early days of the theological movement. It further seeks to establish him as one whose numerous writings demonstrate consistent scholarly understanding of the biblical text in the context of dispensationalism, and at a deeper level than any of his peers. He understood millennialism in the context of biblical theology. As such, he was able to articulate his position through the eyes of both the O.T. and N.T. Not only was he well versed in the Bible and its original languages,


\(^2\) William E. Cox writes: "...their [Plymouth Brethren] ‘rediscovered truths’ are to be found in nearly every Christian denomination. This is mostly because of the great influence of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which was written to perpetuate these views after Scofield had come under the influence of Darby. Over 2 million copies [this statement was made in 1963] of this ‘Bible’ have been sold since its publication in 1909.” William E. Cox, *An Examination of Dispensationalism*, (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963), 1.
but he could expound Pauline theology as well as the theology of the early church divines. He knew the theology of the Brethren movement and their doctrinal positions on dispensationalism. He also knew the teachings of the Church of Rome and the Church of England – having been formerly ordained in the latter – and was unabashed at pointing with much fervor to what he regarded as error.

This research will demonstrate that Govett, while influenced by the social and political events of his day, was not beholden to those who led the forward progression of the dispensational movement in the nineteenth-century. The eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries were historically times of much religious evolution and Protestant debate. Notwithstanding, he was in large measure a theologically independent thinker and often spoke out in his writings against those who presumed to speak on behalf of the burgeoning Brethren theological movement. This research will also seek to prove that Govett was not merely interested in conveying that the millennium ushered in a new kingdom, but more so, was keen to consistently interject into his writings a warning regarding potential loss of that kingdom. Reward in the kingdom and conduct in this life are tied together theologically in the majority of his writings and form a theme through which he was most commonly known.

Govett, a most capable expositor of the dispensational system, not only wrote prolifically at the start of the movement but was regarded in his day as one whose clarity of voice and depth of articulation surpassed that of his contemporary John Nelson Darby – who himself is recognized as being the “father of dispensationalism.” Govett’s intellect is well documented from his early published writings. As an example, in 1841, at the age
of twenty-eight, he wrote a lengthy commentary on the Book of Isaiah entitled, *Isaiah Unfulfilled*. This was quite a daring act when considered in the context of Bishop Robert Lowth’s celebrated and vastly admired commentary on Isaiah, published in 1778. Yet it serves to establish Govett’s confidence in his understanding of the Bible, his zeal for the tenets of dispensationalism, and his eagerness to publicly make his position known.

While Darby is routinely lionized as dispensationalism’s founder – a theological system formally begun as recently as the early to mid-nineteenth-century – it is Govett who provided the most thorough presentation of its central dogma about the kingdom, the Lord’s return, the rapture of the saints, and in particular, reward in the millennium. No theologian before or since Govett has written so prolifically on these subjects in the context of the dispensational system. As much as Darby, as its celebrated leader, provided the momentum at the start of the theological movement, it was Govett that plumbed the theological depths of its central tenets and gave the system pellucidity. Nevertheless, Govett is routinely omitted from the historical scholarship pertaining to the development of dispensationalism. Vern S. Poyhress’ book entitled *Understanding Dispensationalists*, for instance, is typical of the scholarship that omits Govett’s name from the chronological list of names representing the theological system’s timeline of recognized contributors.

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Govett’s writings center around five distinct characteristics. The first of these is his logic. It is written that he was fearless in pursuing a point to its rational conclusion and that none could put his finger more unerringly on weak spots in current theology. The second characteristic is his independence. He did not acquiesce blindly to the post-reformation doctrines of his day. Thirdly, he was essentially a systematic theologian. Govett is regarded as the first to present a clear teaching of reward for believers at the judgment seat of Christ as it relates to the millennial kingdom. A fourth characteristic is his style of writing. His main concern in writing was that all who read it could plainly understand his teachings. Lastly, he demonstrated a profound desire to remain faithful to the text.⁶

Placing Govett upon the historical ground to which he is properly entitled to stand involves an understanding of the theological times in which he lived. Dispensationalism as a new theological movement needed a leader. Darby, a leader in the Brethren church movement, quickly filled that role when the Brethren movement split over a schism in the mid 1840’s and he found himself as the head of the stricter body which became known as the Darbyites. Dispensationalism sprang from the teachings of the Brethren movement – a sect which sought change and rejected all existing Church order. Unlike Darby, Govett was Oxford trained, a fellow, and initially a cleric in good standing in the Church of England – a church representing Reformed consistency and adherence to orthodoxy, not the change imposed by the dispensational movement. As

⁶ W. J. Dalby, Memoir of Robert Govett. Printed as an introduction to Govett On Galatians (Moses or Christ?). (London: Thynne and Company, 1930).
the leader around which this new movement rallied, its followers looked to Darby for direction. He had the financial means through inheritance to concentrate on travel and writing. His writings and his teachings soon became well known as he lectured worldwide from 1830 until his death. It was in this setting that Govett wrote and preached. And while Darby’s name became synonymous with the new theological system, Govett contented himself primarily as a local pastor and author. But while Govett faded into the background during the advancement of the new system in the second half of the nineteenth-century, he did not remain silent when he believed the emerging system to be in error. It is clear that Govett did not presume to align himself with the Plymouth Brethren, nor did he consider himself to be a dispensationalist in the sense that it would eventually become a term synonymous with the Brethren movement in America in the late nineteenth-century. His connection to dispensationalism is mainly Scriptural in that his search of God’s Word led him to many of the same theological conclusions.

In his book *The Righteousness of Christ; The Righteousness of God*, he called the Plymouth Brethren to task in regard to that which he believed to be their error. The Plymouth Brethren became a target of his dispensational concern. The book minces no words in identifying John Darby’s theological errors. Through his comments the reader quickly surmises that Govett was not beholding to the dispensational movement for his

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7 Cross and Livingstone, 1005.

own development on issues related to the millennium, the future estate of the Jews as a
nation, or the various rewards pursuant to the coming kingdom. It is evidential that he
clearly came to articulate his position based upon his own study of the Word in its
original languages and his own in-depth knowledge of church history on these matters.

To place Govett into historical context, therefore, requires an understanding of
the times in which he lived, his writings, as well as the direction he took which
sometimes took him undauntedly into the mouth of the theological beast. Such an
understanding also provides a background for the impetus behind the formulation of the
dispensational movement and its particular understanding of the millennium, its inherent
reward, and the judgment itself.

**Millennialism Defined**

Millennialism as understood within dispensationalism is an eschatology that
assumes its authority from the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation in which is
described, by the Apostle John, a vision of Satan bound. He is thrown into a great abyss
at which time there is to be a resurrection of saints who reign with Christ on earth for
one-thousand years. Upon the conclusion of the one-thousand years Satan is released in
order to be eternally judged. Connected with the term millennialism are such related
terms as apocalypticism, eschatology, chiliasm, and messianism. As such, more precise
definitions are required to indicate the differences. Bernard McGinn gives help in
distinguishing the differences:

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9 The term “chiliasm” is also used to denote the thousand year reign of Christ. The word has a Greek
etymology.

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“Eschatology covers any type of belief that looks forward to the end of history as that which gives structure and meaning to the whole. What sets off apocalypticism from general eschatology is the sense of the proximity of the end...Millennialism refers to beliefs in a coming more perfect terrestrial form of society”.

Furthering this analysis Douglas H. Shantz notes that millennialism represents a particular instance of apocalypticism that focuses on earthly utopias. Nevertheless, there are difficulties associated with defining such terms as millennialism mostly due to contemporary writings not respecting theological terminology designed to describe the phenomenon. Crawford Gribben notes that such familiar terms as premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial are not ideally suited to describe the “eschatological flexibility” of earlier exegetes.

Theologians must be careful to understand that even in the period in which the terms were being established the eschatological categories were not easily applied by nineteenth-century British authors of biblical prophecy. To the contrary, some such as Govett had no difficulty using the terms. This was true also of other theologians such as David Brown, who in 1846 authored Christ’s Second Coming: Will it be Premillennial?

If Jürgen Moltmann is correct in stating that, “Christian eschatology is millenarian

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12 Ibid., 3. Gribben further notes that the terms themselves were popularized only in the nineteenth-century and seem insufficiently fluid to describe an immense variety of millennial beliefs in a range of historic periods.

13 Ibid., 4.
eschatology,”¹⁴ then it may also be asserted, as Gribben finds, that “a reassertion of the importance of millennialism is central to the larger project of reestablishing the importance of eschatology in the agenda of scholarly enquiry.”¹⁵

Realizing the potential for confusion based upon a certain fluidity of eschatological terms in his day may account for why Govett felt the need for such precision. His articulation on the subject is always met with what he firmly believes to be proof from Scripture. For the dispensationalist, the millennium takes on additional importance in that reward for the believer is associated with it. For Govett in particular, pursuit of that reward is crucial to his understanding of eschatology. In dispensationalism reward is understood largely in light of the Pauline epistles in which there is a transformation from a predominantly Judaistic concept of eschatology to one which is essentially Christian. This transformation is sometimes difficult to ascertain since Paul’s pre-Christian writings are not extant.¹⁶ Even so, more than any other N.T. writer Paul’s eschatology can be viewed as one which is systematically evolving.

R. H. Charles has endeavored to organize Paul’s Christian writings into four distinct stages of development and finds his earliest developed thoughts in 1 Thessalonians; his second stage represented in 1 Corinthians; the third stage of eschatological thinking as represented in 2 Corinthians and Romans; and the final stage

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¹⁵ Gribben, 2.

¹⁶ F.V. Filson indicates that what was old versus new in Paul’s thinking can never be successfully argued since there is no direct evidence of Paul’s pre-Christian thinking. But conclusions can be drawn from contemporary Jewish thought and Paul’s letters to learn of his pre-conversion theology. Floyd V. Filson, *St. Paul’s Conception of Recompense.* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich’sche Buchhandlung, 1931), 1.
as found in Philippians. While not a perfectly consistent system, it does help to
demonstrate the organization and evolution of Paul’s thought. It is important to note that
while Paul’s thoughts concerning eschatological events and the parousia fluctuated with
time he never lost sight of their significance to the church. W. Barclay states, “It is
commonly said that Paul’s conception of the Second Coming underwent a certain
development. It is true that Paul’s ideas about the Second Coming did change, but it is
not true that Paul, so to speak, grew out of the idea, or that he abandoned it. From the
beginning to the end of Paul’s life the idea was there.”

As Govett consistently articulates, judgment within dispensationalism is
incontrovertibly connected to future reward. It has at its root an understanding of an
imminent world judgment. Imminent world judgment is tied theologically to a call to
repentance on the basis of the realization that the one true God is both creator and judge.
In dispensationalism judgment is to take place in two stages. The believer will be judged
at the beginning of the millennial reign on earth. The second judgment is viewed to take
place at the end of the millennial reign and is reserved for the unbeliever.

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SCM, vol.1, 1958), 73.
Recent Historical Scholarship and Interest

Ted Daniels indicates that America is a particularly lavish source of millennialism. As evidenced from the many books and conferences, there has been an explosion of the subject the past several decades. The three-volume *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, reflects some of the best of this recent historical scholarship. What accounts for this immense interest? There are a number of factors postulated. Beginning as early as the 1970's one of the best selling books was Hal Lindsey's, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. It sold over fifteen million copies. In the 1990's a series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, entitled the *Left Behind* series, began to appear. Approximately 40 million copies have been sold. The burgeoning video game industry has also captured the imagination of children and teens with their apocalyptic-style graphics and battles against evil forces. A popular theory is reigniting the attention of scientists as they ponder the possible end of the world in 2012 as predicted by the ancient Mayan calendar.

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around the world help to feed the notion that the world is not getting better and that the end must be near. Natural disasters of recent years also help fuel people’s concerns.

Signs of the end time predictions being linked to great world events are not new, however. For example, when Napoleon marched on Moscow in 1812, the Russian Orthodox Church identified him as the Beast or Antichrist.26 Francis Fukuyama and Robert Heilbroner provide descriptions of end-of-the-world scenarios caused by predictions of nuclear war and world famine.27

Modern scholarship reveals a vast number of examples of works on millennial thought published in the mid to late twentieth century. Two of the most noted works include the writings of Diedrich Hinrich Kromminga: The Millennium, in the Church: *Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm*, published in 1945; and his work entitled, The Millennium, Its Nature, Function and Relation to the Consummation of the World, published three years later. An exceptionally well researched recent work of the twenty-first century is that of Charles E. Hill and his work entitled, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, published in 2001. Concerning scholarly works focusing more pertinently on the subject of dispensational history there are far fewer scholarly examples. As noted above, there are frequent examples of popular writings designed to provoke thought on general subjects related to dispensational doctrine. But scholarship bearing upon dispensational history and the influence of its early contributors remains sketchy. Two helpful works include that of Clarence B. Bass,


Distinction Between the Kingdom and Eternal Life

One of Govett’s important eschatological differentiations pertains to that of entrance into the kingdom of Heaven and the believer’s eternal life. In his book, *Entrance Into the Kingdom*, published in 1855, he acknowledges that this distinction and the truths associated with it would not be popular. There are no great names, he deduces, associated with these truths. They rest only on God’s Word. Once again evidence is formed that Govett was blazing his own theological trail.

Established clearly in the Reformation and the sure foundation of Scripture is the truth that “good works” are proof of a living faith and the fruit thereof. But, according to Govett, this leaves open the question: “what are the effects of good or evil works on the future position of one already justified?” He goes further:

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“Does not, then, the New Testament suppose that believers are agents producing both good and evil works?^{29} Does it not anticipate that some would be guilty of sloth, or be found wanting in good works.” What then shall be the issue of such investigation? Can any inquiry be more important to the saint?^{30}

The position held by Govett is that eternal life is God’s unconditional gift to believers, but that the believer’s participation in the kingdom of Christ, or heaven, or God (all three descriptions are largely considered interchangeable), is conditional on the believer’s conduct as good or evil. To the Jew under the law it was ordered by God that he would gain eternal life through his own obedience to God’s commands. However, these righteous conditions have never been fulfilled by man apart from Christ. Therefore, the Gospel declares that eternal life is given immediately to the believer by faith in the work of Christ. He acknowledges that, for most, the kingdom signifies a spiritual reign of grace. But for Govett, participation in the kingdom of God is literal and entrance depends upon the believer’s conduct “after” he begins to believe.

Govett seeks to answer the question, “what is meant by the kingdom of God?” His answer: It is the future visible reign with Christ for one thousand years upon his return. The idea of this he finds several places in Daniel to include 2:44 where it reads: “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.”

^{29} This he argues is on the grounds that Scripture states that the principle of judgment shall be according to works. That is, regard will be had both to the nature of the works, and to their degree of good and evil. (See Matthew 26:24-27; Revelation 2:23; 22:12.

^{30} Ibid., preface.
The kingdom, according to Govett, is spoken of as still future and is the time of reward for the persecuted in this life. It is also essentially a time of reward. The believer enters into the kingdom and receives reward contingent upon conduct. The theme of conduct, reward, and kingdom are interwoven so as to be connected by subject, one with the other, in many of the associated texts.

In furtherance of the difference between the conditions upon which eternal life and the kingdom of God are respectively set, Govett looks to the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the third chapter of Philippians. This chapter he holds to be extremely important to the understanding of the distinction between the two. It also holds truth upon which Govett expounds relative to degrees of reward and conditions upon which there are exclusions. Govett holds that Paul sought not only the joy of entering and receiving reward in the kingdom, but he was starkly aware that the kingdom must be pursued vigorously in order not to be denied entrance as a believer. This theological understanding is not only precisely argued by Govett; it delineates the millennium in greater depth and precision than that which was promulgated by either Darby or the Brethren leadership at large.

A crucial verse for explaining his theological position in chapter three is verse 10 which reads: “that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the

31 Ibid., 10.
fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to
the resurrection from the dead.” 32 Govett explains:

“It is evident at a glance, that the resurrection which the apostle so earnestly
sought, was not the general resurrection. The wicked shall partake of that,
whether they desire it or not. Paul then could not express any doubts of his
attaining to that, or speak of it as an object of hope. It remains then, that it
be a peculiar resurrection: the resurrection of reward, obtained by the just,
while the wicked remain in their graves. Such a resurrection we see in close
connection with the kingdom of Christ, and the time of reward.” 33

Govett goes on to explain that all the justified will receive eternal life, but not all
will partake of the foretaste of the millennium. While justification was assured, the prize
spoken of in the verses which follow was something altogether distinct from eternal life.
Here he finds that faith brings one at once to eternal life, but faith is only the beginning of
a lifelong effort to attain abundant entrance into the kingdom – one that might not be
attained if the believer were not consistent and diligent in his race for the prize of the
kingdom. It is a position that Darby did not dare to articulate; perhaps due to the
difficulty it caused the average believer of his day; or, perhaps he did not have the same
depth of theological understanding as Govett. Whatever the cause, his own writings
reveal the difference in understanding of reward between the two men. In verse 10 of
Philippians chapter three Darby explains that the ἐξανάστασιν is a “rising from among
others.” This rising was the distinction between the believer and unbeliever upon Christ’s
return. Darby states: “Paul looked to have part in the blessed harvest when Christ will

32 The expression τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν is a peculiar expression. The word ἐξανάστασιν
represents one of Paul’s hapax legomena. According to Govett its meaning may be rendered: “the select
resurrection from among the dead.”

33 Ibid., 16.
come from heaven...The deliverance of the body from the power of death could have no such expression if a common resurrection to judgment was in the apostle's mind...Death indeed then for us will be swallowed up in victory.”

To Govett this passage is of utmost and critical importance to the proper understanding of reward as distinct from eternal life. So far from Govett is Darby on the importance of reward in the context of resurrection that it becomes immediately clear that the two men did not rise totally from the same theological system.

Additionally, often Govett is drawn to the explanation of the question of “loss of salvation.” Such verses as that found in 2 Peter 1:10 that speak of making certain that one’s calling and election are secure, are frequently quoted in an Arminian context of striving not to lose salvation. Govett wants to redirect the readers thinking and move the potential loss from eternal life to loss of something else. In this verse Govett finds Peter speaking in reference to the kingdom of Christ. It is a calling and election of those previously elected to eternal life and already righteous by faith in Christ. Connected to previous verses here, Peter speaks of the call of Christians to be diligent because the cleansing from sin is not the end of the Christian course, but only the starting point.

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35 “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” (2Peter 1:10 KJV)
Understanding of Reward

In addition, it is apparent that the concept of reward--its application for this life and its benefit to the life to come--is treated with different understanding by contemporary theological writers. There are some who claim that reward is always distinct from eternal life--that the merit from the good works of believers in this life does not measurably extend to the life to come. Some believe that reward and eternal life are inextricably connected in that eternal life is the reward of a life well lived for Christ. Others claim that reward for believers is measurable and is recompensed apart from eternal life at the Judgment. Those who hold to this latter view are further divided into two distinct sub-categories. One group affirms that reward for believers at the Judgment is incremental and is recompensed in such a way that all will receive some measure of reward. The other group affirms that it is possible that some believers who have not been faithful to Christ in this life will receive no reward at the Judgment. Govett is found in this latter category.

Further compounding one’s ability to distinguish these theological points of view is the overlay of the doctrinal issues of loss of salvation and purgatory which also are thought to be recompensed at the Judgment. Some hold that at the Judgment there will be believers who, rather than receiving even a minimal measure of reward, because of a lack of faithfulness will receive punishment in the form of eternal loss of salvation as meted out by Christ. Likewise, others hold that Christ will punish some believers by casting them out of His presence into an intermediate state known as purgatory. This punishment is for a set period of time which is solely determined by God and represents
the judicial consequence of a dimension of good works which lack merit enough to receive immediate reward by Christ at the Judgment. This research will also investigate Paul’s writings and endeavor to find his understanding of future reward and forfeiture as distinguished from among the various views now held.

**Background: John Nelson Darby**

At the beginning of Govett’s popularity as an author, John Nelson Darby was already making a name for himself as a theologian and provocateur concerning the advancement of the dispensational movement. There are many factors which combine to produce a popular voice for a cause. At the onset of the nineteenth-century there was a renewed spirit of cooperation in the United Kingdom between the church and state. Such writings as that of William Wordsworth’s *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, published in 1822, as well as that of Thomas Chalmers’s writings in the 1820's helped to promote the highest aspirations of the English nation. There was an increase in the seriousness of Christianity among the middle and upper classes and a time in which popular preachers became celebrities attracting large congregations. Into this environment Darby was born.

Darby was intelligent, outspoken, charismatic, and well entrenched in the Brethren leadership. To understand Govett in proper context, one must understand the religious and theological fervor of his day. Darby cannot escape notice; nor can his

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37 Ibid., p.51.
influence over many Christians of his day. Knowing Darby aids in knowing something of
the theological passion of Great Britain of his day and the influences that also impacted
Govett.

Darby was born in London on November 18, 1800. The Darby’s were an old
family with connections in Ireland which began in the sixteenth century. Darby was
baptized fifteen weeks after his birth on March 3, 1801, at St. Margaret’s Church,
according to the rites of the national church. Darby received his first name from his
father, John, but his middle name, Nelson, was given to him through his uncle’s
connection with the naval hero, Lord Nelson.

On February 17, 1812, Darby entered the Westminster public school. In later
years Darby felt that public schools trained boys for the “world,” with little or no fear of
God. He stated, “My education was in my judgment not well directed, save by God.”

In 1815 Darby’s father sent him to Dublin, Ireland for further education. He entered
Trinity College which was an Anglican institution. On July 10, 1819, Darby graduated
with a bachelor of arts degree with highest honors in classics. After finishing his college
studies Darby decided to become a lawyer and began to study law. In his twenty-first
year Darby became a believer and on January 21, 1822, he was called to the Irish bar.

At the beginning of his conversion Darby had been attracted to the church of
Rome, but it is noted that Hebrews 9-10 made it impossible for him to follow the Church.
The following is Darby’s own account of this time of Roman Catholic influence on
himself:

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“For my mind had passed, after its own repentance, under the dark cloud of the popish system (i.e., to look for the powers of Christ’s agency in the visible authority of the Church), though God was with me through it all. And I used to hold up Christ to my brother as available against the claim of men on their points, yet it prevailed so far as to prevent my mind from finding comfort in the truths I honestly urged on him, which I had found in what poor reading of Scripture I had.”

Interestingly, Darby fully believed in apostolic succession (i.e., the belief in the uninterrupted and continuous succession of bishops from the time of the apostles up to the present day), and held that the only channels of blessing were through them. Darby felt that the so-called Christian world was characterized by deep ingratitude toward Christ, and he himself longed for complete devotedness to the Lord’s work. He, therefore, had himself ordained in the Anglican church – sometime in the year 1824.

While Darby was laboring as a clergyman he was honestly searching for an understanding of what the true church is, but the concept remained obscure to him. Now, realizing his union with a glorified Christ in Heaven, and seeing that Christ’s place there represented his own, it became clear to him that the church of God could only consist of such who were united in the same way. Darby came to believe that the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost had formed believers into one body, uniting the members to their Head in Heaven and to each other, and acting in them according to His own will. He saw that membership in Scripture was not membership of an association organized and formed by man, but membership in Christ. For Darby the body of Christ, the true church,

39 Ibid., p.36.

40 Men such as Luther and Calvin, together with their followers, he considered for this reason to be outside of these channels, but he believed that he was not their judge and left them to the mercies of God.

41 Govett was eleven years of age at the time of Darby’s ordination into the Anglican Church.
was composed of those who were united by the Holy Spirit to the Head: Christ in Heaven. Where was Darby to find the true church, or rather its expression, he was seeking? Where was he to find the unity of believers with their Head in Heaven and among themselves? Darby wrote:

“When I looked around to find unity I found it nowhere; if I joined one set of Christians I did not belong to another. The Church, God’s Church, was broken up and the members scattered among various self-formed bodies.

Nationalism was associated with the world; in its bosom some believers were merged in the very world from which Jesus had separated them; they were besides, separated from one another, while Jesus had united them. The Lord’s Supper, symbol of the union of this latter with the world; that is to say, exactly the contrary of what Christ had established. Dissent had, no doubt, had the effect of making the true children of God more manifest but here they were united on principles quite different from the unity of the body of Christ. If I joined myself to these I separated myself from others everywhere. The disunion of the body of Christ was everywhere apparent rather than its unity.”

It was the apprehension of what Darby believed the true church to be in God’s eyes that led him to leave his ecclesiastical position. He probably never did this formally, and he could probably have resumed his ministry in the Church of Ireland at any time, had he wanted to, by simply subscribing to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the church. Nonetheless, it is believed that Darby left the Anglican Church in 1827.

In 1834 Darby’s father died, but Darby would not attend the funeral because of the clerical system which was contrary to what Darby saw as the truth of God. He believed his presence at the funeral would give the impression of his acknowledging the system. It was during this period that Darby sought the companionship of others who

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42 Ibid., 61.
were themselves dissatisfied with the church and were thus beginning to form a new church movement which would later become known as the Brethren. The designation *Plymouth Brethren* came from the fact that the believers in Plymouth had no name, did not belong to any particular denomination, and so they were spoken of by others as brethren from Plymouth. It was in Plymouth that the movement first came into public notice.

The Reformation was seen by Darby as a great light in this growing darkness, and most certainly a work of God in which the truth of justification by faith alone shone brightly. Yet Darby thought the movement overlooked much Scriptural teaching regarding the church and substituted the opinions and the preferences of the leaders of the time. To Darby, these leaders sought the favor and protection of the world, while Roman Catholicism had always sought to control the world. As Darby viewed the church, he saw in her outward testimony here on earth, that she had fallen from her first place and was in ruins. Darby wrote:

“As to the ruin of the Church, the theory came for me after the consciousness of it, and even now, the theory is but a small thing in my mind; it is the burden one bears. Some years after the conversion of my soul I looked around to find where the Church was, but I could not find it. I could find plenty of saints better than myself, but not the Church as it was set up with power on the earth. Then I say the Church as thus set up is ruined, and I cannot find a better word for it.”

Darby came to this view of ruin in an early stage, at a time when his knowledge of church history and awareness of the church’s present state of affairs were limited. His view was rooted in what he thought to be the teaching of Scripture and in what he

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43 Ibid., 78-79.
intuitively felt was the reality of the present state of the church. His conclusions were, therefore, not a result of much personal experience and learning. His later experiences confirmed his initial thoughts; perhaps, his early ideas colored his way of viewing later experiences.

Many of Darby’s critics, past and present, have described him as being jealous of his ecclesiastical authority. They have portrayed him as antagonistic, tyrannical, domineering, arrogant, vain, peremptory, and haughty. They have accused him of using his friends to further his personal ambitions. Others believe that it was his greatness which gave prominence to his weaknesses. Julius Anton von Poseck, who worked with Darby on the German translation of the New Testament and knew him for thirty years, wrote:

“You could not be in his presence more than a few minutes without soon feeling that you were in the presence of a great man and ever greater servant of God...I have often wondered at God’s grace in John Nelson Darby, which was able to sustain him in such healthy, spiritual simplicity for so many years in spite of the increasing amount of human praise surrounding him.”

Despite his negative personality traits, Darby was well known for his consideration of the needs of others and he had a great affection for the poor and preferred to stay with them when traveling abroad rather than with well-to-do believers. This is all the more interesting when one considers the fact that he had been brought up in a rich family and had certainly never known any want as a child.

44 Ibid., 140.
Darby and His Writings

It was recorded after Darby’s death that he was “highly educated and extremely able man, of rare attainments in almost all branches of knowledge, of pre-eminent logical power, of moral and metaphysical analysis hard to match, to say nothing of his linguistic skill, both ancient and modern.” Darby knew ancient Latin, Hebrew, and Greek and modern French, German, and Italian. He could understand Dutch and while in New Zealand he learned the native language, Maori, and was able to preach in it.

Darby’s earliest writings are dated at age twenty-eight. His published works number over forty volumes. The largest of Darby’s published works is his Collected Writings in thirty-four volumes which contain the works from beginning to end of his ministry and reveal the development of his thought. He wrote hymns and also wrote Bible translations in French, German, Dutch, English, Swedish, and Italian. In addition to writing concerning many subjects in the Bible, Darby wrote articles on such topics as: Augustine and Donatists, Church Councils, Papal Infallibility, Calvinists, Calvin’s Ecclesiastical System, On the Formation of Churches, The Claims of the Church of England, The Doctrine of the Church of England, The Mediaeval Church, Ecumenical Councils, Ignatius, Wesleyan Doctrine, and Roman Catholic Brethren. Yet in all of his writings he valued simplicity of thought over style which often led to great confusion by

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45 Ibid., 163.

the reader. Horatius Bonar, editor of *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy*, writes in 1864 of Darby, “When a person undertakes to expound Scripture, it is supposed that he can make himself understood.”

Most of Darby’s writings are polemic and many are written as replies to tracts written by others. Whatever might be said of his balanced demeanor in the early days of his ministry, he is portrayed in his later life as a man who reveals a nature that is caustic and at times vicious. Clarence Bass notes that, “he [Darby] did not doubt that the sole reason for his existence was to serve: executing this conviction drove him to bitter extremes in his relationship with others. Consequently most of his life, and a large portion of his writings, were spent in controversy.” Interestingly, in all of Govett’s many years of public writing he never experienced direct attacks by Darby.

**Dispensationalism’s Beginnings**

As noted, dispensationalism had its beginnings in the Brethren movement in Great Britain. Although it is often stated that dispensationalism had its beginnings within the “Plymouth” Brethren movement, it cannot be stated emphatically that dispensationalism started at one particular place or time. Though the name Plymouth became prominent very early, it was not in Plymouth, England, but in Dublin, Ireland,

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49 Prosser, 62.

50 Ibid., 58.

51 Ibid., 64.
that the first meetings took place. Similar assemblies were founded shortly afterward in Plymouth, Bristol, London, and other places; though some of the members composing these groups knew nothing of others until after the lapse of months and even years. The names of several men have come down through the years as the founders of this movement. They are A. N. Groves, B. W. Newton, W. H. Dorman, S. P. Tregelles. Edward Cronin, Edward Wilson, H. Hutchinson, William Stokes, J. Parnell, and later, Lord Congleton, J.G. Bellett and John Darby. Of these it would seem that Edward Cronin was the instrument through which the others were affected to act upon his convictions (although Darby had been thinking along these same lines independently of the rest for several years). However, the founder of Brethrenism as a system was undeniably Darby.\footnote{Ibid., 64.}

Having ascribed its start to Darby it must be noted with more accuracy that the movement was actually precipitated by the dissatisfaction of one man in Dublin. This man was Dr. Edward Cronin. He was a convert from Roman Catholicism to an independent church but he found that while he was welcome to have fellowship he was not welcome to take communion until he joined some visible, independent church. Cronin withdrew together with others including Darby. This appears to be the actual beginning of the Brethren movement. While documents are not clear as to date, it is assumed that the first breaking of bread with this group occurred in 1826.\footnote{John H. Gerstner, \textit{Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism}, (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), 19.}

The first three decades of the nineteenth-century were times of much unrest in the Church of England and in the various non-conformist bodies of Great Britain and
Ireland. This was the time in which Darby was being educated and forming his religious convictions. Darby’s thinking concerning the Church and his perception of Church history was heavily influenced by the Brethren movement. The Wesleyan revival and similar movements had brought new life into communities that had been cold and formal for years. A spirit of inquiry and yearning after better things was abroad. Christians were eagerly searching their Bibles for fuller light as to their individual and collective responsibilities. The Napoleonic wars had directed attention to the prophetic Scriptures as never before, and the truth of the Lord’s imminent return (much as in this century) was rediscovered after it had been seemingly lost for centuries. Needless to say, much fanaticism was linked with this, yet there was a modicum of truth which led to a fuller understanding of the prophetic Word. What was afterward named *Higher Criticism* was just beginning to attract attention, and Christians were horrified to find unconverted state-paid clergymen readily taking up the new views, and some even deliberately attacking the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures from within the church itself. This led many, including Darby, to despair of the organized church as the pillar of Truth.

The Tractarian movement with its trend toward Rome, the many smaller bodies formed by frequent dissensions among the followers of Wesley and Whitefield, the troubles of the churches of Scotland, and the threatening disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, all tended to cast true believers more upon God and the Word of His grace and to lead them to seek God for themselves. Thus, out of all this unsettled state there came

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to be several very marked movements within the next half century which tended to endeavor to magnify the name of Jesus, to exalt the Holy Spirit, and to reassert the authority of the Bible as the all-sufficient rule of Christian faith and practice, and furthermore, to carry the gospel energetically to a lost world, independent of clerical pretension. The great world-wide missionary movement is one of these. The Bible societies may be looked at collectively as another. What is often called “Brethrenism” is a third. And though the Brethren assemblies have never been large in numbers as compared with the great denominations of Protestantism, their beliefs have been worldwide, and thousands have accepted their views on many lines of doctrine who are not openly identified with them.

It is a mistake to believe that the Brethren movement was founded upon particular views of prophesy. It was not until about 1830 that their understanding of the truth concerning the coming of the Lord began to grip these earnest men as they searched the Word of God. What particularly marked them from the beginning was their belief that there is no Bible warrant for the idea that the Lord’s Supper was ever to be the badge or exclusive possession of a sect or party; that no ordained clergyman needed to preside in order to render the remembrance of Christ in this way. They did not see in Scripture any evidence of a clerical system in the early church at all, but recognized that the Word

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56 Ibid., 16.
taught the priesthood of all true believers having access to Christ by His blood. At first their concern was not so much with separating from the evil that was coming into the denominations, but rather that they desired to find a simple and Scriptural basis upon which all Christians could meet in happy fellowship. Nor, as made clear in Darby’s earliest tract entitled *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*, did they intend to judge or condemn others.

Yet, there is no doubt that Darby himself saw much more clearly than others of the early movement the rising tide of apostasy, and the Christian’s responsibility to separate from evil when fully manifested. But it was not until after the Brethren movement was thoroughly under way that he himself set forth his views in a paper entitled *Separation from Evil, God’s Principle of Unity*. Govett’s writings and teachings emerged in this religious climate. He articulated many of the concerns of the Brethren while remaining denominationally independent. He never identified himself as a Brethren nor did he allow himself to agreed with all of it’s tenets. As such he was also often found to be at odds with Darby’s views on how to communicate the Christian’s responsibility to separate from evil as it relates to the interpretation of doctrine.
In this chapter we seek to uncover biographical data conveying the life of Govett with regard to his upbringing and accomplishments. It must be noted that very little of his personal life has been preserved. It remains to be researched whether his many hundreds of extant handwritten sermon notes and handful of articles will add to this understanding.

Largely lost among the historical records of the nineteenth-century divines is the name H. Robert Govett. Little historical documentation has been preserved of his life and until recently many of his written works were relegated to private collectors and a select few libraries in England and the United States. Dr. Lewis Schoettle, president of Schoettle Publishing company, has been almost singularly responsible for gathering many of these rare books and reprinting them through his publishing company – which now owns the copyright to most of Govett’s works. In addition to Govett’s thirty-nine preserved books and tracts there exists in private collection a large number of his handwritten sermons, as well as clippings of newspaper reviews of his books and a few articles that he contributed to magazines. Notwithstanding the lack of insightful biographical writings on his life, this biographical sketch will attempt to introduce the details and significance of the life of H. Robert Govett.
Govett was born on February 14, 1813 and died in 1901 at the age of eighty-eight. He never married. It is said that he possessed brilliant intellectual gifts and as such became highly respected by his peers. He was credited with having a keen ability to use logic to assiduously remove any weakness in a theological point. As an author and pastor he is best known for his insights concerning the judgment seat, believer's rewards, and the more practical aspects of sanctification. His writings are often marked by a superior level of scholarship.

Much of the biographical sketch contained in this writing is gathered from two primary sources. The first is an anniversary brochure published by Govett’s former church. In 2004 it published an one-hundred and fifty year anniversary brochure. Within the pages of the publication is valuable biographical information that briefly spans Govett’s life. A second worthful source is found in W.J. Dalby’s writings intended as an

1 On the dust jacket of Govett’s book reprinted under the entitled, On the Kingdom, Conley and Schoettle Publishing Company writes: “Mr. Govett’s writing can be characterized in five ways. The first is logic. He was unequaled in an ordered and sustained argument, and in pursuing a point to its rational conclusion. Secondly, he endeavored to keep a fresh approach to scriptures; not always agreeing with the ordinary doctrines of post-reformation Protestantism. A third characteristic is the ordered arrangement of his teaching. He was a systematic theologian in every aspect of teaching God’s word. He endeavored to be clear and concise in his writing so that the most uneducated of men could understand God’s word. Last, and most important, Mr. Govett manifests an overwhelming desire to be faithful to God’s word. To set forth the Spirit’s meaning of every word was his utmost concern.”

Also included on the dust jacket are the following quotes, one from D. M. Panton, an ardent student of Govett’s, and Charles H. Spurgeon respectively: “In all my life I have discovered no author so exactly aware of what God has said; and who is able to make it clear in plain and simple language...When we pass on Govett’s book to others we are doing a signal service.” and, Spurgeon: “Mr. Govett wrote a hundred years before his time, and the day will come when his works will be treasured as sifted Gold.”


3 The Surrey Chapel 150 year anniversary brochure contains one of the most complete biographical accounts of H. Robert Govett’s life. The content of the brochure is written by Dr. Rosamunde Codling.
introduction to Govett’s book on Galatians. In both sources little is written on Govett’s early years and only sparse mention of his theologically formative years. Much more is written in the context of the consistency of the theological emphases found in his writings and preaching.

Born into a well known ecclesiastical family, Govett was the eldest son of the Vicar of Staines and was reared in Staines, Middlesex. He entered Worcester College, Oxford, in 1830. Upon graduation in 1835, at the age of twenty-two, he was awarded a life fellowship. It is recorded that at least two of his brothers also attended Oxford and were later ordained. Govett himself was ordained into the Church of England in 1836, and held two successive pastorates – the first in Bexley, Kent, and the second in Somer’s Town, a slum area in north London between King’s Cross and Euston – before becoming curate of Saint Stephen’s Church, Norwich, in 1841. Govett preached there until 1844, at which time he left not only Saint Stephen’s but also the Church of England. He left the Church over doubts he had regarding the practice of infant baptism. This decision was made after much study on the subject of baptism in the New Testament and a visit to St. Mary’s Baptist Chapel where he witnessed for the first time the rite of believer’s baptism. A few days later he was baptized himself at St. Mary’s by the minister, Reverend William Brock.

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4 Dalby, Memoir of Robert Govett.

5 Surrey Chapel 150 year anniversary brochure, 3.

6 Surrey Chapel 150 year anniversary brochure, 3.
Govett was greatly loved by his congregation at Saint Stephen’s, so much so that upon preaching his last sermon there many of the congregants followed him to his next church. Govett’s leaving was not entirely due to his own convictions. He had written a letter to his bishop over his conviction which read, in part:

“Being now convinced that not a few points are unscriptural in the Church of England service for the baptism of infants, I write to inform you that I cannot conscientiously use that service as prescribed by the prayer-book any more.”

On February 1, 1844, Govett left his church and began a new ministry. He received a speedy response from the Bishop written on February 2, 1844, revoking his license as Curate of Saint Stephen’s. And while this action prevented Govett from taking any further part in the activities of the Anglican church, it was not for another thirty-four years before he formally relinquished all rights of the office. When he took his stand on infant baptism he also had to relinquish his Fellowship at Worcester College, Oxford, since the position could then only be held by an ordained members of the Anglican Church. During the mid-nineteenth-century the Church of England maintained a large degree of control over the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. This loss to Govett also caused a financial loss of £300 annually. Some accounts also suggest that financial support from his family was withdrawn.

Upon preaching his last sermon at Saint Stephen’s Govett took a position to minister as a nondenominational pastor in Norwich at Victoria Hall. It is reported that by

7 Ibid., 4.
8 Brown, Stewart J., 175.
9 Surrey Chapel 150 year anniversary brochure, 4.
1848 he had baptized between 300 and 400 former Anglicans.\textsuperscript{10} He ministered at Victoria Hall for over a decade until on December 21, 1854, a new place of worship was constructed. This was necessitated due to a continued swell of membership. The new church cost approximately £3,000 to build. Govett himself donated approximately £2,500 of that amount.\textsuperscript{11} The new structure was originally opened as Ebenezer Chapel, Surrey Road. The church was later renamed Surrey Chapel. Govett ministered there for forty-seven years until his death in 1901.

\textbf{Govett’s Influence Upon Others}

Religious revival swept the United Kingdom during the 1850’s. It occurred mainly outside of the established churches with prayer meetings, outdoor services with preaching aimed at confronting individual sin and the threat of eternal consequence.\textsuperscript{12} Into this revival climate Govett emerged.

Govett was certainly not alone in his understanding of a literal reign with Christ in a dispensation to come. What makes him unique among his peers, however, is his ardent pursuit of truths concerning who gets admitted into the coming thousand year kingdom and the grounds upon which some are excluded. Historically the church has proof of only a small number of theologians contemporary to Govett whose writings concern, in part, the understanding of loss of reward for believers. These include the American pastor and author, A. T. Pierson (1837-1911) of Philadelphia, whose writings

\textsuperscript{10} Clarke, R. E. D., 1426.

\textsuperscript{11} Dalby, Memoir of Robert Govett.

\textsuperscript{12} Brown, Stewart J., 214.
include such statements as: “With many disciples the eyes are yet blinded to this mystery of rewards, which is an open mystery of the Word. It must be an imputed righteousness whereby we enter; but having thus entered by faith, our works determine our relative rank, place, reward.”\textsuperscript{13} A. J. Gordon (1836-1895), also an American pastor and author, writes: “…just as the Legalist resents the doctrine that good works can have no part in effecting our forgiveness, so the Evangelical recoils from the idea that they can constitute any ground for our recompense.”\textsuperscript{14} In Great Britain, contemporaries include Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910), pastor of Union Chapel, Manchester, who states: “I believe for my part that we suffer terribly by the comparative neglect into which this side of Christian truth has fallen. Do you not think that it would make a difference to you if you really believed, and carried away with you in your thoughts, the thrilling consciousness that every act of the present was registered, and would tell, on the far side beyond?”\textsuperscript{15}

After Govett’s death, G. H. Lang (1874-1958), wrote prolifically. He was a gifted Bible scholar and teacher among the Brethren. He wrote fourteen major works on various Christian and Church subjects, along with numerous booklets. Most of his writings occurred after the age of fifty. His writings also reflect a keen understanding of the kingdom. He was a contributor to the \textit{Dawn} magazine – whose editor was D. M. Panton. D. M. Panton (1870-1955) was a student of Govett and became pastor of Surrey Chapel upon Govett’s death in 1901. Panton wrote numerous pamphlets, but only two


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{15} Panton., \textit{The Judgment Seat}, 7.
short books – both on the subject of the kingdom, its reward and exclusion. But his most significant contribution to the dissemination of this doctrine was as editor. He was editor of *Dawn* magazine from 1924 until his death in 1955. Panton believed that God put *Dawn* into his hands for making known the truths which he learned from Govett. The last issue of *Dawn* magazine, published shortly after Panton’s death, included “A Short Memoir of the Late Editor.” A portion reads:

“...the doctrine of Responsibility and Accountability of every redeemed soul to his Redeemer, naturally arising out of his redemption, has passed from the knowledge of the Church for the most part: certainly, in general, as a living and urgent power over the lives of disciples of Christ. And the future effect upon the believer of this present relationship to his Redeemer is completely ignored by most; namely, that, as a responsible agent of Christ, he must hand in an account of his stewardship before the Judgment Seat of his Lord; that from his Lord’s lips he will receive the sentence due to him, be it good or bad, according as he has been faithful or unfaithful, obedient or disobedient, holy or sinful.”

**Govett and His Theological Independence**

How is it that Govett came to his theological understanding regarding the millennium and its related doctrines? To what extent was he influenced by the tenets of the emerging dispensational system as espoused by the Brethren movement and its leaders? There is a lack of extant information of a biographical nature regarding Govett’s life which makes it difficult to quickly ascertain his theological development – those whose written works and thoughts may have had impact upon him. The background on his theological life would be little attainable if it were not for several factors that shed light on the matter. First, his published writings demonstrate a consistency of theological

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thought throughout his published lifetime. It is indeed rare that an author as prolific as Govett does not find it necessary to refine or correct his position in later years. It is as equally rare to find a theologian whose writings reflect as perceptively deep an understanding on matters of doctrine at the beginning of his published journey as that evidenced at the end. As dispensationalism was newly emerging and finding its way along its doctrinal path, Govett was from his earliest teaching and ministerial life already soundly grounded in his theological positions. It is for this reason that Spurgeon could write that Govett wrote one-hundred years before his time.

Secondly, in answer to the question as to whether Govett was a student of the Brethren movement or whether his learning was through or influenced by Darby’s writings and acclaim, there is irrefutable proof through his writings that he was neither. This proof becomes especially evident from his published work entitled: *The Righteousness of Christ the Righteousness of God: A Refutation of the Views Generally Held By the Christian Commonly Called “Plymouth Brethren” On That Subject,* published in 1864. In this two-hundred page book Govett finds both Darby and the Plymouth Brethren to be in error on numerous theological points – not the least of which were issues of righteousness and justification. He is not content letting the differences remain as a matter of learned dispute. Like-minded on many points regarding dispensationalism, but widely apart on matters of more supreme importance he finds Darby and the Brethren resistant to change and unresponsive to criticism. He writes:

“How easy a thing it would be to discuss points of difference, if both parties maintained a Christian spirit! If each spoke the truth, or what seemed so to him, in love; if each owned in the other’s representations what was proved, and gave up what in his own views was contrary to Scripture, – how soon
might differences of opinion melt away! Love is better than logic; and the approval of God better than a reputation among men.

If Christian teachers were, moreover, persuaded of our responsibility to Christ for the doctrines we hold and teach, this would make us more serious in examination of our views by Scripture, and more ready to abandon a scheme of doctrine which could not show evidence of Holy Writ.”17

Finally, while there are no ascertainable statements by others that Govett wavered on his eschatological position or showed signs of growing in his understanding over time, there is proof that both are true of Darby. For example, eschatologically Darby’s two pamphlets published in 1829 and 1830 indicate that he was sympathetic but by no means irretrievably committed to a futurist premillennialism.18 Timothy Stunt further states: “...we must emphasize that Darby was a very complex person whose understanding of scripture and theology was continually evolving. Indeed his reluctance to cite his authorities may have arisen from an awareness that his mind was far from made up.”19

**Errors Held By Darby and the Brethren**

It is not unusual for theologians of Govett’s day to publicly refute writers when in their estimation there is grievous error. What is more unusual is the restraint demonstrated by Govett on the matter of perceived error on the part of Darby and the

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Brethren. Govett resisted writing his refutation until Darby had repeatedly published his errors in several writings. The excoriation is not of a minor nature. Govett’s words were right to the point: “Mr. Darby’s idea of justification is quite unlike that of the Scripture.” An example typical of Govett’s criticisms is his response to Darby’s understanding of Romans 5:18 which reads: “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.” Govett finds that Darby supposes that God sees a man in a state of righteousness without any works of good intervening in the matter. Govett believes otherwise when he states that the verse tells the reader that righteousness, or a perfect sum of good works, does intervene between the Judge and the justified man. He further states that there is another difficulty raised by Darby related to this verse. He states: “He [Darby] understands ‘justification of life’ in a sense wholly new, or at least new to most theologians.” This is a glimpse into the independence of Govett from that of the emerging dispensational system and his willingness to call attention to the error of those who would suppose to lead its development and convince others of its soundness.

The focus of Govett’s concern is over Darby’s inability to see that the justification of the believer is not because of God’s grace alone. He acknowledges grace is supreme, but he adds to Darby’s thought that justification is the meeting of both grace and justice – the dues of justice as demanded by the voice of law, being first satisfied by our security; and

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20 Govett, Righteousness, 2. Govett in his book The Righteousness of Christ notes that his refutation is of five specific sources by Darby. They include: The Righteousness of God; Pauline Doctrine; Letters On the Righteousness of God; and, Brethren and Their Reviewers.

21 Ibid., 168.
then free grace extended to the believer. To this point Govett adds in correction of Darby’s oversight:

“We suppose that righteousness is the inevitable requirement of law in every case of justification; and that there is no case in which law does not extend, because the whole human race from the very first were put under law; and continue under it still in endurance of the penalty, although it no longer exists as a rule of life, since Eden and the tree of knowledge have disappeared.”

Some years later, in 1890, Govett published his work entitled: Christ the Head: The Church His Body. Govett compliments Darby at the onset of his writing:

“Mr. Darby was honored of the Lord first set forth the glorious standing of the Church, as the Body of Christ. He showed also, in a paper of much research, how the true doctrine concerning the Church was lost immediately after the apostolic age.”

Govett further acknowledges that there was much more to be said. Then he states that Darby was wrong in regard to baptism, justification, and what he regarded as even more critical, Govett states that “he [Darby] refused to own the judgment of the saints before Christ in the day of His coming.” Here he is referencing 2 Corinthians 5.

The latter criticism is of key importance. It is in the context of the initial judgment – that of the saints at the appearing of Christ at the beginning of the millennium – that is crucial to dispensational thought. On this critical tenet Govett finds Darby, the leader of the

22 Ibid., 171.
23 Ibid., 172.
25 Govett, On Colossians, 1.
26 Ibid., 1.
theological movement, to be in error. These comments of Govett occur eight years after the death of Darby, thus indicating Govett’s interest in biblical inerrancy over and above the reputation of one deceased.

It is important to note that while Darby often refuted others publicly for their biblical error, there is no evidence that Darby ever publically refuted Govett’s claims of error against him. One of the most acclaimed occurrences of battle in the public domain was Darby’s written attack on Cardinal John Henry Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vitâ Suâ*. This was not some ordinary man with whom Darby chose to disagree, but a highly respected and to this day revered leader in the Catholic Church. Yet, no defense or attack is ever leveled against Govett.

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27 It was in 1864 that Charles Kingsley attacked Newman and the Catholic Church which provided the impetus through which Newman replies with the *Apologia Pro Vitâ Suâ* (i.e., his “defense for his way of life”). As a Fellow of Oriel College, in the 1830's he was an important founder of the *Oxford Movement*. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1849 and three years later founded the first Catholic University of Ireland. Newman played an important part in the First Vatican Council.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL INFLUENCES OF THE EIGHTEENTH & NINETEENTH-CENTURIES

Govett arose in an era of profound political, social, and religious change in England. The seeds of change began in the eighteenth-century and reached fullness of impact during the nineteenth-century. This research finds no evidence to conclude that one single historic factor or, moreover, a growing body of determinants molded Govett’s theological thoughts. This research finds no revealed statement by Govett as to the power of their influence. Therefore, we have introduced in this chapter a brief overview of a broad spectrum of key events that had a known causal effect upon the religious landscape of an impacted nation.

At the dawn of the nineteenth-century, old leaders were passing away and a new generation was coming of age in the context of evangelicalism. Within that generation outspoken and assertive views were emerging. Not the least of these views was Govett’s eschatological view of the kingdom. According to Peter E. Prosser’s important work on dispensationalism and its influence on the religious movements in both America and Great Britain in the nineteenth-century,¹ millenarianism presented itself in Great Britain in two phases. The first occurred between the years 1820 to 1845, and the second phase

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between 1845 to 1878. During the first phase there was little public notice of millenarianism, but by 1845 that fact had begun to change.\(^2\) It was near the beginning of the second phase that Govett began to make his mark. Much had happened to influence public thinking over the course of the nineteenth-century – some political as influenced by such things as war in Europe and Victorian rule; some social regarding such issues as poverty and education; and some religious as evidenced by important developments in church dissension and world missions.

This broad diversity of influence must be understood in its proper context which includes the chronology of dates in which the historical events occurred but more cardinally must include the evolving development of evangelicalism, millennialism, and dispensationalism as it evolved primarily by means of the Brethren movement. These three terms are not synonymous although they overlap. Millennialism has been debated by the historical church since the early Christian era but reached an important point of interest in the nineteenth-century. Evangelicalism surfaced in Great Britain in the early eighteenth-century but it did not unilaterally adopt a millenarian understanding of prophecy. Dispensationalism sprang from the theological debates of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries and by mid-century encompassed the basic beliefs of both evangelicalism and millennialism. It is consequently not accurate to say that all millennialists were dispensationalists in the context of the nineteenth-century, nor is it accurate to say that all evangelicals in the nineteenth-century were dispensationalists.

\(^2\) Ibid., 202.
The Impact of Religious Dissent

Religious dissent in England is not restricted to modern history. It can be traced back prior to the Reformation. However, it was only after 1740 and the period up to the First World War that extra-Establishment religious movements surfaced that were competent to countermine the Church of England. Alan D. Gilbert observes that this took place in the context of the societal upheaval of the Industrial revolution.

“...it is that the social history of English religion and the relationship between religion and social change between 1740 and 1914 were dominated by the creation and subsequent gradual resolution of a conflict situation involving the Established Church on the one hand, and on the other a popular extra-Establishment Protestantism embracing both the Methodist movement (despite its Anglican origins) and those sections of the old Dissent which were caught up in the Evangelical Revival during the second half of the eighteenth century.”

In this context the question must be asked, what event or events provided the groundwork for Govett and others in the nineteenth-century to feel compelled to abandon the Established Church for another religious preference? In part it was the failure of the Church of England to achieve its monopolistic ideal. Internal tensions – ecclesiastical and political – compounded the problem but Anglicanism had never actually achieved universality. In fact, it was this widening of the religious gap during the early years of the eighteenth-century that allowed for the emergence of the Methodist movement. In this religious atmosphere George Whitefield and John Wesley began their highly irregular campaign of outdoor preaching at Kingswood, near Bristol in the late 1730's. They had

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no parochial responsibilities in the Kingswood area, leading historians to conclude that this was a deliberate reaction to the Established Church’s failure to meet the religious needs of the society at large.\textsuperscript{4} Even with the Crown and Parliament wielding political influence upon the Church, the state was not able to assert its secular authority indefinitely. By the start of the nineteenth-century the mission of the dissenters was not so much to attempt to draw people out of the Church as it was to convert sinners out of the world.\textsuperscript{5} Leading up to this point were the actions of the early Methodists who by their dissent brought into clear light a voluntaristic attitude toward religious behavior.

By the year 1830 – the year in which Govett entered Oxford – the Church of England was becoming a minority religion in relation to the strength of the non-Anglican dissenters. In a broader context the whole of the nineteenth-century is regarded as the Evangelical century. It is during that period that the activism of the movement enabled it to permeate British society.\textsuperscript{6} The Brethren as a part of that movement insisted on the heavenly calling of the church. Existing churches (as the movement understood them), were condemned as “organizations of human contrivance whose systems of government were a hindrance to the work of God.”\textsuperscript{7} Within the Evangelical century Brethren assemblies came to be viewed with a certain separateness that was the effect of their particular desire for holiness.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 3.


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 158.
The Evangelical Connection

D.W. Bebbington writes that evangelicalism is not to be equated with any particular denomination. The word’s normal meaning as late as the eighteenth-century was ‘of the gospel’ which was used in a nonpartisan sense. It is historically true that evangelicalism changed over time. Nevertheless, the characteristics of evangelicalism remain consistent. Bebbington identifies four such consistencies: “...conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.” To this end they threw themselves into an effort to spread the gospel. It was this same evangelical zeal that compelled Govett.

In 1734 the English speaking world witnessed the emergence of a movement that was to become Evangelicalism. Evangelical religion came upon the scene when the fundamental differences between Catholic and Protestant were well concreted. By the late eighteenth-century even the British crown had become limited to Protestants – as were a number of other state offices. Relative to the established church in England, evangelicalism was not aggressively hostile to it, but it did have a deleterious effect upon the old order of church and state. This occurred by virtue of its expanding numbers of non-Anglican church members in a time overshadowed by the French Revolution. David

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8 Ibid., 1.
9 Ibid., 3.
10 Ibid., 20.
Hempton notes that a House of Lords report in 1811 revealed that the Church of England was on the verge of becoming a minority religious establishment.\textsuperscript{11}

Religious zeal in the first third of the nineteenth-century formed the backdrop for Govett’s emergence into public life. This was evidenced, for example, by the unprecedented attempt to convert Irish Catholics. The synergism for this came not from within the established church nor influence of the state, but from the religious zeal of a wide range of evangelical societies.\textsuperscript{12}

Furthermore, between the years 1831 and 1836 many of the prominent religious leaders died: Robert Hall, Adam Clarke, William Wilberforce, Hannah More, Rowland Hill and Charles Simeon. Their passing gave rise to new successors – such as Darby – all of whom now had grown up in the climate of evangelicalism, thus securing its place in the political, social and religious fabric of Great Britain.\textsuperscript{13}

A second factor that contributed to the rise of evangelicalism was a resurgence of interest in Calvinism. After the defeat of Napoleon the continent was reopened and travelers were once again attracted to the city of Geneva. This attraction was due in part by the work of Robert Haldane, a Scottish Evangelical, who in 1816 began a work in

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\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 167.

\textsuperscript{13} Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 75.
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Geneva of giving lectures and advancing Calvin’s leading doctrines. This attention sparked new interest in Calvinism in an idealized way among British evangelicals.\textsuperscript{14}

Other influential church figures rose in the early nineteenth-century. One in particular stands out in changing the direction of evangelicalism. Edward Irving, a minister in the Church of Scotland, arrived in London in 1822 to pastor a church at the age of twenty-nine. Almost from the start he was a controversial figure whose messages often disturbed the hearers, if not outright enraged their good senses. Yet, he was a superb orator attracting even many aristocrats to hear him speak. In 1826 he announced that he had adopted certain prophetic beliefs to include that Christ would soon return.\textsuperscript{15}

This “soon return” of Irving’s evolving doctrinal positions was predicated on the expectation of the millennium being ushered in through the preaching of the gospel. Premillennialism was now on the rise. But within it was the distinct shift in interest to the “rapture of the church” – a belief that the church comprising both the living and resurrected saints would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (this taken from 1 Thessalonians 4:17), prior to the final tribulation. This new understanding of prophecy was preached at Irving’s church and stressed, along with general prophecy related to Christ’s second coming, at the Powerscourt Castle Conferences from 1830 onward. Powerscourt was a sort of symposium on biblical prophecy and hosted by the wealthy Lady Powerscourt.\textsuperscript{16} It is conjectured by historians that Darby must have known Irving by

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\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{16} Grestner, 22.
\end{flushleft}
attending his church on occasion. If not, it is clear that Darby would have known Irving through his presence at the Powerscourt conferences which highlighted this new doctrine. From these influences Darby pressed to include the rapture of the church in dispensational prophecy.\(^{17}\)

James Hatley Frerre added to the interest in prophecy through his published works, but in particular his public prediction of Napoleon’s downfall prior to Waterloo. From this prediction Frerre ventured to predict the start of the millennium in 1822.\(^{18}\) It was into this prophetic environment that Govett at a young age began to develop his religious experiences into deeply held theological beliefs.

### Political Influences

From the 1790's to Waterloo in 1815 it was a period of apocalyptic intensity, especially for the countries of Great Britain and France who were engaged in a struggle for supremacy. The French Revolution is observed to be directly responsible for the revival of prophetic interest. Prosser notes:

“The violence and revolutionary fervor of France, together with the uprooting of the divine right of Kings and the nobility, the overthrow of the church, and social institutions overthrown, led many Christians to believe that the end of the world was coming. The cosmology of apocalyptic thought seemed to be the closest idea to what was happening in Europe at the time. Prophetic students began to say that Daniel’s prophecies were fulfilled (in Daniel 7).”\(^{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) Prosser, 128.

\(^{18}\) Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 82.

\(^{19}\) Prosser, 129.
In Great Britain there was a massive reaction against the French Revolution. It was key in mobilizing evangelicals and it was instrumental in opening British societies to evangelical influence. This was most evident in Scotland. The threat associated with the 1793 outbreak of the Revolution coincided with a sustained evangelical energy. Mark Noll remarks: “Over the next half century, the outcomes of this energy led to an outpouring of new publications, a plethora of new voluntary agencies for missions and reform, a concentrated effort to found new schools, and a diligent application to new forms of spirituality.” Dissenters from the Church of Scotland made significant gains in membership after the turn of the century. There was also an intense reaction in England to the French Revolution that likewise gave rise to a substantial increase in the influence of evangelicals. Although the French Revolution did not create an evangelical dominance it did give evangelicalism tremendous influence in English society.

John Wolffe in the book he edited entitled, Evangelical Faith and Religious Zeal, quotes George Eliot who wrote in 1857: “Evangelicalism brought into palpable existence and operation the idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self.” While there are some historians today who have tended to see evangelicalism as an escapist religious movement most have an awareness of the social implications of evangelicalism. Moreover, evangelicalism so affected

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21 Ibid., 121.

British society that most historians have correctly identified the connection between evangelicalism’s growth and the political and cultural changes that occurred. All of this must be quantified in the context of the French Revolution. This single event forever altered the conditions upon which religion relied for christianising the people. Hempton goes further. He regards evangelicalism as the vehicle through which religious zeal was supplied, so much so that it pushed back the secularizing dynamics of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It furthermore anchored itself in Great Britain’s society until at least the First World War.23

Within the Church of England evangelical influence reached its culmination around the middle of the nineteenth-century. However, outside of the Church political presence was very apparent. More than a hundred evangelical MP’s sat in the House of Commons in the years between 1782 and 1832. Kenneth Brown notes:

“Following their participation in the successful campaign for the abolition of slavery, they made regular interventions in public life, leaving barely a single contemporary need or institution untouched. Partly under their influence parliament was turned into the vehicle for a succession of national crusades with the result that the political process itself was imbued with profound moral and religious overtones.”24

Recorded Henry Thornton: “I voted today so that if my Master had come again at that moment I might have been able to give an account of my stewardship.”25 But by

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the end of the century the intellectual waves generated by Darwinism, Romanticism, and
the ‘New Evangelicalism’ weakened the ability of evangelicals to sustain a powerful
corporate influence in political life.  

Social Influences

The tendency of historians is to engage in periodic revision. This is especially
ture of the social, political and cultural impact upon evangelicalism. One such subject
area is anti-slavery. It is an area of history that most certainly impacted Govett since it
was an extremely visible issue which had a direct affect upon evangelical theology. More
people signed petitions against slavery in the fifty years following 1785 than any single
issue in British politics. Some historians would place emphasis in the success of the
abolition of slavery upon the economic structure of a free market. Most, however, place
emphasis upon evangelicalism’s prominence in the struggle between the spiritual
bondage of sin and the physical bondage of slavery. By 1830 it was clear that the
moderate anti-slavery reforms of the previous decade would not be implemented.
Opinion in Britain had shifted from cautious moderation toward gradual improvements in
the slave system to demand that immediate emancipation be implemented by Parliament.
It was viewed as the most proper way to proceed not just from ideological
disappointments or practical frustrations, but more so, it reflected evangelical

26 Ibid., 145.
27 David Hempton, Evangelicalism and Reform, 18.
conviction. Radical change was required — the same kind of radical change that was required to confront personal sinfulness.

**Education**

Another area of social concern was the education of the poor and disenfranchised. Education has long been a concern of Christians as a work of charity. Schools were viewed as a remedy for sin and social disorder. Even so, there were some who believed it too dangerous to provide the poor with knowledge. But the evangelical, from the late eighteenth-century on, expected the poor to be educated in order that they would be able to read their Bibles and read the tracts which proclaimed the truth of the gospel and revealed the errors of their way. To this end Sunday schools were a major part of evangelicalism. They surfaced in the mid eighteenth-century in large measure to provide access to the Bible for poor children whose parents failed to provide it. The heart of the Sunday school movement centered mostly in textile towns where children were routinely found to be in full-time employment during the week. School was not possible for many children, therefore, the Sabbath provided the only opportunity for instruction.

Since Sunday schools were seen as a remedy for sin and social disorder and there emerged a movement of weekday schools which became increasingly the work of

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30 Ibid., 119.

31 Ward, 13.
the British and Foreign Schools Society as well as the National Society – both aided from 1833 by state grants — it also became apparent that teachers were needed in greater number. And while evangelicalism implied a need to train teachers there was an equally intense desire to provide proper training for their ministers and preachers. The mantra seemed to be that education did not lead to faith, but with greater faith came the desire for deeper instruction. Govett’s commentaries and articles were popular in the context of a population hungry for deeper truth.

By the early nineteenth-century clerical societies began to spring up in England. Their intent was to assist pious men in attaining higher education in order to strengthen the Church of England. Evangelicals within the Church and in the older dissenting denominations sought to advance their understanding of theology. But placing young evangelicals in the universities proved elusive. At the turn of the nineteenth-century the ancient universities were almost the exclusive domain of the Church of England. As Royle notes: “None of these institutions was particularly congenial to evangelical attitudes.” Attempts through the first half of the nineteenth-century to introduce new colleges designed to provide education for nonconformist evangelicals mostly failed. Govett graduated from Worcester College, Oxford, in 1835. Oxford and Cambridge were not divested of most of their Anglican monopolies until 1871.
Conclusion

W. R. Ward notes that the generation that was eclipsed by the French Revolution was the most important generation in modern history not only of English religion, but of most of the Christian world. Old leaders were passing away and a new generation was coming of age in the context of evangelicalism. Within that generation were emerging outspoken and assertive views. Not the least of these views was Govett’s eschatological view of the kingdom.

The changes to the religious fabric in Britain was much more than a changing of the guard. Bebbington suggests that this was due to new influences and fresh circumstances which directed the currents of opinion into different channels. As Govett emerged into the mid nineteenth-century his theological writings had been influenced by an appreciable number of national events. This chapter has identified many of the most compelling of these influences. And while the Brethren movement was an outworking of these influences — which included social, political, and religious milestones — and while Govett’s formidable years grew out of this outworking, it is difficult to determine which event or events was decisive in forging his deeply held theological perspectives. His breaking from the Anglican Church over the issue of infant baptism cannot be isolated by the impinging forces of one or two consuming events. The ongoing dissent from the Church occurred in large measure in the context of a plethora of diversity that spanned the English social spectrum in the nineteenth-century. Richard D. Floyd points

35 W. R. Ward, 1.

36 Bebbington, Evangelism In Modern Britain, 75.
out that the line that divided dissenters from Anglicans was no ordinary boundary of class, wealth, status, or region. Rather there was what he called a ‘vertical’ line that cut through the normal boundaries of rich versus poor, urban versus rural, and industrial versus agricultural. This openness toward religious thought in England during this busy historic period served as a catalyst that undergirded Govett’s preaching and writing. England had been prepared through a remarkable series of political, social, and religious happenings to be not only receptive to what Govett had to say but, moreover, hungry for his learning expressed from the pulpit and voluminous flow of published writings.

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CHAPTER 4

HISTORY OF MILLENNIALISM AND REWARD

As noted in this research the central part of Govett’s kingdom theology is rooted in an understanding of millennialism. This chapter seeks to place millennialism in a general historical context in order to more fully comprehend where and how Govett draws upon this doctrinal position.

Christian millennialism, or chiliasm as it is sometimes known, has ancient roots which goes back to the early church and to Jewish and extra-biblical roots. It served to project thoughts upon a future hope. Likewise, in the context of Britain the rise of millennialism and its relation to apocalyptic thought, which prophesied the final defeat of the Antichrist and the establishment of Christ’s millennial reign on earth, provided a future hope. In Britain, however, it proved to be much more. By the mid-seventeenth century the most popular eschatological position in England was millennialism.¹ Through the person and writings of Joseph Meade, in the late sixteenth century, it is possible to see the emerging influence of millennialism in English apocalyptic thought.² As noted by Jeffrey Jue:

² Ibid., 6.
“...interest in the Apocalypse helped to fuel the fire of revolution, since revolution could be justified now by divine mandate and framed within an apocalyptic timeline. The forces of Satan...had to be defeated in anticipation of the end of human history and the inauguration of the millennial kingdom of Christ.”

Meade gained millenarian disciples in England, the European continent and North America. He also gained to his theological position such notable figures as John Milton, Henry More, and Isaac Newton. His influence extended well into the eighteenth-century.

Millenarian thought extended into the political world as well. Those in power were either God’s representatives on earth, or working against his advancing kingdom. According to Crawford Gribben in the *Puritan Millennium*:

“The Stuarts had promoted their dynasty on the premise that they were rulers by divine right – God’s representatives on earth. The regicides, fueled by millenarian fervor, took advantage of this to argue that this was all the more reason for replacing the royal dynasty with the one they represented. The regicide was nothing less than a clearing of the way for the second coming of Christ, England’s rightful king.”

In the puritan apocalyptic tradition, few terms were more evocative as the term “antichrist” in the Bible. The existence of this character in the world was proof that the end was near. As further noted by Crawford Gribben, “Seventeenth-century exposition

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3 Ibid., 3.
4 Ibid., 5.
6 Ibid., 27.
would prove that the puritans had no shortage of apocalyptic enemies, as Antichrist crept from the Vatican into the most Reformed of congregations.”

In the mid-seventeenth century terms describing the one-thousand year reign of Christ were not settled. There was a huge diversity of terms such as millenarian, millennialist, and chiliast. Likewise, figurative and literal understandings of the millennium continued to be debated, as well as pre-, post-, and a-millennial positions concerning when Christ would return in respect to this period. In practice at the time, premillennialists were referring to three comings of Christ. Two of these comings could be described as his “second coming.” Fringe radicals such as John Archer, seized upon this divergence from orthodoxy. He declared that Christ had three comings, the first when he came to take our nature and “make satisfaction for sin;” the second coming was interpreted to be when he comes to receive his kingdom; and the third when he comes to judge the world at the Consummation. It was this unsettled theological structure into which Govett emerges in the early nineteenth-century.

According to Timothy Stunt, the first two decades of the nineteenth-century had seen a proliferation of strange writings on prophecy. Henry Drummond, a member of parliament, held studies in prophecy at his home at Albury Park, in Surrey. A frequent visitor to these studies was Edward Irving, a radical minister of sorts in the premillenialism movement, and J. H. Frere and Lewis Way, founders of the Society for the Investigation of Prophecy in 1826. With some reluctance, the Evangelical Magazine

7 Ibid., 28.
8 Stunt., Influences in the Early Development., 46.
in 1828 recognized that not all premillenialists could be described as eccentric. For the most part, these were thoughtful men engaged in the study of prophecy from a premillennial position.9

In the forward to his book entitled, The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations, George Dangerfield outlines the significant events in Ireland’s history.10 These events occurred simultaneous to Darby’s life. They are events in history which Dangerfield describes as “inevitable,” that is to say, they are events which occurred to the disadvantage of people and could not be prevented. As an example, the Dublin Easter Rising in April of 1916, an event which happened years after Darby’s death, is an event whose reality is steeped in past history. As a military coup it was (and its leaders apparently expected it to be), a failure. It lasted only a week and the Republic which it proclaimed did not appear until many years later and then in a very different form. Yet it has that peculiar tragic dignity, writes Dangerfield, which is associated with the term “inevitable.”

Several great events made it inevitable. The most significant natural event was the Great Famine which lasted several years and struck in 1845. For the Catholics who survived the Famine and resisted emigration, a great change was in store. It resulted in a disciplinary reform within the priesthood and a religious revival among the population. Yet, religious reform in the face of natural disaster is but one small piece of the long history of civil and religious unrest in that country. Beyond this natural disaster are the

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9 Ibid., 46.

struggles between two cultures, Protestant English and Catholic Irish, invader and invaded. J.G. Bellett writes of Darby of these troubling times:

“It was in the year 1827, that the late Archbishop of Dublin, in a charge delivered to the clergy of his diocese, recommended that a petition should go up to the legislature seeking increased protection from them in the discharge of their ministerial duties, as the teachers of religion in these lands. John Darby was then a curate in the County of Wicklow, and often did I visit him in his mountain parish. This charge of his diocesan greatly moved him; he could not understand the common Christianity of such a principle, as it assumed that ministers of Christ in doing their business as witnesses against the world for a rejected Jesus, should, on meeting the resistance of the enemy, turn round and seek security from the world. This greatly offended him. He printed his objections to such a principle in a pretty large pamphlet, and without publishing it or putting it on sale, sent copies of it to all the clergy of the diocese. All this had a very decided influence on his mind...it was never again what it had been.”

Darby is not ordinarily known as a historian. His name is most often spoken of in terms of theology and the dispensational movement. Yet taking on John Henry Newman in a written rebuttal was no small undertaking and demonstrated in doing so an acute understanding of Church history and its theological debates. He was well prepared for his undertaking. Darby was reputed to have been a diligent and critical student of Hebrew and Greek Scriptures and of “anything of value” regarding revelation. He was also very well versed in Church history. In later years he had quite an extensive library on topics including philosophy, science, and especially geology. He possessed rare editions of Scripture including a 1514 edition. He had an impressive collection of books on the Church fathers, books on geography, archeology, travel, history, and theology.¹²


¹²Weremchuk, 56.
He was well read on the subject of the Church, and its Councils by the time he read Newman’s *Apologia*, and it was without great effort that he took it upon himself to criticize Newman by the use of his rhetorical skills as well as his keen understanding of history.

**Reward In Its Theological Context**

Broadly speaking, and for the purposes of this research, reward is understood to mean a recompense that is due to the believer at the time of judgment. It is a reward received in the life to come for endurance for the sake of Christ in this present life. The idea is one of reward in the Kingdom as a result of Christian living – something which is added to, or apart from, eternal life. In 1 Corinthians 9:23ff, Paul uses the metaphor of the athlete to emphasize the prize which only one contestant can win. He repeats the metaphor once again in Philippians 3:14 when he states, “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” R.P. Martin states, “Paul clearly has in mind here the events of the last day, the resurrection, and the judgment which will also hold the distribution of rewards to the faithful believers.”

Endurance is rewarded with a prize.

Most often the debate does not center upon whether there is reward in the life to come, so much as over the issue of motivation of the person who seeks the reward. This, of course, brings into view the antinomian debate – a view drawn from the misconception of man’s response to God’s grace and one which states that the Christian is not bound by

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any moral law. If eternal life is by grace through faith, can reward be pursued through conduct?

Eternal life is expressed sometimes in the NT, and by Paul in particular, simply as a gift from God, and at other times as something that is a reward which must be attained through worthy pursuit. Additionally, there are times when Paul goes even further with his teaching of reward. This is seen in his recompense premise which accentuates the individual reward of varying degrees based upon a believer’s collective lifetime of deeds – or a believer’s “life record.” While it appears on the surface that Paul is advocating a type of works-righteousness, in point of fact he never loses sight of his true conviction that the grace of God applies to all believers at every stage of sanctification.

Still the question remains, is pursuit of reward something which is encompassed by sanctification, and a legitimate component of atonement? Why pursue reward and at what relationship to disinterested benevolence? One of the most cogent answers to these questions can be found in C.S. Lewis’ address entitled The Weight of Glory. Lewis states: “We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair.”¹⁴ For Lewis reward is closely associated with the notion of glory.

“Perhaps it seems rather crude to describe glory as the fact of being ‘noticed’ by God. But this is almost the language of the New Testament. St. Paul promises to those who love God not, as we should

expect, that they will know Him, but that they will be known by Him (1 Cor. 8:3).”\textsuperscript{15}

Lewis goes on to say that it might be possible to think too much of one’s own glory. In this light he says:

“It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor’s glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken...Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.”\textsuperscript{16}

It is in this sense that Paul speaks of his reward when he says in Philippians 4:1, “Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!”

\textbf{Current Debate}

It is useful to place into perspective how reward for the believer in the life to come is currently understood. This understanding is often filled with biases which disguise the real theological debate and cast a shadow upon one’s ability to see the debate as it has historically existed. There are several contemporary studies on reward which are academic in nature and are worthy of mention. Several unpublished doctoral dissertations have been written in the past fifty years on the subject of reward. One of the most notable dissertations was written by James E. Rosscup in 1976, but its writing is concentrated...
principally on 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, and only generally on the breadth of the Pauline Epistles. Apart from the unpublished doctoral thesis of Stephen H. Travis, which takes up only in part the concept of forfeiture of future reward in the Pauline Epistles, and that of Floyd Filson, few other extensive works exist on the concept of reward and its implication for the believer, and none deal specifically with the idea of degrees of reward apart from two articles which appeared in the early 1990's. The first appeared in the *Journal of Theological Studies* in 1991 entitled “Degrees of Glory: Protestant Doctrine and the Concept of Rewards Hereafter.” The second appeared a year later in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* entitled “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven.” The former has proven to be invaluable to the development of this chapter, while the latter serves as an example of the misinformation which currently exists on the subject. It is difficult for believers to grasp the significance of the Reformer’s understanding of reward if such scholarship as that which appeared in JETS goes unchallenged. It is to this latter article which this research now turns.

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Unlike Govett and the millennialists of the nineteenth-century, currently much confusion exists concerning the doctrine of degrees of reward. This is due in part from the church ignoring the doctrine for many years as well as the conspicuous absence of its debate in church history since the Reformation. Some would espouse that the doctrine is primarily the domain of dispensationalists, yet history tells another story. Other contemporaries are simply uncomfortable with any doctrine that places reward as a separate and distinct gift at the judgment apart from that of eternal life. C.L. Blomberg writes, “In the twenty years of my adult Christian life I have grown progressively more uncomfortable with any formulation that differentiates among believers as regards our eternal rewards.” To make such a statement flies in the face of N.T. teaching that is replete with expression of reward concomitant with so many verses representing so many authors in the N.T.– not the least of which is the Apostle Paul. Blomberg’s concern for an accurate reading on soteriology is much the same debate as that which caused theological division in the sixteenth century – namely that of a differing perspective of the soteriological significance of works. Nevertheless, his premise that this issue is divided neatly between theological systems (i.e., between Reformed Covenantal and Dispensational theology) is unfounded. To be sure, each theological system approaches the doctrine with certain presuppositions that affect peripheral issues, but the bottom line is still the same for both systems – there is reward and it is immersed in grace through and through. Still Blomberg argues that the doctrine of reward is largely born from a dispensational heritage, but grants that it owes its understanding of justification to

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22 Ibid., 159.
Reformational tradition. He mistakenly notes that a belief in a doctrine of degrees of reward is thus a “contrary doctrine” to the Reformational traditions. He additionally states, “Believers may enter into God’s family entirely apart from their own good works, but the degrees to which they will enjoy heaven is said exclusively to depend on how they live out their Christian life – to what extent they obey God’s commandments and mature in the faith. In short, though few would put it so boldly, one is left with justification by faith and sanctification by works.” If Blomberg were to have dealt with the Sixteenth century writings of Calvin alone he would have had to remain silent on this subject of reward being linked to a doctrinal model of justification by works. Calvin although not writing per se on degrees of reward has much to say about a believer’s works in the sense that they are the outpouring of a believer’s understanding of God’s grace and His justification.

What is also equally troubling with this theological misunderstanding is that Blomberg and others are not willing to assign any N.T. text to the understanding of reward. Blomberg states in his article, “I do not believe there is a single N.T. text that, when correctly interpreted, supports the notion that believers will be distinguished one from another for all eternity on the basis of their works as Christians. What is more, I am convinced that when this unfounded doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven is acted upon consistently – though, fortunately, it often is not – it can have highly damaging consequences for the motivation and psychology of living the Christian life.” Blomberg

23 Ibid., 159.

24 Ibid., 160.
is not alone in his conclusions. Filson also states, “Many Protestants are absolutely unwilling to consider the possibility that a Christian doctrine of works had a place in Paul’s thinking. This unwillingness is due to the true conviction that Paul’s message of the grace of God applies to all stages of the Christian life.”25 This then has been the central argument throughout the history of the church, and merely became accentuated with the Reformation. E. Disley writes, “In the sixteenth-century, western Christianity divided not over the image of heaven but over getting there...the Protestant rejection of the merit of works in respect to justification, necessitated a radical revision of the reformed Christian perspective of the hereafter, and it inaugurated a debate which produced some degree of Protestant consensus, but by no means unanimity.”26

What fueled Blomberg’s article is the lordship-salvation debate. His purpose was to refute an earlier article which appeared in JETS written by J. MacArthur and was based upon his book entitled The Gospel According to Jesus.27 E. Radmacher wrote a response to MacArthur’s article and likened it to a view of authority akin to Roman Catholicism.28 Not only does the debate over lordship-salvation rage on, but the debate over the process of sanctification and its relationship to justification is at the heart of the debate, as well as occasionally the Arminian view of eternal security. To the former point Blomberg takes a lordship-salvation approach to rewards when he states that Paul did not

25 Filson, 105.

26 Disley, 77.


write concerning degrees of reward apart from eternal life. According to Blomberg his persistence in “running the race” so as not to lose his reward is only seen as separate from eternal salvation when viewed too simplistically. States Blomberg, “A too simplistic understanding of ‘eternal security’ has probably led many Christians to doubt that Paul could have seriously considered not ‘making it to heaven.’ But true Reformed doctrine recognizes that saints are those who persevere.” A similar statement by A. Hoekema suggests agreement: “Only as he thus continued to discipline himself did Paul feel justified in claiming his spiritual security in Christ. He did not dare to claim this blessing while being careless and indolent in his daily battle against sin.”

Yet, was Paul merely intent on making sure of his own salvation? His own words speak for him in that regard. Prior to looking to the Reformation, it is helpful to next place into perspective Paul’s writings on the subject of reward (apart from eternal life) and follow the development of his argument that reward is based upon the individual believer’s life record. His were not the writings of a Jew who was espousing the “reward and punishment” view of the O.T., but was developing a much broader idea of reward which was recompensed in the life after Judgment.

As presented thus far, one can clearly see that the debate over reward is doctrinally far reaching and complex. Nevertheless, there must be no question concerning the fact that Paul clearly teaches justification through grace alone and that God’s grace extends throughout the process of sanctification. Filson states, “This central

29 Blomberg, 163.

teaching [grace] of Paul is not to be denied, but it is just as undeniable that at times and with unquestionable earnestness he asserted that each man’s life record would be examined and an award made on the basis of that record.  

Several portions of Paul’s epistles point to this principle but perhaps the most clearly articulated description is to be found in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17. In these verses Paul appears to be expressing a principle that extends to all believers. He indicated that the only true foundation of the believer’s work is in Christ Jesus. Using a building metaphor Paul indicates that while other workers may carry on the task of enlarging upon this foundation, each workman must be cautious about how he builds because the Judgment will reveal the true character of the work. This character will be revealed by fire (πυρὶ). If what a man does survives, he will receive his reward. But if it does not survive this smelting process he will suffer loss (ζημίωθῃ στειρωθῇ). Verse 15 states that “he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” There are some who assert that Paul intended this to be a literal testing by fire – as in the apocalyptic sense of Isaiah 29:6 which reads, “the LORD Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire.” However, the various metaphors of planting and building seem to better suggest that Paul intended here to suggest the fire as a continuation of his metaphors.

Still, regardless of whether these verses are to be understood literally or figuratively, Paul clearly regards that lives will be examined and that which is viewed to be praiseworthy will receive reward, while what is viewed as unworthy will be cast aside.

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31 Filson, 105.
as that which is perishable and the believer will suffer loss. Since Paul’s teaching in his epistles moves beyond the Jewish concept of reward and punishment, it is Paul’s intent that these verses not express the idea of punishment, but rather, the loss of reward in measurable degrees. And as Govett consistently writes, reward here goes beyond a mere correlation with eternal life. Reward in these verses is individual; it is dispensed according to a believer’s life record as Christ interprets it; and the reward is justly recompensed. One’s life record is a reflection of the consistent earnestness of the pursuit of holiness in this life – the casting aside in growing measure of the things which hinder. What hinders is self-interest, a self-love which is directed away from the good of others and the glory of God.

**Reward Viewed Through the Sermons of the Awakenings**

We seek next to look specifically at the views of Jonathan Edwards and Timothy Dwight regarding reward. Both wrote sermons which have been preserved and that articulate their views on the future life quite clearly. It is intended that the insight of these two prominent leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries respectively will shed light on the understanding of reward in their day. However, before that portion of research is presented it is necessary to place the argument of reward into its theological context in order to properly comprehend why disinterested benevolence, as debated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries in New England, is linked to the basis of understanding reward in the life to come. As we shall attempt to demonstrate, reward is a complex theological concept that finds little agreement among scholars today.
As noted previously, the theological debates of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries in New England did not include what transpired in the afterlife. Dwight, champion of the second Awakening and president of Yale College, in a series of sermons expresses his understanding of reward. His sermon is based upon 2 Peter 3:13 which reads in the NIV: “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” This sermon sets the groundwork for understanding that reward is an eternal state for the believer that will be ushered in by a new heaven and a new earth. Dwight states that: “These virtuous beings will begin the possession of happiness and glory, to continue only happy and glorious forever...the immense of duration will be an unclouded, everlasting day.” In this sermon Dwight reveals himself to understand reward in the same context as Calvin. There is no separation of thought between eternal life and reward – they are one in the same. Dwight makes his position clear when he states: “The righteous are saved from perdition, and rewarded with eternal life, solely on account of the obedience of Christ.” Nevertheless, Dwight clearly sees a difference in their “allotments.” He states:

“Their own works [the saved] are merely the proportional measure of their reward. All are alike interested in the Righteousness of Christ; and are therefore alike entitled to a reward. But here is a real, and considerable, difference in the degrees of excellence, which they severally obtain, and exhibit; and this difference, we are taught by the

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33 Ibid., 484.

34 Ibid., 496.
A second sermon entitled *The Remoter Consequences of Death: Happiness of Heaven*, also places emphasis upon reward consisting of an eternal new heaven and a new earth. Using Revelation 21:1-3 as his text, Dwight seeks to express something of the particular state of the redeemed in their future existence. He states: “Private, separate interests will be felt, and known, no more.” To this extent he mirrors Edwards – as we shall demonstrate – in that universal good will be upon every heart. Nowhere, however, do we find that Dwight sought to draw a correlation between disinterested benevolence in this life with the believer’s reward in the life to come apart from a suggestion that there are different “allotments” – presumably of such issues as joy and peace. Yet, he makes no effort to introduce the hearers of his sermon to the earthly road which leads to such reward. Edwards, on the other hand, does seek to provide not only a link with the conduct of the believer in this life and the reward in the life to come, but he provides a marvelously articulated glimpse into “what” the reward is in heaven – which he clearly sees is dispensed in degrees.

In Edwards’ sermon entitled *Heaven, A World Of Charity Or Love*, he speaks on the topic of reward. His emphasis is slightly different than Dwight’s in that he places

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35 Ibid., 496.
36 Ibid., 487.
37 Ibid., 491.
not only emphasis upon the nature of the degrees of reward in heaven, but he also speaks of the disinterested benevolence in this life, the motive required, and the nature of self-love which links the believer with the reward to come. Edwards’ text for his sermon is 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. The first conclusion Edwards makes regarding reward in heaven is a link made between that which “draws upon the heart” on earth and that which is good in God’s sight. To this Edwards declares these things to be all the more apparent as lovely in heaven. He states:

“There [heaven] they will find those things that appeared most lovely to them while they dwelt on earth; the things that met the approbation of their judgments, and captivated their affections, and drew away their souls from the most dear and pleasant of earthly objects. There they will find those things that were their delight here below, and on which they rejoiced to meditate, and with the sweet contemplation of which their minds were often entertained; and there, too, the things which they chose for their portion, and which were so dear to them that they were ready for the sake of them to undergo the severest sufferings, and to forsake even father, and mother, and kindred, and friends, and wife, and children, and life itself. All the truly great and good, all the pure and holy and excellent from this world, and it may be from every part of the universe, are constantly tending toward heaven.”

As noted previously, Edwards remarks that God delights in his own beauty, and therefore, he must necessarily delight in the creature’s holiness. This holiness is recompensed in heaven according to the degree holiness is manifested in the believer in this life. Edwards states:

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39 1 Corinthians 13:8-10: “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

40 Edwards, Charity, 330-1.
“In every heart in heaven, love dwells and reigns. The heart of God is the original seat or subject of love. Divine love is in him, not as in a subject that receives it from another, but as in its original seat, where it is of itself. Love is in God, as light is in the sun, which does not shine by a reflected light, as the moon and planets do, but by its own light, and as the great fountain of light. And from God, love flows out toward all the inhabitants of heaven. It flows out, in the first place, necessarily and infinitely, toward his only-begotten Son; being poured forth, without mixture, as to an object that is infinite, and so fully adequate to all the fullness of a love that is infinite. And this infinite love is infinitely exercised toward him.”

And while on earth the believer struggles over motive and degrees of self-love which leads to selfishness – distancing oneself from the holiness God seeks, – in heaven there will not be what Edwards calls “coldness of heart.” Disinterested benevolence will be found in its purest form. To this Edwards declares:

“In heaven there shall be no remaining enmity, or distaste, or coldness, or deadness of heart towards God and Christ. Not the least remainder of any principle of envy shall exist to be exercised toward angels or other beings who are superior in glory; nor shall there be aught like contempt or slighting of those who are inferiors.”

It is here that Edwards begins to demonstrate his understanding of rewards being recompensed by “degree.” He continues his thought by speaking of degrees of reward as “stations in glory”:

“Those that have a lower station in glory than others, suffer no diminution of their own happiness by seeing others above them in glory. On the contrary, all the members of that blessed society rejoice in each other’s happiness, for the love of benevolence is perfect in them all. Every one has not only a sincere, but a perfect goodwill to every other. Sincere and strong love is greatly gratified and delighted in the prosperity of the beloved object; and if the love be perfect, the greater the prosperity of the beloved is, the more is the lover pleased and

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41 Ibid., 332.
42 Ibid., 335.
delighted; for the prosperity of the beloved is, as it were, the food of love, and therefore the greater that prosperity, the more richly is love feasted. The love of benevolence is delighted in beholding the prosperity of another, as the love of complacence is, in beholding the beauty or perfection of another. So that the superior prosperity of those that are higher in glory, is so far from being a hindrance to the degree of love felt toward them, that it is an addition to it, or a part of it.”

That which is only strived for in this life but never truly attained relative to unselfish love finds its perfection in heaven. Edwards comments:

“There is undoubtedly an inconceivably pure, sweet, and fervent love between the saints in glory; and that love is in proportion to the perfection and amiableness of the objects beloved, and therefore it must necessarily cause delight in them when they see that the happiness and glory of others are in proportion to their amiableness, and so in proportion to their love to them. Those that are highest in glory, are those that are highest in holiness, and therefore are those that are most beloved by all the saints; for they most love those that are most holy, and so they will all rejoice in their being the most happy. And it will not be a grief to any of the saints to see those that are higher than themselves in holiness and likeness to God, more loved also than themselves, for all shall have as much love as they desire, and as great manifestations of love as they can bear; and so all shall be fully satisfied; and where there is perfect satisfaction, there can be no reason for envy.”

Holiness strived for in this life is invariably complicated by the sin nature, while holiness in the life to come is recompensed justly and in degrees. Furthermore, heavenly holiness is displayed in its purest form. States Edwards:

“...And, besides, the inferior in glory will have no temptation to envy those that are higher than themselves, for those that are highest will not only be more loved by the lower for their higher holiness, but they will also have more of the spirit of love to others, and so will love those that

43 Ibid., 335.

44 Ibid., 336.
are below them more than if their own capacity and elevation were less.”

Paul never describes what the believer’s reward will be in heaven, only that he should strive to receive all the reward obtainable. Neither does Edwards make an effort at precisely defining what that reward is, only to say that the believer’s employment will be centered in “praising and serving God.” And this the saint will do perfectly.

Finally, Edwards reflects on the believer’s disinterested benevolence in this life – comparing self-love to that found in the life to come as recompensed to the saint in glory:

“There are many principles contrary to love, that make this world like a tempestuous sea. Selfishness, and envy, and revenge, and jealousy, and kindred passions keep life on earth in a constant tumult, and make it a scene of confusion and uproar, where no quiet rest is to be enjoyed except in renouncing this world and looking to another. But oh! what rest is there in that world which the God of peace and love fills with his own gracious presence, and in which the Lamb of God lives and reigns, filling it with the brightest and sweetest beams of his love; where there is nothing to disturb or offend, and no being or object to be seen that is not surrounded with perfect amiableness and sweetness...”

But who are they who will enjoy the truly pure state of disinterested benevolence? Edwards identifies them in three categories. The first are those who have had the principles or seed of the same love that reigns in heaven implanted in their hearts in this world. The second are those who have freely chosen the happiness that flows from the exercise and enjoyment of such love as is in heaven – above all other conceivable happiness. And, the third are those from the love that is in them, are in “heart and life, in

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45 Ibid., 337.
46 Ibid., 350.
principle and practice, struggling after holiness.\textsuperscript{47} To this Edwards concludes: holy love makes them long for holiness. True disinterested benevolence finds its way to a man’s heart. It is a heart which struggles after holiness because the believer has an interest in heaven, and therefore he struggles with that sin that would keep him from it.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 357.
CHAPTER 5

THE MILLENNIUM AND THE HISTORICAL CHURCH

While the previous chapter seeks to explain millennialism in its general historical and doctrinal context, this chapter seeks to more specifically understand the theological debate of millennialism in the context of the historical church itself. Govett helped to draw attention to millennialism and relaunch serious debate in the modern church.

Charles E. Hill, in his work entitled, *Regnum Caelorum, Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, states that it is reported that nearly all researchers claim that the end-time conception and doctrine designated as “chiliasm” dominated the whole Church until the great Alexandrians, and in the West into the fourth centuries.¹ Still some disagree. Millard J. Erickson wrongly asserts, “No trace of this theology can be found in the early history of the church.”² S. Kellogg in his work *Are Premillennialists Right* indicated that it is agreed upon by most Christians that the Word of God predicts an age

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of universal righteousness and peace such as yet to come upon this earth. The present power of sin and evil will end and in its place holiness and truth will appear. For some the teaching of this covers much of the O.T. and the N.T. For others the concentration of proof texts would be few and appear mainly in Revelation chapter twenty. Still other modern writers go outside of the canonical Scriptures to certain noncanonical apocalyptic sources such as 1 Enoch 10:19; and 2 Baruch 29:5. And because this period has been identified by many expositors with the thousand years of Revelation 20, it has come to be popularly known as the Millennium.

The Early Church

One of the central themes of early patristic eschatology was the belief in the premillennial return of Christ. States L. Crutchfield:

“It has generally been accepted among conservative scholars that this doctrine held currency in the ante-Nicene period...Although there has been a general consensus that the early Church was premillennial in its eschatological expectation, the question of that doctrine’s origin among the first fathers of the Church has been the focus of considerable discussion.”

Many leaders of the early Church were struggling to understand the teaching of Scripture concerning the return of Christ. Their struggles are useful for the modern reader of the Bible as one seeks to answer the difficult questions surrounding eschatology. There are many varieties of interpretation among the ante-Nicene fathers concerning the

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significance and nature of Christ’s return. Irenaeus and Origen, for example, are as
different in their understanding of Christ’s return as is theologically possible.

Some today misjudge the history of the millennial argument and claim it to be a
modern debate. To the contrary, authorities such as Adolf Harnack, and Philip Schaff have
cited the documentation of premillennialism in the early history of the church. H. C.
Thiessen holds that the Early Church was premillennial, and himself points to authorities
who cite the wide occurrence of the chiliastic belief as found in Justin, Irenaeus, and
Tertullian. D. Bosworth provides proof of Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and
Lactantius as evidence of the early origin of chiliasm.5

Berkhof is not willing to concede historical ground to the chiliasts. He
maintains, “During the early Christian centuries the prevailing, though not officially
recognized view of the Kingdom of God, was eschatological, and in some cases
Chiliastic.” While he is willing to recognize that a few of the Church Fathers were
clearly chiliastic, he holds that they formed the exception rather than the rule.6 As
previously noted, Crutchfield finds the premillennial return of Christ to be a central theme
of the early patristic eschatology. Quoting Froom, he states, “This conception of the reign
of resurrected and translated saints with Christ on this earth during the millennium –
popularly known as chiliasm – was the increasingly prevailing belief of this time.”7

5 Charles L. Feinberg, Millennialism: The Two Major Views: The Premillennial and Amillennial Systems of
6 Ibid., 94.
7 Crutchfield, 411.
D. H. Kromminga is often quoted as an authority on the history of chiliasm in the early church, and while some disagree with him or claim that he concedes positions unnecessarily, his work is worthy of extensive note.

While some find chiliasm to be a modern debate, still others desire to attach a pre-biblical phenomena to it, claiming that the idea is much older than the Bible. This concept, they claim, is found in Zoroastrianism which boasts of a period of one thousand years following the downfall of hostile powers. So too there is found similar hopes among the Babylonians, Egyptians, and among the Greeks and Romans. Yet, states Kromminga, “the derivation of these seed thoughts from the Israelitish and Jewish literature is far more promising than their derivation from pagan literature.” Yet, a review of the O.T. prophecy does not reveal a millennial hope per se. It simply provides for a reign of the Messiah. But it cannot be denied that in these prophetic portions of Scripture there is a distinctly chiliastic view that could, and did, easily find its way into Jewish thought.

Unlike other early doctrines of the Church, such as the bodily resurrection, Chiliasm eventually fell into disapproval and for many centuries considered a departure from accepted beliefs by both the church in the East and West. Charles Hill states that the story of chiliasm’s drift from the center to the periphery is explained by citing these developments:

“(1) chiliasm’s (alleged) association with Montanism, which is thought to have brought opprobrium upon the doctrine in the eyes of the larger

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Church; (2) the influence of Origen’s spiritualizing of eschatology and allegorizing of Scripture; (3) the related infiltration of the Church by “Greek philosophy” or at least the Hellenistic Zeitgeist, which counteracted more Hebraic and “realistic” modes of thought; (4) the progressive deterioration of the Church’s once vibrant hope of Christ’s return, a delay aided by the peace of Constantine; and finally, (5) the authoritative and enormously influential rejection of chiliasm by Augustine.”

Any historical perspective on millennialism must be drawn from the writings of its representatives. Justin Martyr and Ireneus provide some light on the extent to which chiliasm in the church of the second century, and Jerome and Augustine provide the same for the church in the fifth century. Little agreement can be reached concerning the question of the extent to which the ancient Church held chilastic views. It can be shown geographically to have existed in the Asia Minor, Egypt, Africa, and Austria. But is not as easy to demonstrate the extent to which chiliasm was absorbed into the Christian population of these regions. One must be careful about the extent to which one makes a claim for chiliasm. Bultema, for example, demonstrates a propensity to solicit every ancient writer for his position of chiliasm who voiced the second coming of Christ. Barnabas is often included in the list of ancient chiliasts. His Epistle is one of the earliest Christian writings outside of the Bible and is dated around A.D. 90 or after. Some doubt the claim that he was a chiliast. While his Epistle contains references to scripture and various explanations that may be traced to later chiliasm thoughts it is solely on this basis that claims are made that Barnabas is one of them. Although he worked with the idea of a world-Sabbath and also with Daniel’s ten kings, he applies the promises to Israel

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9 Hill, Regnum Caelorum. 3

unswervingly to the Christian Church. On this basis Barnabas is the oldest amillennialist.\textsuperscript{11}

The very fact that Barnabas wrote so emphatically against Judaism suggests to some that’s he was writing in opposition to the apostolic fathers. The use of Barnabas’ \textit{Epistle} attests to the fact that there may have been in the early Church a unified need for his antijudaistic polemics, since wherever the \textit{Epistle} was read in churches for the education of the members, it must have acted with the full support of the local ecclesiastical authorities. Therefore, it may have had the effect of serving as a tool of official opposition to chiliasm.

Justin Martyr and Ireneus, on the other hand, can both claim to be premillennial writers. Justin Martyr argues for both a restoration of Jerusalem and a thousand year reign of Christ. He does this using principally Revelation chapter 20. Ireneus can claim to be both premillennial and covenantal. Justin Martyr lived around the middle of the second-century and Ireneus lived near the close of the same century. Between Barnabas and these two men, there is reasonable evidence and testimony which covers the entirety of the second-century. In addition, Barnabas writes from Egypt, Justin Martyr from Asia Minor, and Ireneus from Gaul thereby providing testimony which covers the entire Church geographically.

However extensively chiliasm may have been held in the ancient Church, what remains of writings from each are not extensive. In addition to Justin Martyr and Ireneus, other main sources include Tertullian, Commodianus, Victorinus, and Lactantius. Of

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 267.
these Commodianus, Victorinus, and Lactantius provide the most extensive expositions of chiliasm from this ancient period. In addition, Hippolytus labored in Rome in the early part of the third-century and wrote a treatise entitled *On Christ and Antichrist*. He is claimed to be by some a chiliast. The title of his work may lead to that expectation since it appears to be so plainly eschatological. Yet, it is practically silent on the kingdom, making no distinct mention of the millennium. Some look to this summary as proof text which the author gives near the beginning of his treatise:

“...it is proper that we take the Holy Scriptures themselves in hand and find from them what and of which manner the coming of antichrist is; on one occasion and at what time that impious one shall be revealed; and whence and from what tribe he shall come; and what his name is; what is indicated by the number in the Scripture; and how he shall work error among the people, gathering them from the ends of the earth; and how he shall glorify himself as God; and what is and shall be; and how the sudden appearing of the Lord shall be revealed from heaven; and what the conflagration of the whole world shall be; and what the glorious and heavenly kingdom of the saints is to be, when they reign together with Christ; and the punishment of the wicked by fire.”

It is plain that this summary of the contents of the treatises hardly leaves room for a millennium, since it places the world conflagration before both the reign of the saints with Christ in the punishment of the wicked by fire. It appears that Hippolytus’ perspective on the coming events looks more like the amillennial approach to the end times than like chiliastic. Hippolytus raised the question of how one arrived at the idea that Christ was born in the year 5500. He provided this absurd answer:

“Learn that easily, O man; for the things that took place of old in the wilderness, under Moses, in the case of the tabernacle, were constituted types and emblems of spiritual mysteries, in order that, when the truth

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12 Ibid., 61.
came in Christ in these last days, you might be able to perceive that these things were fulfilled. For He says to him, ‘and thou shalt make the ark of imperishable wood, and shalt overlay it with pure gold machine and without; and thou shalt make the length of it two cubits and a half, and the breadth thereof one cubit and a half, and a cubit and a half the height;’ which measures when summed up together, make five cubits and a half, so that the 5500 years might be signified thereby.”

Lactantius, A.D. 260-330, is the last great literary representative of ancient Christian chiliasm. He was tutor to Crispus, a son of Constantine the Great; and wrote his *Divine Institutes* for the first Christian Roman emperor. (The name suggests the later *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of John Calvin). The last of the seven extensive books bring us forth to the chiliastic views of the author.

While much more could be written about the historical context of the church and its position on millennialism as a doctrine

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14 Kromminga, 72.
CHAPTER 6

GOVETT’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE MILLENNIUM & ITS REWARD

This chapter identifies Govett’s understanding of the millennium and its associated reward through his own writings. He majored upon eschatology in his writings and strongly debated those who wrote in disagreement.

Govett’s *The Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture*¹ is not his first book published, but it holds one of the theological foundations for his understanding of biblical theology – that foundation being the millennium and its associated reward in Revelation chapter twenty, verse 4-6.² It should be noted that his original four-volumes on Revelation was no longer obtainable when the abridged edition, containing less than a fourth of the original, was published in 1864. Therefore, this chapter begins with this foundation.


² Revelation 20:4-6 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ³ But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁴ Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. (KJV).
Govett On the Millennium

Govett’s theological understanding extends well beyond the issue of millennial reign and conditional reward for the believer. Nevertheless, the reader of his work cannot help but be impressed with the fact that his exegesis of most biblical text is invariably connected in its biblical theology to Christ’s second coming and the promises associated with it. For example, even the forfeiture of entrance into the Promised Land by the Israelites becomes an instrument in the hands of Govett to pronounce a metaphor related to the denial of entrance for believers seeking admission into the kingdom of heaven.

Govett’s Commentary on the Book of Revelation

Recognizing the controversy surrounding Revelation 20:4-6 he begins his analysis with a prayer that the Holy Spirit guide both he and his readers. The first inquiry he raises concerns the question as to whether the resurrection spoken of in verse 5 is figurative or literal. He writes that this is the point of greatest controversy in the book, but believes it is easily decided. Govett firmly states:

“...if this resurrection may be explained away, so may all others. We answer next, [italics his] That if the resurrection be figurative and corporate, the death which precedes it is figurative and corporate also. We forbid you [the allegorists], then, to assume that Christ’s cause is put down by the literal beheading and slaughter of individual believers. That is literal death, and you may not steal our weapon...and if you are Calvinists, you will find it a live bombshell in the camp.”

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He moves next to identifying the views of those who today would be identified as post-millennialists. It is historically interesting to note that he refers to this group as “antimillennarians” – those whose views hold that the present dispensation is to continue until the end of the world and “more and more is the gospel to increase.”

For Govett the present dispensation will end and will usher in yet another dispensation that will begin with Christ’s return and reign that will literally last for one thousand years. But he is not content to leave the subject at that level. He goes typically deeper. Will all believers reign with Christ during these thousand years? His answer is an unequivocal, no. According to Govett, the kingdom is never said to belong to those who only believe. In his theological understanding the entrance into the kingdom should not be too narrow nor too wide. The kingdom should not be for all believers, nor should it be only for those who suffer death for Christ. In verse 6 the believers who arise in the first resurrection are addressed as “blessed and holy.” The description of these who participate in the first resurrection as blessed and holy is described in contrast to some proving themselves as unworthy of their calling as servants. They are dismissed as unworthy to partake in that reward. Govett finds that “blessed” is the word continually

5 Ibid., 510.

used of Christ to describe those partaking in the millennial kingdom. Often such as these the second death has no power.

Often passed over by dispensationalists in verse 6 is the first part of the phrase “...but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” In a rush to expound on the thousand year reign the contrast between being priests and reigning with Christ goes unnoticed. Govett sees deeper meaning.

“Here is at length the lawful union of the kingly and priestly offices. Under the Law, the kings might not be priests: and no priest became king. Under the Gospel, the saints were priests, but were forbidden to be kings. 1 Cor. 4:8-14. Now the risen are both priests and kings. Here is the perfection of government. For the rulers are the righteous, no longer tempted by sin or Satan. With full knowledge, perfect impartiality, and love of God and man, they rule their subjects. If there be any evil, it springs from the governed, not from the governors.”

The reader is also encouraged to understand that the thousand years is not the final state. It is a transition period between the old earth and the new which takes on the character of both.

**Govett On Reward**

Articulation of degrees of reward for believers in the millennium and denial of entrance for some is exclusively the scholarship of Govett in the nineteenth-century. He articulates it throughout the century and upon his death its theme was sounded by a small number of followers into the first quarter of the twentieth-century, after which a lapse of

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8 Ibid., 526.
fifty years occurred before Govett was rediscovered and a flurry of contemporary theologians again pick up the cause. As his books consistently show, persevering in this life as a believer is not only honoring to Christ in the process of sanctification, but adds a blessing. The blessing consists of entrance into the kingdom and reigning with Christ throughout the millennium.

Govett’s Commentary on the Gospel of John

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Govett begins his introduction to the text by identifying several important findings related to the millennium and Christ’s return. His position on dispensationalism becomes clear to the reader when he compares the Gospel of John to the other gospels in which he finds good works to which Christ calls the believer for entrance into his millennial kingdom. While he concedes that John deals primarily with the subject of eternal life, he acknowledges that John does not fail to speak of the millennial hopes of Israel.

Govett further reveals his dispensational position when he declares that John chapter one discovers Christ from three points of view: 1.) As he existed from eternity; 2.) As a man at his first coming; and, 3.) As seen in the coming millennial glory, fulfilling the hopes of Israel. Verses 50-51 read, “Jesus answered [Nathaniel] and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of

Man.’” Govett adds: “Verses 50 and 51 of this chapter are incapable of any true interpretation by an anti-millenarian.” This thought continues in his assessment of chapter three when he defines the love that God manifested toward the world as something greater than that of the elect. He states:

“All hyper-Calvinists would make it the elect only. But this is a sad perversion of Scripture, to favor a system. It is just an example of treading down one truth in fierce partisanship on behalf of its fellow. It shuts out the testimony, which this Gospel so distinctly gives, that Christ died, not only to ‘gather in one the children of God scattered abroad,’ but for Israel as the Nation; multitudes of whom will perish.”

Govett further regards the amellennial position of a present spiritual reign of Christ to be incorrect when he suggests that the phrase “lift up your eyes,” as found in verse 35 of chapter four to be a riddle to all who do not accept the millennial doctrine. To Govett the only way the passage can be comprehended is to see Jesus speaking of three grand dispensations of God: 1.) That of sowing; 2.) That of reaping – which is now; and, 3.) That of the rest and joy of harvest-home, or the millennial reward. In regard to this reward he draws the correlation between it and “work” stating that work is to be succeeded by reward or wage. This subject of reward is something which he finds occupies much of the subject of the New Testament. It is by this truth that Govett indicates Christ’s desire to encourage his suffering children. It is also by this truth that Govett finds Christ motivating his Church not to seek its reward in this life from the
hands of men, but rather in the millennial day of the Lord and that the least gift rendered to a disciple in this life will not fail to be remembered.

Within the story of the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, Govett also identifies the millennial kingdom. In chapter five verses 28-29, which read: “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.” He discovers that there is a distinction among those who rise and he states that the resurrection of Lazarus is the crowning miracle of the Gospel. He notes:

“Our Lord will, in the coming hour, call to the dead, as of old He called Lazarus. Then they shall come forth out of their tombs, as Lazarus did – clad with their bodies, never more to be put off. But there is a distinction among those who rise – a moral distinction. There is, first, the resurrection of the righteous; then the wicked. This denotes the better day begun. There are two resurrections: one a thousand years before the other, as Revelation 20 proves. The first resurrection is a reward. It is ‘the resurrection of the righteous,’ Luke 24:14.”

And here Govett makes further distinction regarding entry into the millennial kingdom in that entry is not to be granted by simple faith. Instead entry is granted by the fruits of faith, or good works. He believes that for some the resurrection is the resurrection of judgment, but not necessarily one of “damnation,” as he phrases it. He states that some believers will be excluded from the first resurrection because they have not done good, or because they have done evil. He uses the example of some who have died soon after believing faith. These individuals may not have performed good works.

\[13\] Ibid., 210.

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Therefore, since entry into the millennial kingdom is based upon good works they will not enter because of their deficiency.\textsuperscript{14} Further on in chapter six, in response to Christ’s teachings upon the feeding of the five-thousand, he addresses verse 40 which reads, “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” In this context he regards the resurrection at the last day as the result of eating the true manna – that is, of believing on Jesus as the Son of God. He states that four times over chapter six this concept is brought out. Govett counters the question as to whether the resurrection on the last day implies that all believers will enjoy the thousand years by stating that if that were so these passages would be in direct conflict with John 3:3-5 and other texts of the Gospels. Govett believes that all will be raised by Christ at his coming, but whether they enjoy the thousand years or not depends, not upon faith, but upon works.

There is another aspect of Govett’s dispensational thought that runs contrary to a classical understanding of the system. This is found in the doctrine of eternal salvation. For Govett there is the possibility of losing eternal life for believers if they do not remain true to Christ in this life. Not just reward is lost, but eternal life itself. This Arminian understanding is found in his response to John 6:58 in which is stated: “This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever.” From this text Govett finds what he describes as several great applications. First, in regard to the unbeliever, those who reject Christ as Savior cannot by any obedience of their own escape from death to life. Second, there are those who

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 212.
Govett believes have accepted the truths of Christ as Savior, but afterwards fall away from the truths they once believed. To them the truth stated in John 15:6 applies. Govett states: “withering of spiritual life in this day comes on; and in the day of God, the fire!”

There is yet a third opinion expounded by Govett on verse 58 as it relates to believers. This opinion relates to the moral food which the believer consumes. If the believer is engorged by the pursuits of earth and flesh, his spiritual energy, light, and grace will see spiritual life diminish since it is destructive to life and leads to spiritual death. In the future day those believers who are consumed with the world will dwell in the Second Death because they refuse Christ as their life here and now.

Govett’s Commentary On the Book of Hebrews

In his discourse on the second chapter of Hebrews, Govett writes that the author, whom he believes to be the Apostle Paul, is urging the reader to diligence in order not to lose the glory set before them. Attention was to be given to the truths which were set before them in order that they not lose the hope set before them. This hope Govett also finds to be “the salvation” and “the kingdom.” Connected with this Govett states that the old way of interpreting the prophesies was to think in terms of all blessings belonging to the Church and all judgments belonging to the Jews. He finds that two things are present to the hearers of the Gospel: 1.) Eternal Life, which is the gift of God at once to faith, and is inalienably the possession of the elect; and, 2.) The Millennial Glory, which is a matter

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15 Ibid., 284.
16 Ibid., 285.
of reward and which may, by misconduct after faith, be lost. For Govett, this is the key to the epistle’s difficulties.\textsuperscript{18}

According to his findings this epistle is based upon the believer’s personal responsibility to Christ himself as their Lord. As such the doctrine of reward is to be found at various points in the epistle. The Gospel as applied to believers resembles that of the Law in this regard: God expects obedience from his people. Lack of obedience leads to loss of reward. To this point he raises the common objections and refutes them. The first of these objections that some would raise is that Christ has left no commands involving penalties to his people. He disproves this by stating that Christ has left commands that if broken lead to damage in this life and loss in the life to come. He delineates three examples. The first is the issue of baptism. For baptism Govett means the believer’s immersion after faith. He states that it is declared that the refusal to obey this command will cause exclusion from the millennial kingdom. A second command noted is that the believer not incur debt. Here he cites Romans 8:8 (“and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”). A third command he raises is that of forbidding a believer from marrying an unbeliever. Here he cites 2 Corinthians 6:14 (“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?). To this Govett adds:

\begin{quote}
“Now with regard to these and like commands we are here instructed, that such is the greatness of the Person delivering them, that no
\end{quote}

infraction of them can be without sad consequences in the day to come.”

Another objection that Govett finds raised by most believers is that Christ is never said to judge believers and if he were to judge, Scripture says that none could stand. To this objection Govett immediately reassures his readers that no believer will be brought into judgment before Christ in order to determine whether the believer is reconciled. The believer is not an enemy but a servant. But Christ and the apostles both maintain that because all believers are servants, they will give an account since the moment of belief, and this accounting will result in either reward or punishment for their deeds. This is to be revealed in the Day of judgment and will be according to works. Here Govett cites for brevity just a few passages of Paul (i.e., Romans 2, 14; 2 Corinthians 5).

Govett is equally as comfortable finding the doctrine of future reward and punishment under Law in the Old Testament. He looks to King Solomon’s turning to idolatry and away from the God of Israel. To this he reminds his readers that God said to Solomon that he will tear the kingdom from him and give it to his servant (1 Kings 11:9-11). He turns also to Hezekiah on his death bed. God gave Hezekiah a sign but his heart was proud and did not return to God what was due him. In return God’s wrath came upon the king as well as Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32:24-25). He adds:

“And finally, if this be an inspired Epistle, God’s conduct toward His ancient people make it certain that, as offenses against the Law’s commands brought damage and loss of good to offenders, so neglect to obey the orders of Christ, or willful transgression of His commandments

19 Ibid., 37.
as the Lord of all, will draw down His displeasure. And that may and will manifest itself, to the exclusion of some believers from the millennial kingdom, or even draw down positive infliction (Matthew 18:35; 5:21-37).

For it is very worthy to be pondered, that the Apostle draws here and elsewhere in this Epistle, and inference just opposite to that which would be or is deduced by many teachers of the Word...²⁰

Although Govett finds much language in this epistle regarding the millennial kingdom, he also sees very clearly that the epistle speaks of an eternal kingdom that replaces the earthly kingdom. As is his custom, on this subject he draws not only from Hebrews, but also from other portions of Scripture. Since Hebrews is written to the believing Jew, Govett sees correlation between this epistle and numerous other books of the Old Testament. In the concluding chapters of Hebrews his focus is primarily on comparing the epistle to the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, and Isaiah, Genesis, and Exodus of the Old Testament. He examines closely Hebrews 12:27-29 which reads: “And this expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.” Govett responds that there is first a shaking of heaven and earth that will be preparatory to the millennium, and during those one-thousand years Abraham enjoys the promised land and its city. After this there will be a removal of the shaken earth and replaced with an unshaken, eternal one. He asks the

²⁰Ibid., 39.
question: In what sense do we receive a “kingdom unshaken?” The shaken and temporary kingdom of the millennium is a reward to works. The unshaken and eternal kingdom is a gift in grace to all believers. Here Govett references Revelation 11:15-18; 20:4-6; and 22:3-4. He sees that the context of the Epistle to the Hebrews strongly confirms this view.

Govett’s Commentary On the Book of Isaiah

This book is one of Govett’s earliest written. At the age of twenty-eight this was quite a daring undertaking given his age and the existence of the widely celebrated commentary written by Bishop Robert Lowth. Perhaps because of the care he perceived he must take in adding to Lowth’s acclaimed works, Govett was very meticulous with his footnotes and citations. He gave great care to quote numerous divines and respected contemporaries, as well as dealing with a large number of key passages in their original language and Septuagint text. It should also be noted that at the time of the publishing of his commentary he was still ordained in the Anglican Church. Even in this early work there is a clearly delineated understanding of the tenets of dispensationalism. He writes not only of his position on the millennial reign with Christ, but also on who will inhabit the earth during that period. Furthermore, he articulates the purpose of the Tribulation


22 Govett, Isaiah.

Govett writes in the Preface: “It must appear an act of great daring, for any of talents and learning inferior to the celebrated Lowth, to attempt a version of the Prophet Isaiah after that Prelate’s admired composition. But though the Prophet is greatly indebted to his labors for a restoration in very many places of what was evidently the original text, it did appear to the author that though the Bishop had derived and acknowledged much assistance from the Septuagint, there was yet much more concealed beneath that translation which has not been wrought as yet by any.”

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and its benefit to the Jews as a nation in regard to their future promised relationship to the Messiah.

At the beginning of his exposition he states his approach. In endeavoring to expound upon the prophecies of Isaiah he establishes two guiding principles. The first of these is the recognition that no prophecy is to be rendered as a private interpretation of a set age. He finds Grotius and those like-minded in error who claim as such. The second guiding principle is related to the first. Those prophecies declared by Scripture as having been already fulfilled are to be understood as literal. In as much, those prophecies yet to be fulfilled must also be understood to be someday fulfilled literally – so long as such a literal interpretation does not tend toward the absurd. Following these principles Govett concludes that the majority of Isaiah’s prophecies have yet to be fulfilled, and that which is largely supposed by many to have already been fulfilled, in reality, had only a “commencing” fulfillment in the events referred to. Bishop Samuel Horsley, a contemporary of Bishop Lowth, is quoted by Govett in support of his position:

“You are perfectly right in the opinion you maintain, that a far greater proportion of the prophecies, even of the Old Testament, than is generally imagined, relate to the second advent of our Lord. Few, comparatively, relate to the first advent by itself, without reference to the second. And of those that have been supposed to be accomplished in the first, many had in that only an inchoate fulfillment, and have yet to receive their full completion.”

Govett demonstrates little fear in challenging the ancient divines on this issue of literal interpretation. In chapter eleven verses 5-6, for example, Govett criticizes Jerome

\[23\] Ibid., 123.

\[24\] Ibid., 124.
and his figurative understanding of the passages. The passages read: “Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them.” Govett recognizes that most would agree that verse 5 portrays a picture of perfect justice at the Lord’s advent. However, verse 6 presents more of a theological problem whereby wild animals will lie down together. He notes that Jerome denounces the literal meaning and finds a figurative meaning wherever he can. At the same time Jerome acknowledges that most Christians of his day received the passage literally. Jerome states: “These things...the Jews and our Judaizers (by that he means the Millennarians) contend will take place literally.”

Govett’s theological position pertaining to the future status of Israel is made unambiguous in his consistent treatment of the text. Chapter forty-six is one in which Govett finds similar dealings as that found in previous chapters whereby Israel as a nation is declared to be protected by God from birth to old age. Having predicted the advent of Christ in verse 11, Isaiah turns to the salvation of Israel in verse 13. Govett supports his position by quoting Jeremiah 23:5-6, “‘Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, ‘The LORD our righteousness.’”

25 Ibid., 169.
In the beginning of chapter fifty-one an appeal is made to Israel to remember its humble beginnings and God’s faithfulness to the nation even until the end. Govett finds that the Savior’s return, as depicted in chapter sixty, will be the signal for the restoration of Israel. In support of his position he quotes Dr. Henderson in his belief that the latter chapters of Isaiah will be fulfilled during the millennium. The fact that Israel as a nation appears so prominently he justifies as Isaiah being a prophet of the Jews and to the Jews. He turns also to Jerome and references him as saying that the ancient Christians understood this chapter of the millennium in like manner. Referring to the verses in chapter sixty-two Govett, once again, quotes Jerome on this subject: “...the last time, when after the fullness of the Gentiles, Israel is to be saved and return to the Lord.”

In his analysis of chapter sixty-five, Govett expands his description of the millennial reign to include his understanding of the condition of the inhabitants. During the thousand years, the life span of the earth’s inhabitants are to be lengthened to a time of the “antediluvian patriarchs.” One hundred years will be considered the end of childhood. Those youth in verse 20 who do not make it to one hundred years are considered accursed. The verse appears to refer to the time after Satan is loosed for a short period. During this time Satan will go forth and deceive the world. In support of his opinion he quotes fifth century Procopius of Gaza who states:

“Some explain the declaration that there shall not be there one premature or aged, in the following manner: that all those who attain to

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26 Ibid., 322.
27 Ibid., 325.
28 Ibid., 331.
my resurrection shall be perfect and vigorous in soul, so that there shall be nothing imperfect, or infantile, or aged, but all equals in partaking of one regeneration. The adult then that shall be saved, will be young, and will find him that is lost of the same age with himself...Then, also, they who by their works have prepared themselves habitations, shall obtain them, and enjoy their own labors, cultivating their own fruits, fearless of any stranger seizing on the result of their labors, but shall live in endless enjoyment of life, ’according to the days of the tree of life;’ which words intimate also that the promise made in Paradise will be fulfilled, and that he that obtains them will be immortal, not growing old.”

With this declaration Govett proceeds further. Once again the reader is made to realize the depth to which Govett has been able to articulate the dispensational system. He extends far more deeply into his delineation of the text than Darby or even Scofield after him. Govett also wants the reader to understand that a distinction should be made during the millennium between those born or living at the commencement of the thousand years and that of the risen saints. Furthermore, Govett supposes that those alive will differ in rank. Here he quotes from Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:41, “...for star differs from star in glory.”

Govett’s Commentary on the Book of Colossians

The comments concerning this epistle are started with practical words to the Church of Govett’s day. He connects the words of the opening salutation with the phrase “we give thanks.” In doing so he reveals his knowledge of grammatical construction and comments, “...when two modes of construction are grammatically open to us, the order of

29 Ibid., 332.

the Greek should decide which is to be adopted.” Based upon that principle he connects the word “love” with the “hope” – which Paul speaks of in verse 5. It is apparent that even when speaking to his readers in very practical terms regarding such basic Christian truths as love toward one another, he finds the text very clearly pointing toward the “goal” of love – namely, the kingdom of heaven and its reward.

Govett wrote this book at the age of seventy-seven. Thus, he is still passionately writing about the millennium in his later years. The book was originally titled, *Christ the Head; the Church His Body*. According to Govett’s findings, Paul, writing to the Colossian Church wanted them to see that their spiritual love sprang out of their faith and hope. Govett discovers, in the order of Paul’s words, that faith came first, then hope, then love (as a result of the former two). He makes Paul’s writings very practical for his readers and states, “We have the reason why love among Christians is at so low an ebb. Most Christians have lost hold of the *hope* set before them in the Gospel.”

He states that ours is a hope whose anchor is fixed in heaven. When Christ returns the promised kingdom of heaven comes.

The matter of baptism, which caused Govett such great concern in his ministry many years earlier, and over which he was separated from the Church of England, is spoken of in Colossians 2:12, “having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” He dedicates numerous pages to this subject, and comments:

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31 Ibid., 7.
“Baptism, according to the mind of God, must be immersion. For in it there are both burial and resurrection. In pouring on the face, or sprinkling, there is neither burial nor resurrection. Baptism, also, (John 3) is both death and birth: neither of these is seen in sprinkling or pouring. Baptism (or immersion) is as peculiar to this dispensation, as is the Lord’s Supper...The believer’s immersion is not only the next step to the divine circumcision, but is the proof of its having been received. God has purposely made the ordinance of baptism humiliating, and distasteful to the world, that it may be not a piece of routine, but a real step of faith, overcoming the world. Observe the “the” – “the immersion” – the well-known one, commanded by God. The rightful insertion of the article decides, that we must render the next clause “wherein” also, not “in whom also.” Baptism is a burial; but it is a burial with Christ, and from that flows all its power.”

Govett’s Commentary on the Book of Galatians

Published in 1872, under the title, Moses or Christ? Being the Argument of the Galatians, Govett concentrates on the theology evoking concern for the Church in Galatia – the issue of mingling both Law and Gospel to achieve something better. He carefully notes that Paul does not use the term churches of God, nor does he praise them for anything. As Govett notes: “the irregularities of Corinth were bad; but this was a forsaking of the foundation of the Gospel.” In general his comments form the notion that Moses taught that the Law can never give present spiritual freedom, or the eternal heritage in the coming day. He states that Christians are led out from law, and that they may stand in grace. They are led out from Adam, that they may stand in Christ.

32 Ibid., 120.
34 Ibid., 4.
35 Ibid., 163.
Moving to a practical level, Govett warns his readers that the form of seduction in their day is to add the essence of the Mosaic covenant, calling it “the Moral Law;” and the principles of circumcision – or Infant Baptism, and national religion, together with fasts and feasts, on the authority of “Mother Church.” Of this, he says, “...beware! If to add to faith in Christ God’s command by Moses were bad, to add man’s commands is worse.”

When he arrives at 5:19-21, he has occasion to return to the theme that is ever present in his biblical theology, reward in the kingdom. He asks, “What is then the kingdom of God?” His fear is that the believer will not understand the kingdom in its context. He fears, as in all of his writings, that the believer will suppose the threat of loss is directed to unbelievers only. Likening the kingdom to the seventh day of creation in Genesis, it will be a rest from God’s redemptive work. In Govett’s theology there are two things set before the believer: the gift of God which is eternal life, and the prize of one’s calling which turns upon one’s conduct of faith.

Going further than those biblical scholars of like mind in his day, Govett finds that the millennium is not simply preserved for the believer upon Christ’s return. Entrance is restricted. There are degrees of reward given, and there is absolute denial of reward to those who are unfaithful in this life. All of Govett’s writings address these matters. In this commentary he answers the question: “What will happen to those of his redeemed who have resisted his commands and have been unprofitable to Christ in that

36 Ibid., 163.

37 Galatians 5:19-21 “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”
their works are that of the flesh and have taken their pleasures in this world?” His answer:

“In such as disobedient children, the Lord cannot have pleasure; He will show therefore His displeasure by shutting them out of the kingdom of glory. During the day when the believer’s works are recompensed, they must be shut out of glory and joy, while others rejoice and reign: Matt. 7:21; 18:13; 19:23. They shall be saved at last; but sore will be the woe through which they pass, in losing so great a boon: 1 Cor. 3:15.”

Govett’s Commentary on the Book of Romans

Govett wrote his commentary on the Book of Romans at the start of his final decade of life. Originally written under the title *The Righteousness of God The Salvation of the Believer*, Govett astutely discovers the theme of reward – a theme of Scripture he had trained his spiritual eye to discover during sixty years of writing. For example, in chapter two verses 5-6 which reads: “…But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds,” Govett reveals that the coming day of wrath will be God manifested as the recompenser of good and evil. The treasures of sin now, in this life, will be turned to awful woe. But there is no balancing in that day of wrath of good deeds of the ungodly against their bad ones. Govett writes that no amount of giving and prayer will blot out a man’s former sins. So long as man is ungodly, no deed of his is good. The recompense will be to each one

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38 Govett., *Govett on Galatians.*, 199.

individually and in different measure of misery according to each man’s measure of sin.\textsuperscript{40} In 2:7 which reads, “to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life,” Govett adds that this is a word to believers. This is now a time of sowing. Christ calls his disciples to fill up the day with good works. To this he adds that it is not enough to begin well and then to lose zeal.\textsuperscript{41} The millennial thread, Govett affirms, runs throughout the epistle.\textsuperscript{42}

Although Govett is keen to warn the believer of the dire consequence of not living in a manner pleasing to Christ, and although his exposition of Scripture on this matter is often forcefully delivered, he never writes in a condemning manner, or with a legalistic ring. There is a gentle and compassionate side to Govett the pastor which provides the foundational tone that undergirds his theological passions. Yet, in this regard, when he believes that other theologians are not acting in a biblically tolerant way he is quick to draw that out in his writings. Such is the case with Darby and the Brethren. On numerous occasions Govett was at odds with both Darby and the Brethren’s teaching on matters of biblical truth. He did not fear standing his ground and making such matters publically known. His commentary on the Book of Romans was published almost a decade after Darby’s death, but he writes in such a manner as to suggest he still lives.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 22

\textsuperscript{42}Notice the millennial thread which Govett finds runs through the epistle. He divides the epistle into seven divisions. Division 1: chapter 2:7-16, God’s righteousness as judge, reward to subjects; Division 2: chapter 5:17, Christ, worker of righteousness, reward to those fully Christ’s; Division 3: chapter 6:4-5, baptism, come out from Adam, the first resurrection; Division 4: 8:12-14, after justification, death, life millennial; Division 5: 8:17-23, suffer with Christ / glorified with Him, body delivered out of death; Division 6: 14:10-13, appearing before Christ for judgment, Division 7: 15:10-13, Christ minister of the Circumcision, mercy to Gentiles, our hope.
This can only be as a result of Govett’s understanding that Darby, in fact, lived as the symbol of energy behind the advancing theological system of dispensationalism. Nowhere in his writings is this passion for truth to reign over errancy made more clear than in his exposition of chapter fourteen. The chapter, as noted by Govett, reveals the law of love as applied to the brethren in Christ.

Chapter fourteen begins with Paul drawing attention to those who are weak in the faith. They are to be received but not for the purpose of passing judgment. The example Paul uses is over the matter of eating all things versus eating only vegetables. They are not to pass judgment on one another. To this Govett renders an explanation by saying there are those who are firm and intelligent on matters of Scripture, and there are those in contrast who are weak in their understanding. The latter find it difficult to hold to what they believe. Govett notes:

“Now we know, that in all ages, there have been those who refused to partake both of animal food and of wine. This was one of the chief practices of the Gnostics, or ‘Men of Intelligence.’ The leader of false doctrine at Colosse propounded this, as we gather from that word – ‘Let not them any one judge you in matters of food or drink:’ Col. 2:16"...The scrupulous [the weak], then, must have derived their hesitation from reasonings of men, philosophy, tradition. These scruples, however, were not to prevent the brethren who held them from being received as Christians. They were not to be kept away from the Lord’s table. They were not to be received provisionally, – if they were willing to enter into the Church on the grounds on which Christians in general held and practiced the eating of flesh.”

He prudently offers that unity of belief on all points would be an excellent thing. Controversy, he states, is not always the best way to attain unity. “The solvent power of
The points upon which both the weak and strong could agree were of greater importance to the Church. Revealing his knowledge of church history he laments that finding breaches of this are too easily found. For example, he cites the second-century church over the question of the right mode of celebrating Easter. Roman and Western Christians celebrated it one way according to the commands of the apostles John and Philip, the Eastern Church another way according to a tradition from Peter and Paul. Which was right? His answer, neither. As was often his way, he turns to Paul and Scripture for a grounding in truth.

But he does not rest in the historical past. He cites what he believes to be egregious in his day – the position of Darby on the topic of Christian tolerance one to another on divisive matters such as that posed before the reader at the onset of chapter fourteen. It appears that Darby refused fellowship to any who did not condemn the conduct of George Müller and his pastoral associate Henry Craik of Bristol, England. If any in their assembly wished to be received by other Brethren congregations they must study the many pamphlets that were produced by the Brethren relative to the various sides of the question. He writes: “A very thorny, unprofitable, and much perplexed affair.” For Govett, this was an example of sending believers to discriminate opposite lines of reasoning. His response to Darby and the Brethren’s position was to ask this question:

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44 Ibid., 500.

45 George Müller and Henry Craik co-ministered as pastors of Bethesda Chapel – a Brethren assembly in Bristol, England – for many years, as well as ministering to many thousands of orphans and founding the missions organization: Scripture Knowledge Institute at Home and Abroad. Their work was well known and respected around the world. Pierson, Arthur T. (1899). *George Mueller of Bristol And His Witness to a Prayer-Hearing God*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.

“Was Christianity then a dry, contentious system, in which the chief thing was to be ecclesiastically right?”

47 Ibid., 501.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:11, “And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” These are the souls Paul is threatening with exclusion.

In the early 1900's D. M. Panton wrote these words:

“...it is exceedingly remarkable that in the very heart of the great Grace chapter of the Bible, the truth that a Christian’s reward is exclusively determined by his own fidelity lies deeply embedded. ‘Working,’ as Calvin has said, ‘is not at all opposed to grace. ‘For if, by the trespass of the one (Adam), death reigned through the one; much more’...’”

Panton learned well from his earthly mentor, Govett. These words could have been penned by Govett himself. As controversial as the words sound to many Christians today, they were electrified words in the nineteenth-century. Nevertheless, the idea of something which lies ahead of this life – something which was to be in addition to a believer’s eternal reward – was merely the foundation of a greater, more disputable theological system. Millennialism was at the heart of Govett’s theology and within it was the idea of reward for believers in the context of a literal thousand year reign with Christ

1 Panton, Judgment Seat, 47.
on earth. Looking deeply into Scripture, Govett discovered not only the notion of reward, and not only degrees of reward, but “exclusion” from the kingdom all together for those whose conduct as believers in this life was adjudicated by Christ at the Judgment to be worthless.

Politically, socially, and religiously the notion of a coming kingdom that yielded reward was something which gave both great comfort to individuals, and nations, and ardent debate in religious circles. One such example of how public the debate was in England, over the matter of proving or disproving a coming kingdom, can be seen in the formation and growth of the Continental Society for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge in the early 1800's. It was founded by the likes of influential men as Henry Drummond, and carried its influence to much of continental Europe. The clamor was noticed by the Brethren. Darby was directly influenced by some of the leaders of the debate. Govett most certainly took notice.

Kenneth Scott Latourette has called the nineteenth-century, “the great century of Christian missionary expansion.” It was a century that was preceded by heightened spiritual awareness followed by the revolutionary era in France, which, combined, served to provide a sense of prophetic expectation which led to the launch of mission societies for home and abroad and the imminent return of Christ. Even before this important century in British theological development, there were those who formed a legacy of

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3 Ibid., 135.
millennial interpreters who built upon the work of the seventeenth-century theologian Joseph Mede. It is noted that as late as 1754, Charles Wesley wrote a letter: “Let me also recommend to you to look into the passages of Sir Isaac Newton on Daniel and the Revelation, and into Mede’s commentary on the Revelations, both of whom come very near to the truth.”\(^4\) Mede’s interpretations stood as the standard – especially that of the millenarian legacy of dispensationalism – which extended into the nineteenth-century in Britain.\(^5\)

From 1790 to 1850 there was tremendous upheaval throughout the world.\(^6\) It was into this era that Govett was born and wrote. It spawned much debate over matters of eschatology and the millennium. It perpetuated a theological movement and opened the floodgate for voluminous amounts of writing on the subject. The debate continues.

**Summary of the Salient Points**

This research attempts to add to the ongoing interest in dispensationalism and the continuous revision of millenarian thought. Past studies on the subject of the nineteenth-century development of eschatological thought have all but neglected mention of H. Robert Govett. As this research has shown, he thought deeply regarding the matter of premillennialism. He articulated, as none did in his time, the particular issue of reward in the millennium. Furthermore, he almost singlehandedly, wrote concerning the

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\(^5\) Jue, 316.

importance to persevere in this life so as not to totally lose reward in the life to come. Eternal life was contingent upon faith alone, but reward in the millennium was to be won solely on the basis of conduct.

Govett’s thoughts are molded in his mind and articulated in print for the world to see at a time of political and social volatility in Britain and the continent. He lived and wrote in an era in which the debate over premillennialism was highly charged. But, rather than engage in the public debates of his day, he chose instead to shepherd a growing flock of believers at Surrey Chapel, Norwich, and to quietly debate the eschatological issues with ink. Nevertheless, his writings spoke to generations in Britain and abroad. They impacted the likes of G. H. Lang and D. M. Panton who continued his passion for reward in the kingdom well into the twentieth-century, before being lost in modern theological debate. It is hoped that this research will serve in a small way to reintroduce the importance of Govett to the early development of dispensationalism and to allow him his place at the table of eschatological debate.
CHAPTER 8

APPENDIXES

The following two Appendixes are included to provide a more precise background to the biblical concept of reward and judgment – two of Govett’s central doctrinal theme in his many writings – as Govett interpreted them and used them to defend his positions. As noted throughout the content of this research, he drew his theology not so much by means of his exposure to the ascending debate of his day (for his understanding of eschatological truths drew from greater depths than his peers), as through his ability to connect the theological threads from his scholarly studies which drew broadly from the historical development of the church, extra-biblical books, and biblical theology of the Cannon. He consistently and emphatically expounds the biblical importance of the doctrine of reward and judgment and insists that knowledge of this truth is imperative to the eternal well-being of every true believer. As an Oxford fellow and teacher he was well versed in the original languages of the Bible and was able to follow the biblical motif of this doctrine from the O.T. into the N.T. His writings drew upon all of his learning. To know Govett theologically is to see the legacy of the church and its scholarship on eschatological matters. While devoutly dispensational in his findings he nonetheless is consistent in his posit of facts which he draws from the well of
established knowledge and builds his case for what he finds should be the paramount pursuit of every believer.

Appendix A provides the theological background for reward as Govett would have drawn upon it, while Appendix B provides his theological context for end time judgment. While they are treated separately in the appendixes, in Scripture Govett often found them interconnected. This connection is most articulated in the following sub-heading entitled “Imminent World Judgment.”
Appendix A: REWARD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND EXTRA-BIBLICAL SOURCES

Paul only occasionally used the actual term *reward* in his epistles, yet he held firmly to the conviction that a future reward was awaiting the believer. To understand his thought it is imperative to place the concept of reward in its proper cultural and religious context. Reward as Paul understood it as a Jew was closely linked with the notion of *recompense*. By definition, recompense is that which is justly received by both the believer and the non-believer. It is the judicial consequence of both action and will, and culminates in God’s adjudication by punishment or reward. For Paul as a believer, recompense was clearly linked to justification by faith and to the *good works* of the believer. It was also clearly linked to the Scriptures which Paul often quoted in his writings. Paul the Jew,¹ would have received extensive training in the Scriptures. It would have been a part of the instruction in the home, as well as in the synagogue – as noted in the writings of Josephus and Philo.² Additionally, Acts 22:3 mentions that Paul was personally trained under the respected rabbi Gamaliel. Thus, Paul’s understanding of reward would have originated from the authority of Scripture.

¹ 2 Cor. 11:22 indicates that Paul was a Jew: “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I.”

Old Testament Words For Reward

There are some sixteen words used in the O.T. to express the idea of reward. The Hebrew words which are most commonly used are: לֹֽאַמִּ֣ים, לָֽקֵּ֣ב, וּלְֽכֹּ֔הוּ, וּלְֽכֹּ֔הוּ, וּלְֽכֹּ֔הוּ. The word לֹֽאַמִּ֣ים is used in Scripture to indicate an understanding of recompense, which it does often by implication or inference.\(^4\) It specifically means “to deal fully or adequately with, to deal bountifully with, to recompense, repay.”\(^5\) Psalm 103:10 uses לֹֽאַמִּ֣ים when it says: “he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.” Here, in the NIV translation, the English word repay is used to express the idea that God’s reward is undeserved. The same Hebrew word is used in 2 Samuel 22:21, and is expressed in this manner: “The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.” In this instance לֹֽאַמִּ֣ים is translated rewarded and is used to express that which is due a man in accordance with the righteousness of his life.

The Hebrew word לָֽקֵּ֣ב is used in Scripture to mean “to bribe or influence a judge, or to bribe a reward.”\(^6\) Using the English word ransom in Job 6:22 the verse reads: “Have I ever said, ‘Give something on my behalf, pay a ransom for me from your wealth...’” In Proverb 21:14 the same word is translated bribe, “A gift given in secret

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\(^4\) לָֽקֵּ֣ב is found in 1 Sam. 24:17; 2 Sam. 19:36; 22:21; 2 Chron. 20:11; Psa. 7:4; Psa. 18:20; 94:2; 103:10; Isa. 3:9,11; Obad. 15.


\(^6\) לָֽקֵּ֣ב is found in Deut. 10:17; 27:25; Job 6:22; Psa. 15:5; Prov. 21:14; Isa. 5:23; 14:13; Micah 3:11.
soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath.” Once again, in Isaiah 5:23 the Hebrew word is translated bribe, “who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.”

Another frequently used word for reward is רָכַּב which is used to imply the meaning “to hire, or to provide wages (or a reward).” The word is used in Genesis 15:1, “After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’” Using רָכַּב, Jeremiah 31:16 reads: “This is what the LORD says: ‘Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,’ declares the LORD. ‘They will return from the land of the enemy.’” In Ecclesiastes 4:9, the same Hebrew word is translated return: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work…”

The fourth frequently used Hebrew word is הָנָן. It is used to convey the meaning “to make whole, or to provide a recompense.” It can also convey the meaning of “a bribe, penalty, or retribution.” Genesis 44:4 reads: “They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, ‘Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil?’’” Here the English word repaid is used to mean recompense. In Psalm 91:8, the word punishment is used to convey the meaning of a penalty: “You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.”

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7 רָכַּב is found in Gen. 15:1; Num. 18:31; Ruth 2:12; 2 Chron. 15:7; Psa. 127:3; Prov. 11:18; 26:10; Eccles. 4:9; 9:5; Isa. 40:10; 62:11; Jer. 31:16.

8 הָנָן is found in Gen. 44:4; Deut. 32:41; 1 Sam. 24:19; 2 Sam. 3:39; Job 21:19; Psa. 31:23; 35:12; 91:8; 137:8; Prov. 13:13; 25:22; Isa. 1:23; Micah 7:3.
Old Testament Metaphors for Reward

In addition to the actual words for reward found in the O.T. there are other words used which are intended to convey themes having the same meaning as reward. As J.E. Rossocup discovered in his research on reward, there are several such themes of note. The first theme to be discovered in the O.T. is that of the perceived relationship between God and His people within the framework of the Covenant. This perception begins immediately in the Book of Genesis and is found in the unfolding story of Abraham and God’s established relation with him. Here the idea of reward comes in the form of a blessing. In Genesis 12:1-3, Jehovah God speaks to Abraham and requires him to leave his country for another land of promise. In so doing, God promises to bless him (ברכה). In addition, there is a promise that those who bless Abraham will themselves be blessed.

In 2 Samuel 7:1ff Jehovah God speaks through Nathan to inform David that a covenant relationship is to be established with his descendants forever. David in response prays to God in verse 29 asking Him to be pleased to bless David and his descendants forever (ברכה). The theme of blessing was one in which the recipient was gratified in this life. Jehovah God was the greatest possession. Thus, reward in the present life is a prominent O.T. theme. However, there emerges a subordinate theme that resolves the conflict which presents itself when God’s people

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9 Rossocup, Paul’s Teaching, pp. 32-71.

10 2 Sam. 7:16...“Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”
could not find the fullness of His blessing in this life. God who is ultimately a just
rewarder would then provide a recompense in the life to come. This understanding is
present in Job 14:1-15, which states in part, “...there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it
will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail...If a man dies, will he live again? All
the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come. You will call and I will
answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made.”

The second prominent O.T. theme thus relates to the concept of reward in a
future state which is achieved upon death (i.e. immortality and resurrection from the
dead). In contrast to the theme of blessing, as noted by example of the life of Abraham
and David-- which is earthly in its context--this O.T. theme takes up the idea of a reward
in a life beyond the grave. It is a progressively developing theme which points primarily
to a moral conception of the future life. The Book of Job, though it does not teach
categorically a future life, strongly suggests its presence. Ecclesiastes, in contrast,
refuses to mention a doctrine of a future life. In contrast, in the Psalms, and in particular
Psalm 49 and 73, Sheol seems to be presented as the future domicile of only the wicked
(there is some dispute among commentators), whereas heaven is the domicile of the
righteous.

11 R.H. Charles states in his footnote, “This idea of Sheol as an intermediate abode which is here suggested
Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity. Reprinted. (New York: Schocken Books,
1963), 70.

12 Charles, Eschatology, 70-79.

The doctrine of the resurrection was developed explicitly early in the third century or toward the close of the fourth century B.C. It is sophisticated in its complexity and at the same time presupposes its prior existence in Israel on two dimensions: the doctrine of an individual immortality of the righteous, and secondly, the existence of a Messianic kingdom. The doctrine of an individual immortality ultimately gave way to a belief in the resurrection from the dead and the Messianic kingdom on the basis of the common good of the nation which long remained more precious to Israel than that of the individual. W. R. Alger affirms, “It is admitted by all that the Jews earnestly looked for a resurrection of the dead as an accompaniment of the Messiah’s coming.”

A third prominent O.T. theme relates to the concept of reward as it is to be received at a future judgment which will usher in a future kingdom. This judgment is typically described in the O.T. as the day of the Lord (יָיְעָר ה’). The O.T. looked forward to the day when the established order would be overthrown and a new and perfect order established by Yahweh. Judgment by man in the O.T. was not always just, but judgment by God is always viewed as just. The Jew was not to consider God’s judgment to be a blind weighing of merits and demerits. L. Morris concludes that, “...it [judgment] makes its home with qualities like loving-kindness, faithfulness,

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14 Ibid., 78.

15 Ibid., 79.


righteousness, mercy, truth and glory.”¹⁸ The day of the Lord is a phrase found in eight books of the O.T. Frequently the phrase is used to convey a meaning of a pending judgment such as that found in Joel 1:15 when it reads, “Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.”¹⁹

Judgment upon individual sinners is characterized with such descriptive phrasing as found in Isaiah 13:9, “...a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger--to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.” Other phrases include: “it will come like destruction from the Almighty (Joel 2:1);” “…it is dreadful. Who can endure it? (Joel 2:11);” “That day will be darkness, not light (Amos 5:18,20);” “the day of the Lord will be bitter (Zeph. 1:14);” and, “that great and dreadful day (Mal. 4:5).” Individual judgment for the righteous is viewed in a positive light as found in Daniel 12:1ff. Verse 1 describes a time of great distress, and the reader is told that everyone whose name is written in the “book” will be delivered. In verse two there is pictured a division whereby some will go “…to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” Daniel himself is promised a reward in verse 13, “As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”

The allotted inheritance in this verse is the Hebrew word יִשְׁתַּחַת which has as its meaning “lot” or “portion.” It appears elsewhere in the O.T. in Judges 1:3 and Proverb 1:14. The latter verse reads, “throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse.” Each lot represents all that one owns, but each lot does not necessarily signify equality with

¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹ See also Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 2:1; Joel 3:14; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:7.
others. It may therefore be inferred that there is a possibility that the “lot” spoken of in Daniel 12:13 is representative of what is justly due Daniel, but not necessarily equivalent to the “lot” inherited by others.

The inheritance itself is best understood as being given in the kingdom. The concept of kingdom is presented several times in the Book of Daniel. Daniel 2:44 reads, “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.” In Daniel’s vision, in chapter 7, the one like a son of man will bring judgment and will establish a kingdom that “will not pass away” and “will never be destroyed (vs.14).” It is understood that reward and the establishment of this kingdom are in some sense related.

The Motif of Reward

In the O.T. the variety of words used to express reward creates many insightful ways of contemplating the richness of its broad meaning. The N.T., however, is much more precise and narrow in its use. Scripture tends to divide its motif of reward according to O.T. and N.T. lines. In the O.T. reward is mostly seen to be earthly and physical. In the N.T. reward is viewed in relation to the heavenly and spiritual. When the Bible is approached from the standpoint of literary criticism the O.T. presents a flowing pattern of what righteousness looks like. For example, in Psalm 112:1-3, a person is described as being blessed: “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds

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great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever...”

Wisdom literature also provides a description of what happens to the righteous man: “The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward.” (Proverbs 11:18). The virtuous woman is described in Proverbs 31 as one who is deserving of the “reward she has earned,” and that her works should “bring her praise.” The O.T. stresses the view that God rewards those who are righteous and live by His law. As a reward they will receive the good things of this life (e.g., family, home, sustenance, honor, etc.). Since God remains an essential part of the picture, these rewards may be viewed as having something of a spiritual connection. Moses prompts the Israelites to remember that they will seize the Promised Land, not because of any degree of their own righteousness, but merely because of God’s faithfulness to His Covenant.²¹

**Reward In the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha**

Evidence suggests that Paul and several other N.T. writers made occasional allusions to one or more apocryphal books.²² For example, there appears to be “echoes” from the Wisdom of Solomon in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and in 2 Corinthians.²³

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²¹ See Deuteronomy 9:4-5.


²³ Compare Rom. 1:20-29 with Wis 13:5,8; and Rom 9:20-23 with Wis. 12:12,20; 15:7. Also compare 2 Cor. 5:1,4 with Wis. 9:15.
Within the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha there is both an increase in concentration upon the future hope of the individual and a concern to address reward after death.

The future hope for the individual represents a paradigm shift since in the O.T. focus was generally placed upon God’s dealing with the nation. According to D.S. Russell, “It [O.T.] was concerned not with solitary immorality, but with the establishment on earth of an everlasting kingdom in whose untold blessings righteous Israel would share.” 24 Yet, there were some pious Jews of the post-exilic period who could not hold to such a view and believed instead that not only should the righteous nation of Israel share in the coming kingdom, but also the righteous individual. 25 For the individual, as noted in the Apocrypha, reward is described as being experienced in this life. In respect to reward in this life the Book of Sirach finds that one who fears the Lord is said to receive long life, peace and health (1:18-20). 26 There is also a suggestion of reward with reference to a “good name” abiding in eternal life for the individual who is wise in this life (37:26). 27 In the Book of Tobit it is said, “For if thou doest the truth, success shall be in thy works, and so it shall be unto all that do righteous (4:6).” 28


25 Ibid., 367.


27 Ibid., 447. Sirach 37:26...“Who is wise (for his) people gaineth honour, And his name abideth in life eternal.”

28 Ibid., 211.
G.F. Moore concludes that there can be found repeated mention of the reward of good works in the apocalypses.²⁹ For example, in 4 Ezra 7:77 asserts, “For thou hast a treasure of works laid up with the Most High, but it shall not be showed thee until the last times.” Likewise, in 2 Baruch 24:1-2 similar words are found: “‘For behold! The days come and the books shall be opened in which are written the sins of all who have sinned, and again also the treasuries in which the righteousness of all those who have been righteous in creation is gathered.’”

Concerning the resurrection and reward in an after-life, Russell concludes that the writers of the Pseudepigrapha contemplate a resurrection for both the righteous and the wicked.³⁰ Charles writes that the doctrine of the resurrection is made a commonplace of Jewish theology by 1 Enoch.³¹ In five apocalyptic books Russell finds evidence for belief in a general resurrection followed by a judgment which is intended for everyone – the righteous and the wicked.³²

In the Apocrypha, 2 Maccabees includes in the text several very clear references to a life after death. Two Maccabees 2:9 states: “...And when he was at the last gasp, he

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³⁰ Russell, 370. Russell finds two references made to resurrection in 1 Enoch 6-36: In 20:8 which reads “...Remiel, one of the holy angels, whom God set over those who rise;” and 22:13 which reads concerning the sinners of the fourth compartment of Sheol, “...and of the transgressors they shall be companions, but their spirits shall not be slain in the day of judgment nor shall they be raised from thence.” Those sinners who have not received punishment in this lifetime will be raised (see chapters 26-27) for judgment. Others who will be raised are the righteous who will share in the blessings of the kingdom on a purified earth, as in 10:17 which reads in part, “...and then shall all the righteous escape...;” and in 58:3 the righteous are said to be in the light of the sun, and the elect in the light of eternal life.

³¹ Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, 185 (see the description of The Resurrection).

³² Russell, 371.
said, ‘Thou cursed miscreant! Thou dost dispatch us from this life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, and revive us to life everlasting.’

Again in 7:14, 36 the mention is made of being raised up by God for dying in righteous suffering.

Additionally, in the Wisdom of Solomon the righteous are said to live forever and receive a glorious kingdom with the Lord as their reward. An intermediate state, between earthly life and an eternal one, further depicts reward with the intermediate dwelling being a foreshadowing of a final reward. There is also to be found a “record” which is kept—such as found in the book of life—to separate the righteous from the unrighteous as expounded in the Fragments of Noah 108:3 and elsewhere. The quality of a person’s life is depicted as being of significance. In addition to the metaphor of books, “treasuries” and “scales” are also frequently used to describe what is stored-up as reward for a righteous life of good works. For example, Baruch 14:12 reads, “...For the righteous justly hope for the end, and without fear depart from this habitation, because they have with Thee a store of works preserved in treasuries.” Two Enoch 66:6 reads,

33 Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 141.

34 Ibid., 141-2.

35 Ibid., 543.


37 Ibid., 280. 108:3, “...And wait ye indeed till sin has passed away, for their names shall be blotted out of the book of life and out of the holy books, and their seed shall be destroyed for ever...”

38 Ibid., 490-1.
“Walk, my children, in long-suffering...in faith and in truth, in reliance on promises...that you become inheritors of endless time.”

**Reward in the Rabbinic Writings**

In the Gospels Jesus speaks frequently of the life to come. In Matthew 5:12 and Luke 6:23, the writers quote Jesus as saying: “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.” This concept is quite Rabbinic. C.G. Montefiore believes that this reward is not measured by God in equal portion of works performed by man to reward given by God. This concept of equal measure is not Rabbinic in origin. God’s rewards are born out of a much more generous scale. Montefiore states, “The beatitudes of the life to come cannot really be compared with earthly good deeds.” God will give man his “handful” in the world to come. What is more, what God gives is not commensurate with what man does in this life. It should be further understood that the Rabbinic writings suggest that the works of man do not place God under obligation. God simply places Himself under obligation because of His promise of reward. Rabbinic Judaism does not hesitate to recognize the merit of good works, or in exhorting men to acquire it by storing up merit for the future life to come. Reward as taught be the Rabbis suggests that all of God’s rewards are due to his goodness, mercy and grace. He pardons and rewards for His

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39 Ibid., 468.


41 Ibid., 34.

own sake, and from the perspective of the Rabbis, He pardons and rewards for the sake of Israel and the honor of the Torah.\textsuperscript{43} Man also acquires merit by God’s grace. The concept of merit in the Rabbinic writings portrays man as being required to secure merit upon which reward rests. Yet, if one were to merely fulfill the commands with the sole purpose of securing merit one would not receive the reward. Man must receive merit in a pure way—out of love for God.\textsuperscript{44}

Rabbinic writings affirm the resurrection and the life to come. Rabbi Jeremiah said, “When you bury me, put shoes on my feet, and give me a staff in my hand, and lay me on one side, that when the Messiah comes I may be ready.”\textsuperscript{45} Rabbi Abbu states, “A day of rain is greater than the resurrection of the dead; because the rain is for all, while the resurrection is only for the just.”\textsuperscript{46} Rabbi Chebbo said, “The patriarchs so vehemently desired to be buried in the land of Israel, because those who are dead in that land shall be the first to revive and shall devour his years, [the years of the Messiah].”\textsuperscript{47} Nevertheless, as G.F. Moore says, “Any attempt to systematize the Jewish notions of the hereafter imposes upon them an order and consistency which does not exist in them.”\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{43} Montefiore, C.G., 295.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 296.
\textsuperscript{45} Alger, 170-71.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 170.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 170.
\textsuperscript{48} G.F. Moore, vol.2, 389.
Reward In the Qumran Documents

Similar to the teachings in the rabbinic writings, the Essenes also held to a doctrine of resurrection. They taught that there was an immortality of the soul and that there were rewards to be gained for the righteous. These rewards were to be eagerly sought.49 The Essenes also held a belief in the resurrection of the body and a final judgment. However, neither Philo nor Josephus, whose historical works shed light upon the Essenes, mention the resurrection of the body. Hippolytus of Rome does attest to this belief in his writings entitled Refutation of All Heresies. He writes: “The doctrine of the resurrection is firmly established among them. They declare, in fact, that flesh will rise again and be immortal, just as the soul is already immortal. When the soul is separated from the body it goes to rest in a pleasantly light and airy place until the judgment.”50

The Qumran documents further describe the concept of a future reward. The Community Rule mentions reward as “eternal joy, a crown of glory in everlasting life,” and a “garment of honor in eternal light” (1QS 4, 7-8).51 The Essenes pictured themselves as fulfilling the prophetic expectations of the salvation of the righteous. They did not necessarily view immortality as something to be separately attained, but rather as a continuation of a position attained upon entry into the Essene community. Ultimately, it is difficult for the reader of the Qumran documents today to have a complete


50 A. Dupont-Sommer, The Essene Writings From Qumran. Reprinted. (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973), 34.

51 Ibid., 53.
understanding of their beliefs concerning the future, partly because of the fragments of information available regarding the sect.

The Thanksgiving Hymns include statements which suggest a bodily resurrection: “...that he may stand before Thee with the everlasting host and with [Thy] spirits [of holiness], to be renewed together...” (1QH11, 10-14). In the Community Rule reward for the righteous is established and recompense for the wicked defined as “eternal torment and endless disgrace together with shameful extinction in the fire of the dark regions.” (1QS4, 12-13). The Resurrection Fragment (4Q521) is a poetic text which identifies a future state and reflects the words of Isaiah 61:1, “He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.”

The Thanksgiving Hymns (1QH) further depict the final and eternal bliss of the righteous. M. Burrows writes, “The final and eternal bliss of the righteous, with all their conflict’s o’er and all their victories won, is pictured in glowing colors, though of course without very precise drawing.” In the beginning of the Thanksgiving Hymns (1QH1, 15-20), the writer speaking of God to man on behalf of the sect at large states: “Thou hast allotted to them tasks during all their generations, and judgment in their appointed seasons according to the rule [of the two spirits, For Thou has established their ways] for ever and ever, [and hast ordained from eternity] their visitation for reward and


chastisements; Thou hast allotted it to all their seed for eternal generations and everlasting years...”

Conclusions

The Hebrew Scriptures use numerous words to portray the idea of reward. Its meaning has broad indications from recompense and repayment, to bribe and influence. Reward often is expressed in earthly or physical motifs, but also surfaces as something to be received in the future. The primary thrust of reward in the O.T., however, is in this life and most often concerned for the nation rather than for the individual. Typically reward falls into three thematic uses in the O.T. One theme of reward comes through a blessing—such as the Covenant relationship. A second theme includes the concept of reward achieved upon death and draws attention to the Israelite’s understanding of immortality and resurrection. A third theme involves reward to be gained at a future judgment and typically underscored by the use of the phrase “the day of the Lord.”

There is evidence that Paul occasionally made reference to extra-biblical books in his epistles. This would indicate that he not only knew of their teachings, but was influenced by them. There is to be found in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Rabbinic writings, and the Qumran documents abundant reference to the notion of an afterlife which is steeped with benefit for those who remain righteous in this life. And here one finds a paradigm shift from emphasis on the nation to a gradually increased emphasis upon the conduct of the individual. Moreover, there is an evident shift from reward in

54 Vermes, 191.
this life to reward in the life to come. This future reward is often expressed to provide a hope of vindication for the individual and the nation of Israel. It is expressed in terms of an immortality, resurrection, and a future kingdom. To this end there is portrayed an ultimate recompense for both the righteous and the wicked. In some texts good deeds toward God are counted meritoriously toward reward in heaven, but the merit received must be born of a pure motive and centered on a love for God.

Throughout the extra-biblical writings there does not appear to be a consistency regarding a comprehension of reward and the afterlife. Although the concept appears numerous times, there is little detail assigned to the notion. The Jew could hope to be instructed in no more than a simple understanding that good works, or righteous living, would yield a reward in the here-and-now and in the hereafter, and that everyone – including the wicked – would be subject to a future judgment. Forfeiture of reward occurs for the wicked which may be characterized as either Jew or Gentile. However, a perception of reward that is recompensed in degrees based upon some measure or scale defined and recompensed by God does not find its basis in the extra-biblical writings. It can be found by inference in the Hebrew Scriptures in the imagery of a future allotted inheritance, such as found in Daniel 12:13.
Appendix B: THE APOCALYPTIC AND ESCHATOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF JUDGMENT

In the time of Paul’s writing, recompense and the accountability of human beings were demonstrably interconnected truths. As a Pharisee, prior to his conversion, Paul would have held to this conviction and would have been zealous to defend it.¹ In contrast to the position of the Sadducees, who denied that there was any future life, Paul the Pharisee would have believed that there was a future life including a great last Judgment. If he kept the law and its traditions, he could confidently anticipate rewards in the life to come. If he failed to keep the law, he could expect punishment from a righteous God. The proclamation of the pending judgment finds specific mention in various places in the N. T.² Its idea permeates the Pauline and deuto-Pauline literature as found in Acts, Hebrews, and James. It is also found most powerfully in the Book of Revelation.

In contrast to the O.T. and its earth-bound perspective on reward, the N.T. is more concerned about describing reward as something that is eschatological. It is rare to find in either the O.T. or N.T. where a story does not reward virtue and punish vice. In the N.T. the theme of reward has much the same contrasts, but with a twist. For example, in the beatitudes there is presented a picture of an ideal people who are rewarded for the

¹In Philippians 3:5 Paul identifies himself as a Pharisee: “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee...” and Galatians 1:14, “I was progressing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” (NIV).


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same spiritual lifestyle as found in the O.T. Yet, their reward is “otherworldly” and eschatological. Their rewards are mentioned as possessing the kingdom of heaven, seeing God, and being called children of God. Jesus encourages people to practice piety in such a way as to receive a “reward from your father in heaven.” He tells parables where the rewards are spiritual rewards such as entering into the “joy of one’s Lord.” In the Olivet discourse, Jesus describes a reward that is inheriting “a kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” The rewards that Jesus offers are open precisely to those who recognize that they cannot earn them. It is important to note that rewards in the N.T. are less connected with godly living for the sake of achieving earthly prosperity, as in the O.T., but rather are presented as the object of one’s motivation to “endure” in the face of affliction or trials experienced in this life.

Unseen heavenly rewards are offered also as encouragement not to lose heart. Hebrews 10:35 reads, “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.” Believers are encouraged in Hebrews 12:1 to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and to run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” In Revelation the theme is again reinforced as seen in the letters to the seven

4 Ryken, 719-20.
5 See Matt. 6:1.
6 See Matt. 24-25.
7 See Matt. 25:34.
churches. The churches are encouraged to persist in their commitment, and if they overcome the apostasy and persecution they are promised to receive a heavenly reward. The heavenly reward described in the N.T. stresses a transcendent permanence to the reward.

The imagery of athletic competition is used to enforce the idea of an imperishable wreath of victory. One finds in 1 Corinthians 9:25 these words, “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” Monarchial crowns also provide an image of rewards by representing crowns of righteousness, life, and a crown of glory. Furthermore, the conditions under which one receives a reward are not based upon outward behavior alone. Rewards are received as a result of inward qualities which are pleasing to God and model the life of Christ. Christ presents in the beatitudes the contrast between outward behavior which is rewarded and inward character which also leads to reward. In this regard, Christ is recorded in Matthew 5:16 as saying, “...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven,” thus demonstrating a pleasing outward behavior. Yet, He also said in verses 11-12 of the same chapter, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...” Here the person to receive reward does so merely by remaining passive and demonstrating the inward quality of meekness. R.T. France finds the idea of reward to be frequent in Jesus’ teaching, “not in the sense of an earned...
payment (this idea is excluded, e.g., by Lk. 17:10) but of a freely given recompense, out of all proportion to the service.”

### Imminent World Judgment

Demonstrably connected to future reward is the concept of an imminent world judgment. This concept of imminent world judgment is tied theologically to a call to repentance on the basis of the realization that the one true God is both Creator and Judge. New Testament thought captures both the Jewish apocalyptic thinking on this matter of a pending judgment of the world, and the recognition of deliverance from its eternal consequence in the person of Christ. Paul does not hesitate to appear contradictory to his doctrine of justification by faith alone when he speaks of judgment according to one’s works. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5:10 he speaks of judgment when he says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” C.G. Kruse interprets Paul’s words this way, “What Paul is saying here is that we need to order our lives in the light of the fact that each one of us shall be brought before

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11 Ibid., vol. 1, 74.

12 See also 1 Cor. 3:13-15; Rom. 2:5ff, 14:10.
the judgment seat of Christ (cf. Rom. 14:10)."\textsuperscript{13} Believers are warned also to be ready with such language as, “What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short...” as found in 1 Corinthians 7:29. This is a theme which extends throughout the N.T.\textsuperscript{14} Additionally, they are warned to remain faithful until the end (τελευταία).\textsuperscript{15}

God is called the Judge in James 4:12 and 5:9. He is called the Judge, God of all in Hebrews 12:23. He is the one who is judging in Romans 2:16, 3:6, Acts 17:31, and Hebrews 10:30. The N.T. also adopts such O.T. phrases as, the Day of Yahweh, and the Day of Judgment. Romans 2:5 speaks of the “the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.” The eschatological judgment is also simply called wrath, the coming wrath, or the wrath of God.\textsuperscript{16} Believers are warned to be ready for the pending judgment and God’s wrath with such descriptive phrases as keep awake (γρηγορῶν).\textsuperscript{17} There is also in the N.T. the notion of the thief which is connected in thought to the coming of the Day.\textsuperscript{18} R. Bultmann affirms these findings when he says, “many a traditional expression out of the Old Testament hope or Jewish apocalyptic occurs [in the N.T.].”\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{14} See also Rom. 13:12; Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 1:3, 22:10.

\textsuperscript{15} See also Heb. 3:6; Rev. 2:26.

\textsuperscript{16} See Rom. 5:9, 12:19; Eph. 11:1, 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 11:18, 14:10, 16:19, 19:15.

\textsuperscript{17} See Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; Col.4:2; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 3:2ff. 16:15.

\textsuperscript{18} See 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3, 16:15.

\textsuperscript{19} Bultmann, vol.2, 76.
The word in the N.T. which is used most frequently for judgment is the Greek word κρίνω. It has several meanings. It is used to imply a legal process such as found in Matthew 5:40, and 1 Corinthians 6:1. The word is also used in the N.T. in the sense of “making a decision,” such as found in Acts 4:19 which reads, “Judge (κρίνατε) for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.” Occasionally there are overtones of the O.T. with the use of this word in the N.T. In this regard the word is used to connote a sense of ruling in Matthew 19:28. Furthermore, the O.T. is reflected in the word being used to refer to deliverance and Christ’s victory over the forces of evil. This meaning is found in John 12:31 which states, “Now is the time for judgment (κρίσις) on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.” As Morris finds, “The death of Christ was in one aspect a judicial dealing with the evil one. As in the Old Testament, this does not mean an impartial weighing of evidence...He [Satan] is cast out because he deserves to be cast out. Believers may know that their deliverance is soundly based.”

In the N.T. judgment is primarily one which falls upon the individual. It is judgment that is found to be both a present judgment and future judgment. In the present judgment, the Lord’s judging provides an incentive for self-examination. In the future judgment, the judgment is carried out with certainty and finality. It will be dispensed on the Day as spoken of so frequently in the N.T. Of note concerning this future judgment is

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21 Morris finds that judgment in this life provides a sense of dignity and meaning to life. Judgment incites men to self-examination and repentance and is never to be taken as merely a threat by God. (Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment*).
the fact that God judges all men, but He does not do it in person. John 5:22 states, “the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.” Peter is quoted in Acts 10:42 as saying, “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.” It is also here revealed that all men will be judged--both the living and the dead. All the secrets of men will be judged according to Romans 2:16. J. Murray states, “There needs to be no doubt as to what is in mind in this verse.”

This is an inescapable judgment. For those who are the enemies of God, it brings with it the sentiment in the N.T. of a fearful expectation. Hebrews 10:27 states, “...but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” Believers, however, need not have fear of the judgment to come since the N.T. explains that believers do not face judgment in the same way as do the enemies of God. Jude 24 says, “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy (ἀγαλλίασει)...” Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the judgment that awaits everyone is serious and is overflowing with far-reaching consequence.

A significant aspect of the imminent future judgment is that it will be based upon works. In Matthew 25:31ff there is an explanation of the eternal consequence of work in this life. Verse 41 and 42 state, “For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.” Verse 46 concludes, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment,

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but the righteous to eternal life.” Jesus also is reported as saying in John 9:3, that believers must “work” since, metaphorically speaking, the day is short. It is work itself as well as the motivation which prompts the work that become the focus of judgment—not the measurable results or the tangible success of the work. However, work must be based upon something more noble than the mere desire for reward or the fear of eternal punishment. T.C. Hammond writes, “…It is forgotten that God’s original and chief quarrel with man was, and is, the wrong use of his will rather than his method of living…to live righteously is what man ought to do—merely his duty. Motive, as well as the actual mode of life itself, must be taken into consideration.” Still difficulty arises in the mind of some when a theological reconciliation is attempted to be made between grace and works. On one hand, salvation is due inextricably to the good gift of Christ. On the other hand, judgment is said to be on the basis of works. Reconciliation between the two takes place in such verses as 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 which declare that salvation comes only from what Christ has done. Still believers must live out their lives in recognition of this truth. Some build on this foundation of truth with great care, while others treat this truth recklessly and carelessly.23 24 25

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24 1 Cor. 3:11, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”
Eschatology of the Old Testament

World judgment forms an important element in the broader concept of eschatology. When eschatology is pursued certain distinctives surface that can be characterized along O.T. and N.T. lines. In the O.T. eschatology is derived from the understanding of the concept of Yahweh. So long as Yahweh was perceived as being interested in an earth-bound judgment, eschatology involving the individual could not coexist. A change in perception thus took place in the O.T. on two fronts. The first involved when Israel came to the realization that Yahweh was the one true God, and the second involved the Exile which became the means through which there began to be a greater emphasis upon the individual.26 The concept of a final judgment for the individual is developed in a limited way in the O.T. Both a preliminary and a final judgment surface in Isaiah 24:21 and 22 which reads, “In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.” This division of two distinct judgments is also noted in Ezekiel—the first being the restoration of Israel to its Promised Land, and the second a judgment visited upon the Gentiles. In Daniel the distinction between judgments is again noted. Here the first act of judgment is performed by the saints and the final judgment is to take place by the crushing of kingdoms while God’s kingdom is said to endure forever.27


27 See Dan. 2:44.
Described in the O.T. are places where the dead go either upon judgment or to await judgment. The understanding of the distinction of these locations will aid in the further understanding of the concept of future judgment and its recompense. The abiding places are principally four in number. They are **Heaven**, **Sheol**, **Gehenna**, and the **Pit**. Regarding the first of these abodes, it was to heaven that Enoch and Elijah were swept away. It is apparently heaven that the psalmist has in mind when he writes in Psalm 49:15, “But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.” Heaven is the location where God abides and is therefore seen as a place to desire as a final destination.

Sheol is represented in the O.T. with several understandings. It is either the eternal abode of all the dead, the exclusive eternal abode of the wicked, or the intermediate abode of martyred Israelites and certain apostates. Sheol largely became synonymous with penalty and was in every case of conduct--whether good or bad--the exclusive final abode of the Gentiles.\(^{28}\) Gehenna is said to be derived from the Hebrew expression **Valley of Hinnom** or the **Valley of the Son of Hinnom** as found in such passages as Joshua 15:8, “Then it ran up the Valley of Ben Hinnom (בְּנֵי הִנְנֵם) along the southern slope of the Jebusite city...”\(^{29}\) It became associated with evil and ultimately was simplified and named the **Valley** as found in Jeremiah 2:23, “See how you behaved in the valley (חֲנֵה); consider what you have done.” As with Sheol, the use of Gehenna in the O.T. has various usages. It is used to indicate the topographical boundary such as that


\(^{29}\) See also Jos. 18:16; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Neh. 11:30; Jer. 7:31, 32; 19:2, 6.
between Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. It is used to signify a place of idolatry such as that found in 2 Kings 16:3, which was possibly located in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Gehenna was also “implied” in its use to signify punishment for the rebellious and apostate Jews as found in Isaiah 66:24, “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.” In this usage the punishment is eternal.\(^{30}\)

Another indication of abode after death is the Pit. It is frequently used as a term synonymous with the “grave,” as found, for example, in several locations in Job. Job 33:18 states, “to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.” In Isaiah 24:22 the Pit is uniquely described as an intermediate abode which is a place of punishment for guilty angels and kings. This contrasts the intermediate place of abode for the righteous who are to be found in Sheol.

**Eschatology of the New Testament**

It is apparent thus far that throughout the dispensations of biblical history Israel has exhibited incongruities in the development of its eschatological thought. In support of this fact Charles states, “…in every period we have, on the one side, the doctrine of God ever advancing in depth and fulness; on the other, we have eschatological and other survivals which, however justifiable in earlier stages, are in unmistakable antagonism

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\(^{30}\) See also Dan. 12:2.
with the theistic beliefs of their time.”

Given this O.T. reality it is not too surprising to discover that to a certain extent the same holds true regrading eschatology in the N.T. Therefore, it would be somewhat unrealistic to expect to bring into harmony all of the eschatological findings of the Bible or the extra-biblical writings of the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Rabbinic writings. For example, within the Rabbinic writings S.H. Travis comments, “It is characteristic of this literature to set incompatible teachings side by side without any apparent embarrassment.”

Within the N.T. there are several stages of development of thought concerning eschatology. In the Synoptic Gospels is found an interconnectedness between eternal life and the kingdom. The parables of the hidden treasure and the costly pearl as found in Matthew are both synonymous with the “highest good” which is viewed to be eternal life in the kingdom. Interchangeable terms are used in the Synoptics such as: to have eternal life (Matthew 19:16); to enter life (Mark 9:43); inherit the kingdom (Matthew 25:34); or to enter the kingdom (Luke 18:24). Christ spoke of the kingdom in the present from the outset of His ministry. It is also regarded by Christ as a future anticipation. Since the accomplishment of Christ’s task to usher in the kingdom was dependant upon the people to accept Him, his teaching in the Synoptics is seen to shift from a present to a future kingdom concept. Yet, Christ did not totally abandon the idea of a present kingdom and


33 See Mark 1:15.

34 See Matt. 26:29.
is seen on occasion to combine the present and future in the same statement. In Mark 10:15, Christ is reported as saying, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Here can be found an important connection between the present life and the life to come. That is to say, there exists a proclamation by Jesus that entrance into the future kingdom has a relationship and interdependence upon an inward reality of thought and being in the present kingdom.

In Jude’s epistle the author contends with the issue of judgment from a Jewish perspective and infuses his epistle with apocalyptic language taken from the Pseudepigrapha. The epistle also acknowledges the legitimacy of O.T. prophesies. In verse 13 which reads, “They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever,” there is inferred an understanding of 1 Enoch 18:15ff, which describes stars that transgress the commandment of the Lord. Verse 14 reads, “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones.’” This is a direct quote from 1 Enoch 1:9. The angels spoken of in verse 6 who did not keep their positions of authority and are said to be bound with everlasting chains for judgment has also as its basis verses from 1 Enoch. Jude warns that such were the faithless Israelites who were saved out of Egypt as noted in verse 5, and furthermore the fate of those from Sodom and Gomorrah who will suffer the punishment of the eternal fire. Yet this punishment is temporary in relation to the “judgment on the great Day” as

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35 See also Matt. 18:3; Luke 18:17.

36 See 1 Enoch 10:6,7; 12,13.
found at the conclusion of verse 6. Closely related to Jude in eschatological thought is 2 Peter.

Similar to Jude, Peter warns of pending judgments. Peter mentions, as did Jude, Sodom and Gomorrah as well as the angels that fell from heaven in 2:4ff. Here too they are to be kept in “gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.” As with Jude these were but preliminary judgments which precede the final “day of judgment” as found in 2:9 and 3:7. Peter looks forward to this final day and seeks its speedy coming. It is a day which is described in 3:12 and 13 as one that will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire—the only mention of its occurrence in the N.T.—and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. According to Peter, this will be the home of the righteous and one which he anxiously awaits. Chapter 1:16 and 3:4,12 speak to this future event as one which takes place after the parousia. The postponement of the parousia brings about scoffers in 3:3ff and is related solely to the patience of God as stated in 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

James in his epistle has given eminence to the concept of recompense. In 2 Peter the reader is greeted by the hope of a speedy coming of the day of judgment, however, in James the reader is told to anticipate it. James 5:8 states, “You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.” In addition, the concept of an O.T. recompense of blessing and punishment is brought to light in such passages as 1:2 which reads, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds;” 2:12, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,”
and 5:11, “As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” James clearly defines a contrast between the recompense for doing right, versus the recompense to be expected for doing wrong. In 1:12 James states, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” The contrast to this statement is found in 1:15, “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” Here the language of the apocalyptic writings similar to that found in Enoch is strongly felt.

The epistle to the Hebrews provides further insight into the eschatological understanding of the final judgment noted by the author as the Day—which as with James is seen to be at hand. Chapter 10:37 states, “For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay.” The language of the apocalyptic writings makes its way into this epistle in such text as 12:29 which reads, “for our God is a consuming fire.” Judgment is said to take place at the second coming of Christ, at which time the punishment of the unjust will be dreadful, yet for those who are said to be “waiting for Him” He will not bring judgment but salvation. This salvation is described as entering into a Sabbath-rest (σαββατισμός) in 4:9. It is a rest from toils and troubles that is further described as a better resurrection (κρείττονος ἀναστάσεως). Chapter 11:35 reads, “Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused

37 See also Heb. 10:27.

to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.” It is language which appears to be patterned after 2 Maccabees 7:1-42 in the depiction of the martyrdom of the seven brothers and their mother, all of whom while being tortured to death vocally proclaimed a hope in a resurrection unto *ever flowing life* for their sufferings at the hand of Antiochus Epiphanes the king.

In the Johannine writings the hope of the parousia was one which was simultaneously both present and future. In a present context there are such passages as that found the gospel of John 12:26 which reads, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.” And in a future sense there are such passages as represented in the gospel of John 14:2, 3: “In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” Similar to that found in the synoptics, John’s gospel utilizes the concept of the believer passing into eternal life, which is seen as corollary to the kingdom. Although the word “kingdom” is seldom used by John in this context, the concept is prevalent. Yet for John there is an important distinction that can be drawn between his writings and that of the synoptic writers. For John eternal life is envisioned to be both present and future. John speaks of believers possessing eternal life while they live and having the assurance of never passing into death. In the gospel of John 6:47 he writes these words: “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life,” and in 8:51, “I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” Eternal life for John is a timeless possession which begins at the
point of salvation. Nevertheless, its perfection is not achieved until the consummation of
the final judgment. Having been begun on earth, eternal life after the final judgment will
be perfected in heaven.  

The author of Revelation writes of an eschatology that considers those who form
a great multitude comprised of every nation, tribe, people and language. Whereas O.T.
eschatology tends to distinctly separate the Jew from the Gentile, in Revelation the
distinction tends to separate not upon national lines but upon spiritual ones. At the
parousia, according to Revelation 1:7, “…every eye will see him, even those who pierced
him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.” Christ’s judgment is
described in numerous symbolic forms as having “a sharp sickle in his hand” in 14:14,
and in 19:15 “He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.” The
author speaks also of a temporary Messianic kingdom in 20:6, “Blessed and holy are
those who have part in the first resurrection.” The same kingdom is described in 5:10
when it declares: “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.” The idea of a temporary kingdom is first found in 2
Enoch 32 and 33 where it speaks of an eighth thousand years. Chapter 33:2 states, “…at
the beginning of the eighth thousand there should be a time of not counting, endless, with
neither years nor months nor weeks nor days nor hours.” In 4 Ezra 8:52 the Messiah is
said to be dwelling in a paradise for a period of time, and in 14:9, Ezra and other
righteous men are declared to be dwelling with Him “until the times are ended”—probably

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39 See 1 John 2:17.

40 See Rev. 7:9
referring to the time leading up to the Messianic kingdom. In Revelation 22:12, Christ is quoted as saying, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

Upon the close of the millennium, or Messianic kingdom, Revelation speaks of a general resurrection and a judgment where in 20:12, "...The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." In 21:8 the metaphor of a *fiery lake* is the place reserved for the wicked: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.” An ideal kingdom of God is described in chapter 21 which is to be established for the righteous after the judgment whereupon they will dwell in a new heaven and a new earth.

**Conclusions**

The eschatological concept of a future judgment forms not one cohesive unit of thought but many which tend to divide along O.T. and N.T. lines. Judgment is in the hands of Yahweh who is characterized by such terms as the “judge,” and “the God of all.” His judgment also is given descriptive terms such as “the Day of Yahweh,” and the “coming wrath.” In the O.T. His judgment is first seen as earth-bound and later takes on the form of an apocalyptic, future judgment which is expanded upon by the N.T. authors. O.T. imagery is carried forward into the N.T. which also borrows apocalyptic language directly from the Apocrypha and the literature of the Pseudepigrapha. Nevertheless, there

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is not to be found consistency in the development of eschatological thought. The
description of judgment is sometimes noted as exclusively future, while others such as the
Johannine writings stress the hope of the parousia which is seen not only as future but
also as present. The Synoptics, for example, speak of “inheriting a kingdom” and regard
it as a future anticipation.

While many of the N.T. books speak of a pending judgment and the need for
being ready for it, James goes beyond this declaration and gives eminence to the concept
of recompense at the time of the judgment. He brings to light the O.T. concept of
recompense which is said to encompass both a blessing and punishment. Consequently,
eschatology as related to a future world judgment, recompense of the individual, and
eternal consequence should not be viewed as a theologically consistent doctrine. It has its
varied emphases which sometimes appear contradictory, but in the main it is an evolving
doctrine that grows through time in its depiction and its consequence upon the righteous.
Thus far this dissertation has demonstrated the contrast and similarities among the N.T.
writers but has intentionally excluded the writings of Paul. Paul’s writings uniquely
demonstrate a development of eschatological thought over the time span of his preserved
writings. That is to say, there is to be found within his writings no single, cohesive,
eschatological system.
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