

9

Prophecy and Power



RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Jeremiah 31:33

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Ezekiel 36:27

Prophecy and Power

My daughter and her husband lived in central London for five years. They went with exuberance, knowing they would be able to easily travel throughout Europe, and they took advantage of every opportunity to do so. It did not take long for them to realize that a change in lifestyle would need to be made if they were to fully value this new experience. In fact many Americans never do adjust to the differences in living in a foreign country, returning to the United States sooner than originally planned.

They, however, grew to love London life with its culture and diversity, wanting to extend their stay as long as possible. The people, the architecture, the rich history all combined for a memorable experience. The key to their time there rested on one major premise. They made the decision to let go of trying to force the Americanization of British life and enjoy being in one of the world's most remarkable cities. Imported expectations were relinquished, and this yielded richer benefits.

Living in London may not appeal to everyone because of lifestyle differences. The issue in this chapter concerns not a different way

RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT

of living but a different way of thinking. It addresses our idea of the Spirit's ministry seen through various theological viewpoints.

New Covenant Expectations

The primary Old Testament passages addressing the New Covenant are Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-28; and Joel 2:28-32. Even though the actual words "new covenant" are found only in the Jeremiah text, the context of these passages all concern the New Covenant and the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament states that Christ instituted the New Covenant at His death

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(Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). With the church's inception in Acts 2, the New Covenant was initiated (Acts 2:15-21). The promised Spirit came in fulfillment of "this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel...I will pour forth My Spirit on all mankind" (Acts 2:16-17). All mankind would include not only the nation of Israel but the Gentiles as well. The book of Galatians teaches that the blessings of Abraham came to the Gentiles and that they also received "the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:6-9; 13-14).

Jesus also taught that the Father promised to send the "Helper" after the Son returned to the Father (John 14:6; 16:7-10).

All evangelicals typically agree that the benefits of the New Covenant are available to both Jews and Gentiles. However, there remains disagreement as to the extent, the timing, and the specific recipients of the Holy Spirit's ministry. This goes to the heart of the eschatological *already/not yet* idea. How much is already fulfilled

PROPHECY AND POWER

and how much is yet to be fulfilled? Is this progressive fulfillment, from partial to complete fulfillment? Do all the promises go to the Gentiles through faith? If so, does the church, and not Israel, fulfill the covenant completely?

The answers to each of these questions vary, based on different theological viewpoints when addressing future, eschatological events. In the following material, as will as in chapters 10 and 11, three distinct perspectives of future events will be addressed. In each case, there are consequences related to each view regarding the Spirit's "empowerment" in the Christian life.

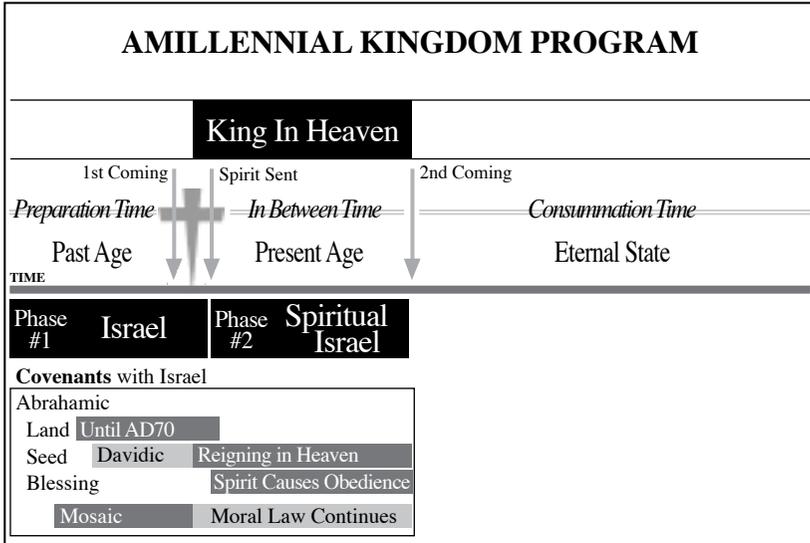
The Traditional Amillennial View

The traditional *amillennial position* sees the church as spiritual Israel, eliminating the need of a future thousand-year (millennial) kingdom for national Israel with Christ reigning from Jerusalem. The Abrahamic Covenant is further developed in the Davidic and New covenants. The Davidic Covenant was established with David (2 Sam. 7) and was fulfilled in Christ, the Messiah and Abraham's seed. The messianic reign was instituted with Christ's ascension to the Father (Acts 1). When Jesus returns, the eternal state will follow judgment. Presently we are in the "between time" with Christ reigning from heaven. The promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36) was instituted at Pentecost (Acts 2) with the pouring out of the Spirit on all mankind, Jew and Gentile. The giving of the Spirit provides the indwelling, baptizing, and gifting ministries, and is the source of energizing obedience through the believer. The Mosaic Law given to Israel (Exod. 20) consists of three parts: moral, ceremonial, and judicial, but only the moral portion is assumed applicable for today. With all the Old Testament promises and prophecies to the nation of Israel finding fulfillment in the church, spiritual Israel, amillennialists believe that most prophecies are "already" fulfilled.

A graphical presentation of this view (see next page) shows the replacement of national Israel by spiritual Israel. This new and

RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT

present form of the kingdom is the recipient of all Old Testament promises and prophecies.



The Traditional Premillennial View

The traditional *premillennial position* understands the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants as perpetual and unconditional promises of God to the nation of Israel. The church does not supplant Israel. God temporarily set aside the nation of Israel because of their rejection of the Messiah. While God’s current form of the kingdom on earth is the church, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, He will again restore the nation Israel in a future earthly, millennial kingdom following Christ’s return and before the eternal state.

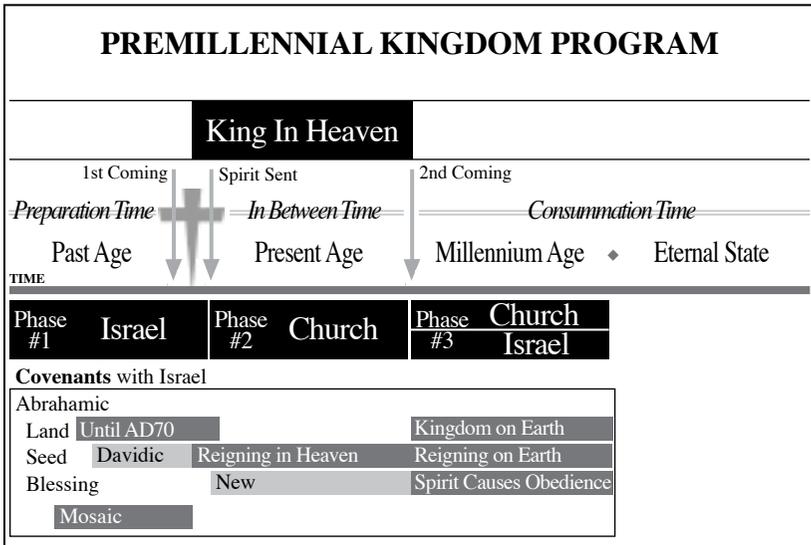
In the present age, Christ reigns from heaven and the Spirit of the New Covenant provides the indwelling, baptizing, and gifting ministries as well as enablement for believers to obey God’s Word. The Mosaic Covenant is generally understood to be no longer valid as a binding authority for the church (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 5:18). Rather, as discussed in chapter 3 the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)

PROPHECY AND POWER

includes New Testament commands that are the current requirements for the believer's walk.

In progressive fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, Jesus currently reigns in heaven until His return (Rev. 20:1-6). On earth Christ, along with the resurrected saints, will rule together. In complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, the ethnic nation will once again be in the Promised Land with their King, Jesus Christ, on the throne of David. Also in fulfillment of the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit will place a new heart within regathered Israel and cause them to walk in obedience (Ezek. 36:26-27).

A graphical presentation of this view (shown below) illustrates this position. Following the church age, God will restore Israel to their land and their King will rule from His earthly throne. The eternal state will follow the millennium kingdom.



An Alternative Premillennial View

The alternative *premillennial position* is a variation of the tra-

RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT

ditional premillennial position. As with the traditional *premillennial position*, the alternative view also pictures the temporary setting aside by God of the nation of Israel and places Christ's earthly rule during a future millennial kingdom. During the millennial age God will fulfill the remaining promises for the nation of Israel.

As a result, the graphical presentation of this view is the same as that of the traditional premillennial position. However, this author will make a case for a distinction between the two premillennial positions based on the extent of the Spirit's enablement for believers to obey God's Word. The distinction between the traditional premillennial view and the proposed alternative premillennial position will be explained in detail in the next two chapters. A preview addressing empowerment expectations is provided below.

Empowerment Expectations

The New Covenant texts (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36; and Joel 2) entail major prophetic events anticipating fulfillment. Note the following:

I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Jer. 31:31).

I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it (Jer. 31:33).

They will not teach again...neighbor and...brother...for they will all know Me (Jer. 31:34).

I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember not more (Jer. 31:34).

I will take you from the nations...and bring you into your own land (Ezek. 36:24).

PROPHECY AND POWER

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes (Ezek. 36:27).

You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers (Ezek. 36:28).

I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind (Joel 2:28).

The expected fulfillment of these prophecies in God's program, concerning the future of Israel, obviously differs from other major eschatological views. The traditional amillennial position understands that the intended meaning of the three texts refers not to literal Israel, but to the church, while the traditional premillennial position requires an actual, literal fulfillment by the nation of Israel. Therefore how each position views "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezek. 36:27) is critical not only to the eschatological positions of *already/not yet* but, in particular, to the concept of a "special empowerment" by the Spirit for living the Christian life.

Already/Not Yet

In this regard, two factors must be kept in mind. *First*, in an *already/not yet* theme, the *already* concept refers to a past or a present time and event, while the *not yet* concept refers to some future time and event. *Second*, and as previously discussed, Acts 1:4-8 does not support the *empowering model* to explain the ministry of the Spirit for living the "victori-

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RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT

ous” Christian life. Also, since “I will...cause you to walk” (Ezek. 36:27) is the other major passage used to support and explain the *empowering model* for “victorious” Christian living, the following two chapters will explore that assertion.

Cause to Walk

Consider the implications of “I will...cause you to walk” from Ezekiel 36:27 for each interpretation in relation to time, as shown in the following chart. Since the traditional amillennial position sees spiritual Israel, not literal Israel, all the promises and prophecies to Israel are now fulfilled in the church and, consequently,

CAUSE TO WALK Ezekiel 36:27		
View	<i>Already</i>	<i>Not Yet</i>
Traditional Amillennial View	Completely Fulfilled (<i>cause</i> Church to walk obediently)	—
Traditional Premillennial View	Partially Fulfilled (<i>enable</i> Church to walk obediently)	Fully Fulfilled (<i>cause</i> Israel to walk obediently)
Alternative Premillennial View	—	Completely Fulfilled (<i>cause</i> Israel to walk obediently)

God *causes* the church to live obediently. On the other hand, the traditional premillennial position sees God working with the nation of Israel in the future during a 1,000-year earthly reign of Christ, when He will *cause* Israel to walk in obedience. Proponents of the traditional premillennial position usually understand that there is a

PROPHECY AND POWER

present *enabling* by God for obedience since the church participates in the blessings portion of the Abrahamic Covenant. However, the alternative premillennial position does not endorse a “special empowerment” during the present church age. Rather, fulfillment of this prophecy awaits the return of Christ.

The distinction between the two traditional viewpoints and the alternative premillennial position addressed in this book is the *extent* of the Spirit’s empowerment for believers to obey God’s Word. So stated previously this author believes an “influencing” ministry rather than a “causing” or “enabling” ministry is the biblical model. This distinction is critical for understanding the Christian walk.

Conclusion

The purpose of providing these differing eschatological views is to give perspective regarding the possibility of a “special empowerment” by the Spirit for living the Christian life, as addressed in the preceding chapters. The expectation of each view shall be addressed in the following chapters.

The end result for each view differs. The traditional amillennial position requires that all promises and prophecies be fulfilled prior to Christ’s return. On the other hand, the traditional premillennial position and the alternative premillennial position both allow for incomplete-prophetic fulfillments prior to the return of Christ. As a result, remaining or partially unfilled prophecies still are to be completely accomplished during the 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth. This distinction goes to the heart of the eschatological *already/not yet* theme.

