CONFERENCE REPORT

STUDY COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE ARTICLES OF FAITH 24-27

This report was presented to the 142nd Conference of the Bible Fellowship Church in 2025.
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Bible Fellowship Church

Study Committee to Examine Articles of Faith 24-27

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The BFC Committee met four times between 2024 and 2025 BFC Conference and submits the following report that has been unanimously adopted by the members of the committee. The final version of this report was approved by the committee on January 30, 2025.

Respectfully Submitted,
Timothy J. Bertolet, Secretary

Study Committee to Examine Articles of Faith 24-27: Andrew T. Crossgrove, Convener; Timothy J. Bertolet, Secretary; Daniel J. Hoffstetter, S. Wayne Rissmiller, Timothy J. Schmoyer, Keith A. Strunk, Aaron J. Susek.

Opening statement

This committee was formed by the 2024 BFC Conference with the assignment of examining our position on the millennium. We were instructed to "study Articles of Faith 24-27 with a view to possibly revising, moving, or removing our statements on the millennium and who will bring recommendations to the next BFC Conference."

Our committee met four times during the 2024-2025 interim between BFC Conferences and studied our current articles and the issues of the millennium. We have unanimously arrived at the following proposal:

Proposal: *It is the unanimous finding of this committee that the BFC should modify its doctrine statement to allow men who affirm an amillennial position to serve as elders and pastors in the BFC, and that the new wording of the doctrinal statement be written in such a way that the amillennial and various premillennial positions could both affirm the statements on eschatology without needing to declare reservations.*

Due to the nature of our work, we have not yet arrived at precise wording to propose for this change and we will need another year to continue this work. This is because (a) the topic is very broad and detailed—too much to handle in one year; and (b) because we believe that we should allow time to convince the denomination that this is the right step to take. We submit this paper as a step forward in making the case before we submit proposed changes to the Articles of Faith in 2026. Following the amendment process laid out in Article 701 [Amendments to the Faith & Order], changes to the Articles of Faith require a two-thirds majority of Conference *and* a simple majority of the boards of elders of at least two-thirds of the churches. Therefore, our study committee wishes to provide opportunity for much dialogue between all parties. That dialogue begins with this paper. We desire your feedback so that we can begin to draft amendments that will be favorable to everyone.

This report will proceed along four major lines: (1) we will discuss the proposals we considered and why we did not choose others; (2) we will highlight the challenge of this presentation; (3) we will discuss the common cores of premillennialism and amillennialism that we believe we could unite around *without* losing or compromising the BFC's commitment to the authority of the Word of God; and (4) we will end with a proposal of our recommended next steps as the committee continues its work.

1. Options considered

a. **Option 1:** Remain with our current Articles of Faith (AOF) on the millennium and instruct the Ministerial Credentials Committee that the exceptions granted to currently-ordained men were out of order. Rescind the credentials of men who were previously granted exceptions. This seemed to be rather divisive to the body since the men were ordained in the domination in good faith as those in complete agreement. It also undermines the delegated authority that the Ministerial Credentials Committee has been granted and could be seen as a rebuke of their faithful work. While this is an option in the sense of charting the spectrum of possibilities, it was not one the committee seriously considered since it is potentially the most divisive.

b. **Option 2:** Remain with our current AOF on the millennium. Continue to allow exceptions for ordained men if they change their view after they were ordained as men in full agreement with the doctrinal statement. Continue to instruct the Ministerial Candidate Committee to *only* accept men who are in full agreement with the BFC AOF. This would be the "status quo" option. *To continue this way perpetuates the inconsistency where we deny entry to men who could hold to the exact same position as a man presently ordained and granted an exception.* The longer this continues, the more it creates a scenario where we wink and grant an exception once you are in the club of ordained BFC men, but not before. If we do not question the fitness of men in the denomination who are granted an exception, why do we exclude them from being a fit on this issue when they come from the outside? We believe that going forward and continuing this way fails to address the issues in a meaningful way, potentially signals a lack of integrity, and shows a degree of favoritism not consistent with scriptural ethics.

c. **Option 3:** Remain with our current AOF. Continue to allow exceptions for ordained men if they change their view after they were ordained as men in full agreement with the doctrinal statement. Instruct the Ministerial Candidate Committee that they are allowed to grant exceptions on the issue of the millennium to men coming into the denomination, just as the Ministerial Credential Committee does. Instruct elder boards that they are allowed to appoint elders under the same exception granted to ordained men. These instructions could be included in the Principles of Order and probably not in the AOF.

   In this scenario, on paper the doctrinal position of the BFC would remain premillennial. It would honor our heritage and doctrinal commitments that our forefathers considered an important feature of our eschatology and hermeneutics.

   The difficulty is that this view makes us different on paper and in practice. We have changed our doctrinal statement many times in the past and have not considered it a dishonor to our forefathers but consistent to the principle that they instilled in us: above all else, to follow the Word of God.

   Furthermore, before a larger world it signals a lack of integrity. We claim to have certain convictions as matters of doctrine and as a denomination, but we allow an ordained man to not be committed to a certain doctrine we have in writing. If a doctrine is a distinctive of the BFC, then it must certainly be a distinctive affirmed by her leaders and preached in the pulpits. The nature of doctrinal statements is to declare positions and mark boundaries for mutual church fellowship. We do not believe that we should, in the AOF, close a door to fellowship at the same time we all know in practice it is open in the Principles of Order (or wherever it might appear in writing). In other words, if we are a premillennial denomination, then it must be enforceable by the leaders of the denomination at the pastor and elder level. We do not believe that we should "split the difference" in this way.

d. Option 4: Change the Articles of Faith to something that allows for more liberty on the matter of eschatology. The BFC would then enforce and hold ordained men and elders to the position as it is written. While it allows for a greater differences within the AOF than we presently have, it also allows us to strengthen the conviction of our enforcement of these boundaries.[1] We already believe that ordained men in the denomination who hold an existing exception remain a fit in the BFC, and we no longer would have to turn away men of the exact same conviction and caliber. We believe the same standard by which one retains credentials in the BFC should be the same standard by which you enter. *Of our four options, this is the option we are proposing.*

2. Introduction to the unique challenge of this presentation

The challenge of this study committee has been that (1) not all the members of committee would affirm or agree on one eschatological position; and thus (2) the committee is choosing to make an argument for denominational unity despite holding different positions. Usually when a study committee is formed, its primary focus is to exegete the texts and determine "what does the Scriptures say." The history of the BFC is marked by key changes that were driven by careful exegesis where we left one position to affirm another more accurate position (e.g. from Arminian soteriology to Calvinist soteriology). In our case on this subject, given the nature of the question of the millennium, our committee cannot come and say before this Conference, "This is the right and proper understanding of the millennium and here is the exegesis to prove it."

The larger question of framework for eschatology has always been, "What is your biblical theology of hermeneutics?" How one understands issues like the Abrahamic Covenant, the land promise to Israel, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Creation are factors in how one arrives at their particular eschatological conclusion.[2] Positions range from classic/revised dispensationalism to progressive dispensationalism[3] (those holding to an "already/not yet"), to

[1] It would probably be wise for Conference to also make clear instruction to this effect to the Ministerial Candidate Committee, the Ministerial Credentials Committee, and local Boards of Elders that even broader exceptions to the new statement on eschatology are not to be granted (or perhaps not to be granted without expressed instructions from BFC Conference?). In other words, we would make clear we have opened the door a bit more but also prohibited anyone from going further without the approval of BFC Conference. It would effectively declare, "We really are united around these issues and we really choose to divide with leadership who are not in agreement."

[2] For example, John Walvoord asserts that if you just get the Abrahamic Covenant right, everything in your eschatology is obvious and falls into place. He writes, "It is recognized by all serious students of the Bible that the covenant with Abraham is one of the important and determinative revelations of Scripture. It furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and reaches for its fulfillment into the New. In the controversy between premillennarians and amillennarians, the interpretation of this covenant more or less settles the entire argument. The analysis of its provisions and the character of their fulfillment set the mold for the entire body of Scriptural truth" (*The Millennial Kingdom* [Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1959] 139; quoted in Keith Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *TMSJ* 10/2 (1999): 191). In other words, Walvoord argues if you don't reach his *dispensational* premillennial conclusion, you haven't taken the Abrahamic Covenant according to what God meant. This quickly becomes circular: if you use the right hermeneutics, you'll arrive at my view; if you don't arrive at my view, your hermeneutics were bad regardless of your actual exegetical arguments.

[3] Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL.: BridgePoint, 1993); Darrell L. Bock, "Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 112–46.

progressive covenantalism,[4] to Baptistic covenant theologies[5] or some unique variation in between. While all of the views are determined to understand the Word of God as He intended it (i.e., taking it "literally" or according to the "plain sense"), all the positions disagree on what exactly that should look like. The dispensationalist might say, "You aren't taking the Abrahamic Covenant according to the literal sense given in Genesis" while a covenantal position might say, "But you aren't taking this New Testament passage that interprets Genesis according to its plain sense."[6]

Our committee has focused on asking and answering the question, "Where should the borders of our position on eschatology be?" We hope that BFC Conference will understand the distinct nature of the task at hand and recognize that it tasked this committee with exercising discernment beyond just faithfully interpreting Scripture. We must examine why a certain range of views is already allowed but another range of views is not allowed. [7]

Our goal, based on our wrestling with the implications of differing interpretations, is to convince BFC Conference that in the current theological milieu of the 21st century, there are enough broad similarities between premillennialism today and amillennialism today that the BFC can expand to allow amillennialism in a carefully-worded doctrinal statement that does not compromise our positions on the authority of the Word of God and our unstated[8] but underlying commitment authorial intent.

Put another way, we grant that in past generations one can find amillennialists doing shoddy exegetical work on the Old Testament that was rightly accused as "spiritualizing" the text. We also grant that some dispensationalists have also done shoddy exegetical work, at times ignoring the figurative function of apocalyptic literature. In the past, some "literal" approaches to Revelation have so literalized the text that it ignored the apocalyptic imagery in the genre, where it is intentionally symbolic and intended by the original author to be understood figuratively. It will not do to say "the BFC takes a literal approach to the Bible, so *therefore* amillennialism is not a fit."

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[4] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2016); Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2022), 74–111. While this view uses the word "covenant," they have been careful to distinguish themselves from historic versions of covenant theology.

[5] Like the covenant theology found within the Second London Baptist Conventions of 1689.

[6] The back-and-forth between views in Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2022), is a good example of this. See Michael Horton's remarks on pp. 183-189 to classic dispensationalism; Wellum's remarks on dispensationalism (pp. 213-218); Darrell Bock's progressive dispensationalist critique of covenant theology (p.222) and his critique of classic dispensationalism (pp.234-235, 237-238); and Snodgrass's classical dispensational critique of everyone (pp. 239-250, but especially pp. 246-247).

[7] See appendix 1 for a short survey of various positions of eschatology between premillennialism and amillennialism.

[8] We simply mean we have no statement in the Articles of Faith or Book of Order on proper hermeneutics. We are not advocating that we should necessarily have one, but simply that if we allow for an amillennial view, what unites us would be greater than any difference between premillennialism and amillennialism differences inside the BFC.

In another era, we believe that allowing for different eschatological positions in the BFC during that time might have led us to compromise on grammatical-historical interpretation in a way that is no longer true today. With great admiration, we honor the past and the commitments of our forefathers. But like our forefathers, we are again led to ask the question, dare we change?[9]

Today we must ask anew, "When Christians brothers disagree, when do we divide in fellowship and when do we unify around greater biblical commitments despite our differences?"[10] What are the ties that bind? Is the amillennial brother seeking to faithfully handle the Word of God through normative interpretative methods? Does his interpretation uphold the authority of the Word, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the unchanging character of God's promises? While there are times when one must divide with those who hold these, the questions are when and why. The answers to our issues at hand lead us to believe that it is appropriate to move the boundaries of our doctrinal statement to allow like-minded believers to fellowship and lead alongside us.

3. Common commitments between premillennialists and amillennialists that the BFC can affirm

If we may be a bit transparent at this juncture, as we wrestled with the different eschatological positions held by committee members and teased out the implications, we were pleasantly surprised at regular points where we found ourselves saying, "I disagree with how you handle this passage specifically, but I see where you are zealous to guard the same underlying presuppositions that drive me to my view." Some examples of common underlying presuppositions we all wholeheartedly affirmed together included (1) grammatical-historical interpretation,[11] (2) literal future reign, (3) Old Testament and kingdom promises that are not fulfilled in our present age, (4) balancing the already/not yet of inaugurated eschatology, (5) refusal to "spiritualize," and (6) commitment to the ultimate end being the New Heavens and the

[9] Here we are referencing brother Don Kirkwood's seminal essay. We change not for novelty but only as lead by the Word of God and the faithful application of it. https://bfchistory.org/writings-from-our-pastors/dare-we-change/

[10] See appendix three on theological triage.

[11] **Grammatical-historical interpretation definition:** for our purposes, we are defining it as taking the words as intended in their original context according to the normal rules of word meaning, grammar, syntax, and genre. Sometimes this is called "literal" or "plain sense;" all these terms can sometimes introduce confusion depending on how they are understood. We want to be clear that when something is intended by the author to be poetic, metaphor, expression, figure of speech, symbolism, etc., grammatical-historical interpretation acknowledges that and accounts for it—"literal" and "plain sense" should mean this. It does not "literalize" the text in a way that ignores the intent or the figure of speech. It strives to determine the author's intent where the author intended not to be literalistic. Grammatical-historical interpretation must be used in conjunction with letting Scripture interpret Scripture because God is the ultimate author of the Scripture: not just the human in his setting. The ultimate context for any passage and its meaning is the whole of Scripture.

New Earth—a literal earth.[12] This leads us to believe that these are the types of things that we can unify around in the BFC whether one is premillennial or amillennial.[13]

a. Unifying around key hermeneutical convictions

It is a misunderstanding of the difference between premillennialism and amillennialism to simply state that the former holds to literal grammatical-historical interpretation and the latter abandons such principles in favor of "spiritualizing" or "allegorizing" the text.[14] In fact, most modern amillennialists hold to their view precisely because they are following grammatical-historical interpretation. For example, G.K. Beale in his commentary on Revelation 20 argues at a highly detailed *textual level* for his interpretation.[15] The premillennialist may disagree with his interpretation *but it will no longer do to dismiss amillennialists with the sweeping brush stroke of "it's not grammatical-historical interpretation."*[16]

Furthermore, the history of the church shows us that good, godly, evangelical, *and* Calvinist saints committed to faithfully interpreting the Scriptures have disagreed vigorously over the nature of the millennium. Historically, Baptist confessions, especially the ones that lean Calvinistic and come from English Puritanism, have not felt the need to delineate the precise nature of the millennium, and we believe the Bible Fellowship Church should heed this wisdom.

The premillennialist and the amillennialist share enough common theological and hermeneutical convictions that they can serve in ecclesiastical fellowship together. Each pastor should be allowed to follow these shared hermeneutical convictions in his preaching and teaching of God's Word, knowing he is free to land on either the amillennial or premillennial side.

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[12] In fact, part of what makes the BFC a unique blessing is that we already unify around these things without declaring a position on the dispensational vs. covenant theology debates of the last 100 years. In fact, we have avoided some of the root causes of the divisiveness over eschatology. This means the BFC already has an ethos that allows a range of nuance on the question of how one views the Bible's overarching structure. Of course we have boundaries, but we allow positions that avoid the extremes of either. We don't divide with dispensationalists simply because they are dispensationalists, or covenant theologians because they affirm a unity to the unfolding of the covenants. We have found a core to unite over. Our proposal merely continues this way forward into the premillennial and amillennial divide.

[13] One cannot help but observe that perhaps we got entrenched in old battle lines that no longer apply in light of changes within both camps. On these shifts see Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: A New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004).

[14] R. Todd Mangum writes, "Simply parroting the older dispensationalist canard that the dispensationalist-covenant theology debate is between those who take the Bible 'literally' and those who 'allegorize' or 'spiritualize' Scripture should come to an abrupt halt." (*The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift* [Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007], 210).

[15] G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999).

[16] Sam Storms, in *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), acknowledges that it may have been true of older amillennial interpretations that they did view Old Testament passages that speak to future, physical, and geo-spatial realities as referring to *spiritual* blessings for the church now but new amillennialists (like Anthony Hoekema) emphasize them as future, physical, geo-spatial *and* fulfilled on the New Earth (pp.426-27). Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, Second Edition. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1994), 47, makes a similar remark. See our footnote 47 below.

Five hermeneutical principles we can unify around, regardless of whether one arrives at an amillennialist or a premillennialist position

First, Sola Scripture. The BFC is committed to the truth of Scripture and Scripture alone as the final authority. At first glance, this may not seem like a hermeneutical conviction, but it actually anchors hermeneutics. If Scripture is the final authority, then Scripture must be interpreted according to God's intent in the words written. This means we don't use methods to impose meaning on Scripture. "Hermeneutics is concerned with the practical application of *Scripture alone*."[17]

Second, Scripture interprets Scripture and is the final authority in interpretation. If Scripture is the final authority, then Scripture is going to be the proper interpreter of Scripture. When we find difficult passages, we interpret the unclear passages of Scripture by the clear passages of Scripture. This guards our interpretation from being widely speculative and fanciful when something is unclear. We don't read into the Scripture allegorical or spiritual meaning not intended by God.

Third, God has spoken in his Word, which is inerrant. If Scripture is God's revelation to us, then His intent in Scripture is of the utmost importance. He is not speaking to us in code or allegories. He is speaking to us in plain human language. He speaks to reveal and make known. Because God speaks and God does not err but is infallible, His speech will be inerrant and infallible. If God is speaking plainly and clearly, we then must listen plainly and clearly. We are not interpreting Scripture through some sort of divination or mystical methodology to get it to reveal its secret. God speaking in plain language without error means that we interpret according to the plain sense of the words and their meaning.

The inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture means that God does not break His Word. He makes unconditional covenants that do not change and are irrevocable (Heb. 6:13-20). If God has spoken something, He does not change it because He grounds His Word in who He is. God gave His promise to Abraham: "Surely I will bless you and multiply you" (Gen. 22:17; Heb. 6:14) and in that word He shows "more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose" (Heb. 6:17). It is impossible for God to lie; His Word is inerrant and infallible.

While this third point is an area of similarity between the amillennialist and the premillennialist, where it gets "tricky" is how one balances the nature of progressive revelation and the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament (see below). Nevertheless, the amillennialist is not taking the previous words of God and overturning the meaning either by spiritualizing or allegorizing them. Both the amillennialist and the premillennialist believe that God's Word and its meaning do not change and God's promises do not change.

Context is always key in determining the meaning and the ultimate context of Scripture in the entirety of the Canon. Consider the English word "trunk." That term could mean (1) an elephant's trunk; (2) a suitcase-type box for packing; or (3) the trunk of a car. If I make a promise

[17] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 49.

and say, “I will pack my trunk tomorrow,” you know in my original promise that I do not mean option #1. Let’s say I do not specify beyond that. But the next day, I come back to you and I say, “I packed my car like I promised.” Now, as I have progressively revealed my meaning, I have kept my word. You did not understand the entirety of what I was going to do but you had enough to know I would be packing my stuff. Later-added context helped clarify my original intent even if you did not fully understand all of it at the time. Thus it is with progressive revelation.

Progressive revelation is, in part, determinative for how we read the text of the Bible *especially since God's one story unfolds progressively and God does not lie or mislead*. He also does not exhaust His full meaning all at once, even though He knows it for Himself. For example, with regard to the Abrahamic promises we see a shaping of progressive revelation where the New Testament argues (1) the seed promised is ultimately Christ and those in union with him (Gal. 3); (2) Abraham was ultimately promised he would be heir of the whole world (Rom. 4:13); and (3) there is also a sense in which Abraham was promised more than the land/country on earth—but a heavenly one (Heb. 11:16). Even more, it is the unfolding of progressive revelation that shows us how the Gentiles come to share in this promise as they are grafted in. In Ephesians, Paul speaks of this as a mystery made known (Eph. 3:1-6).

Fourth, we should read the words of Scripture in their intended meaning and that entails using grammatical-historical interpretation. Our commitment to grammatical-historical interpretation rests on the truth of who God is and what He does. He is the ultimate author of Scripture. The meaning of Scripture comes from the author who formed the words. Meaning is rooted in what is being said through the plain sense of the words. This means we do not engage in reader-response methodologies, critical theory hermeneutics, allegorical methods that find hidden meaning, or spiritualization of the text that goes beyond any spiritual and true meaning in God’s original intent. Grammatical-historical interpretation is not an authority over the text. God is the authority, and His Word is infallible, not our interpretation and methodologies. But right use of the grammatical-historical interpretation is a servant, under the authority of the text, that seeks to hear God as God intended to be heard and understood.

Grammatical-historical interpretation will also take into consideration the genre of Scripture (proverbs, poetry, narrative, apocalyptic). It will recognize poetic expressions, figures of speech, non-literal meaning, and figurative expressions *where that is what the author intended to convey*. It will not read symbolic meaning and allegories into the text where the author did not mean it as such. This, of course, can be tricky at times and this is why we continue to be careful students of Scripture.

We should allow freedom to the pastor and congregants to weigh out the nuances of apocalyptic literature and what symbolism might be inherent in the text itself. Taking the text as the author intended is the most basic point to all good interpretation. Expanding our doctrinal statement to allow for amillennialism is *not* an abandonment of the hermeneutical principle of grammatical-historical interpretation; rather, it allows believers to exegete the nuances of the text. It acknowledges the complex balancing act of putting the Scriptures together in determining

one's eschatology,[18] *even when we are all committed to reading Scripture according to the intended meaning.*

It is a simple fact of the history of biblical scholarship that much more is understood today about the nature and nuances of the genre of apocalyptic literature than was recognized a century ago, when divisions over eschatology were at their high-water mark. A generation ago, it was easy to accuse interpreters of merely spiritualizing the text or merely being overly literalistic. These are old battle lines. Today we recognize the importance of literary criticism more broadly and the nuances of apocalyptic genre more specifically. *This means today, if one finds symbolic meaning in apocalyptic and prophetic texts, greater effort is made to show through grammatical-historical exegesis that the symbolic meaning was the intended meaning—or at least that is the argument the commentators labor to make.*[19] Sometimes the "literal meaning" of the text is the non-literal referent. ***Only good exegesis and letting Scripture interpret Scripture determines this***. It is irresponsible today to dismiss the amillennial position as one that is not consistently practicing grammatical-historical interpretation and is not committed to the original intent of the Scriptures.

Letting Scripture interpret Scripture means that we reject historical-critical methodology. While historical-critical methodology often uses grammatical-historical interpretation on particular passages, it does not see the Bible as one book from God. An historical-critical scholar might for example think that it is inappropriate to use Paul to help us understand something in Luke as we formulate an understanding of the whole Bible. He would also reject any notion that the New Testament and Old Testament are bound together as one book,[20] and that we can use the New Testament to help us understand the Old Testament and *vice versa*. This commitment that the Bible is one book is something all in the BFC firmly agree upon.

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[18] This gets complicated as numerous texts are synthesized together, but it also makes some divisions more of a razor's edge than ever before. For example, a premillennialist might say in Revelation that Text A is more symbolic and Text B is not symbolic and defend his position through grammatical-historical interpretation, whereas an amillennialist might say both Text A and Text B are symbolic and defend his position by grammatical-historical interpretation. Should this difference alone over Revelation 20 be a basis for denying ordination and pastoral call within the BFC?

[19] A good example, outside of apocalyptic literature, of using grammatical-historical interpretation to argue the *original* intent of the statement "for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed" is figurative is G.K. Beale, "An Amillennial Response to a Premillennial View of Isaiah 65:20," *JETS* 61.3 (2018): 461–92. One does not necessarily have to agree with his conclusion to acknowledge that Beale is doing the hard work of grammatical-historical interpretation to support his view.

[20] David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship Between Old and New Testaments*, Third Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010). He helpfully notes six concepts that are fundamental to a biblical solution: (1) Christology; (2) Salvation history; (3) Typology; (4) Promise and fulfillment; (5) Continuity and discontinuity; and (6) Covenant. For our purposes: how one brings these together will have some impact on how one answers the question of premillennialism and amillennialism. But for the BFC, the other areas where we are united (including some of these areas) or where we allow for a range of nuances (e.g. promise and fulfillment, covenant) are what serve to unite us so that we do not need to make the dividing line over premillennialism and amillennialism. In other words, if we allow flexibility on continuity and discontinuity or promise and fulfillment within an acceptable range and avoid extremes, we see no biblically justifiable reason to consider amillennialism in itself as "a bridge too far."

Fifth, the Bible tells one story of God's mission to glorify His name and save the lost.[21] We believe in one God who speaks. Thus, while the Bible is a collection of books, we recognize the divine author and the God-breathed nature of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16). The human authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). As such, the Bible tells one overarching story of God glorifying His name within creation.

God created man in His image to have dominion over all creation as His vice-regents on His behalf. Man sinned and rebelled. Since Genesis 3, God's revealing Himself in creation for His glory has also been for the purpose of redemption. Saints in Old Testament Israel and in the church today believe the same gospel message (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 1:2; Gal. 3:8; Heb. 4:2). The gospel message is to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16-17). This one story unfolds with nuances and distinctions of continuity and discontinuity, but is still one plan and purpose of God and is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In Adam all die and sin, and in Christ all will be made alive (Rom. 5:12, 17-20; 1 Cor. 15:22).

While there are distinctions in the unfolding of God's plan, God's plan has always been to bless the nations through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Israel was God's firstborn son (Ex. 4:22), called to be the highest among the nations and God's own heritage (Deut. 26:19; 28:1; 32:8-9). She is the firstfruits of God's harvest (Jer. 2:3). The gospel was never just for Israel, but Israel's Messiah would bring the nations to know the living and true God. The dominion of the Messiah would extend to the ends of the earth and kings will bow to him (Ps. 72:8, 11, 17).[22]

Jesus is this crucified and risen Messiah. While He is now being, in part, rejected by the Jewish people (His brothers according to the flesh), in the plan of God, it nonetheless remains that salvation is in the gospel and that gospel is going to the ends of the earth. God is fulfilling His plan to extend His glory into all creation and is saving people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. This does not mean God has broken His promises or rejected His people (Romans 11:1). But "a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). God will fulfill the promises He made to Israel in the Old Testament.[23]

This reading of the unfolding story of Scripture in the way described would find broad agreement within the BFC and would be a unifying rallying point between amillennialism and premillennialism. Furthermore, reading the Bible as telling one story *is a hermeneutical commitment.* It arises from our reading of the text and using grammatical-historical methodology,

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[21] Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004) for a helpful introduction.

[22] Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006) is a great thorough treatment of the narrative to Scripture and these themes without being either dispensational or covenantal.

[23] Everything in this paragraph could be affirmed by both covenant and dispensational views as well as amillennialist and premillennialist views. Even if one disagrees over the precise referent in view when Paul says "and thus all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26a), all sides could affirm this broad outline.

but it is nonetheless a hermeneutical commitment that works in concert with grammatical-historical methodology (see Goldsworthy's *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*).[24]

b. Areas of distinction between premillennialists and amillennialists

The first area of difference between the premillennialist and the amillennialist is the following: How should we understand use of the Old Testament in the New Testament?[25]

The use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is difficult—the secondary literature is immense on this topic.[26] However, it cannot be maintained that the authors of the New Testament strictly practice the 20th century equivalent of "grammatical-historical exegesis." They were not modernist, nor did such a notion exist in the ancient world. Put succinctly by two *conservative* evangelical scholars, "NT writers claim meanings for OT texts that cannot be demonstrated on the basis of the typical canons of modern grammatical-historical criticism."[27] *This is not to say they interpreted the meaning of the text against the intended meaning. Instead, it is to say they did more than a bare grammatical-historical reading.*[28] They often saw the text as pointing to Christ, or located it in the progress of unfolding redemption. In other words, they

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[24] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*. Unfortunately, when it comes to hermeneutics many "grammatical-historical" interpretations only follow the methodologies of E. D. Hirsch (*Validity in Interpretation*) without questioning the modernist presuppositions that drive his formulation. He is correct on many things, including the meaning in the text grounded by the author. *But* the Christian recognizes that the Bible is *more* than a human book, and there is the divine author who inspires all the human authors in their particular contexts. We need to answer this question: In what way does the Bible teach us to read the Bible, and what are the theological commitments we must have that guide our hermeneutical process? The theological commitments themselves that arise from the text are shaped by it, so this process is a sort of "hermeneutical spiral."

[25] Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 87-88; Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensational Hermeneutics: Interpreting Principles That Guide Dispensationalists' Understanding of the Bible's Storyline* (Theological Studies Press, 2023), 35-39, 50-71. In the BFC, this is an important issue as we have already committed to an "already/not yet" reading of Scripture with regard to promise-fulfillment and the Kingdom of God. Ryrie repeatedly rejects any and all conceptions of the already/not yet, even when it is from premillennialists and progressive dispensationalism.

[26] For recommended introductions see: G.K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994); G.K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018); C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Fontana Books, 1952); Douglas S. Huffman, *Understanding the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Forms, Features, Framings, and Functions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024); Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, Darrell L. Bock, and Peter Enns, *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007); Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Nicholas G. Piotrowski, *In All the Scriptures: The Three Contexts of Biblical Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021); Gary Edwards Schnittjer and Matthew S. Harmon, *How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024); Michael J. Vlach, *The Old in the New: Understanding How the New Testament Authors Quoted the Old Testament* (Sun Valley, CA.: The Master's Seminary Press, 2021).

[27] Douglas J. Moo and Andrew Naselli, "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 746.

[28] For an introduction to this issue and a resolution to the apparent dilemma see the entire essay by Douglas Moo and Andrew Naselli, "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament." It is available online at https://andynaselli.com/wp-content/uploads/Moo-Naselli_Problem-of-NT-Use-of-the-OT.pdf See also Dan G. McCartney, "The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 101–16.

were more attuned to the nature of the story coming to a climax in Christ than we sometimes are if we too narrowly focus only on the original context for the meaning. They saw Christ as the climax of the story and it shaped how they read the text, but not in a way that merely imposed meaning or invented things out of thin air. They understood typological patterns imbedded in the Scriptures themselves.[29] The Scriptures also convey concepts of corporate representation by figures like kings and priests, or Adam, Israel, and David—which also typologically point to the fulfillment.[30] Thus, they often took certain passages as being fulfilled in Christ because of the nature of the divine text and the concepts imbedded within it.

Take, for example, the use of Psalm 16—Peter in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 does not violate the meaning of the text; he pays attention to the words in the text and thus says, "This text can't be about David because David's body did decay." However, if we practice the late 20th century variety of grammatical-historical interpretation, which locates meaning only in the original context, we are left with the text only being about David. In fact, some classical dispensational hermeneutics are so strict that one is not allowed to factor in progressive revelation or acknowledge that the divine author might have known more in what he said than the human author understood in the moment.[31]

The biblical authors of the New Testament practiced more than a bare-naked "grammatical-historical interpretation." Their understanding of the text and its fulfillment was shaped by redemptive history and the inauguration of eschatology in Christ.[32] *What the text is* (a progressive revelation of God that unfolded along history and came to a climax in Christ (Heb. 1:1-2) *was part of their hermeneutical method.*[33]

In the Bible Fellowship Church, we would affirm that grammatical-historical interpretation is important and an essential part[34] of biblical interpretation. However, we should be wary of the dangers of turning grammatical-historical interpretation against the flow of progressive revelation or making it a vaunted idol that always assures proper results.[35] When we

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[29] James M. Jr. Hamilton, *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promised-Shaped Patterns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022).

[30] A good example of this is how Matthew (in Matt. 2:15) uses Hosea 11:1—"out of Egypt I called my son" with respect to something that is fulfilled in Jesus, the ultimate Son, recapitulating the experience of the original Israel (also God's Son, Ex. 4:22-23) coming out of Egypt, so that Hosea 11:1 is read both as a referent to the original experience of Israel (the grammatical-historical interpretation) *and* seen as a prophetic pattern that naturally culminates and is fulfilled in Christ. This, then, goes beyond a single meaning original only to Hosea's time.

[31] See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Single Meaning, Unified Referents: Accurate and Authoritative Citations of the Old Testament by the New Testament" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 45–89; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001); also Vlach, *The Old in the New: Understanding How the New Testament Authors Quoted the Old Testament* and, to a lesser extent, Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles*.

[32] See Moo and Naselli's discussion of "hermeneutical axioms" in "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," 716-717.

[33] On this point see McCartney, "The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament."

[34] It is an essential *part* but must not be practiced in exclusion from other necessary elements.

[35] There are can be a sort of modernist approach to words, meaning, and hermeneutical methodology. Used in exclusion, grammatical-historical interpretation can become a sort of factory machine to build widgets—I put in the text, run it through the factory of methodology, and out pops the right interpretation. But what interpretation involves

use the grammatical-historical method improperly, it can actually become something that "gets in the way of a canonical reading of Scripture in terms of promise and fulfillment, coalescing in Christ and His redemptive work."[36] When some dispensational authors try to argue that this is not how the New Testament uses the Old Testament, they end up interpreting the text contrary to what the NT actually says—where is "literal" interpretation when one argues things like:

(1) Joel 2 was not fulfilled in Acts 2 at Pentecost.[37]
(2) The New Covenant is not inaugurated, or is only for the millennium, or is not salvific.[38]
(3) James did not actually mean that Jesus's house and kingdom was rebuilt in fulfillment of Amos 9.[39]

In all these examples, the classical/revised dispensationalist hermeneutic[40] can be so committed to the single meaning that is only found at the point in time when the text was originally written that they do violence to the text and the literal meaning in the New Testament passage where the OT text was interpreted.[41] They fail to see how the larger context of the biblical story helps us understand the meaning of the passage and God's intent.[42] *The meaning*

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is both an art and a science. Furthermore, *biblical* interpretation should also be governed by biblical presuppositions. In other words: *what* the text is should also shape *how* we interpret it.

[36] Michael S. Horton, "A Covenant Theology Response," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views of the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 186.

[37] Mark A. Snoeberger, "Traditional Dispensationalism," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL IVP Academic, 2022), 161. He writes, "Exactly *none* of the prophecies specific to Joel 2 were fulfilled in Acts 2." Peter's quotation is introduced with, "But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel ἀλλὰ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ" (Acts 2:16). Peter is explicit in the contrastive "ἀλλὰ τοῦτό ἐστιν" to make abundantly clear that what the audience was seeing was not drunken men but what Joel said would one day happen "in the last days."

[38] Roy E. Beacham, "The Church Has No Legal Relationship to or Participation in the New Covenant," in *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant*, ed. Mike Stallard (Arlington Heights, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2012), 110-11, 137-38, 143. It is worth noting that the three views in this book are all representative of classical dispensationalism, and there are two other dispensational views that differ with these views of the New Covenant.

[39] Mark A. Snoeberger, "Traditional Dispensationalism," 161, says "he [James] was not suggesting that these events were presently unfolding (after all, the Amos prophecy first requires the reestablishment of the "house of Israel among all the nations"--v.9); rather he was suggesting that since the yet-future plan of God included Gentiles, the early church should not, by implication, withstand Gentile faith in their day." when, in fact, James argues that from the reality to Christ's kingdom now [the tent of David is reestablished in the Messianic fulfillment] to the not so obvious conclusion for the Jews that they conclude we must accept Gentiles as full members of God's house without them being circumcised.

[40] See appendix 2 on where the BFC disagrees with some forms of premillennialism, particularly classical dispensationalism's denial of the inauguration kingdom of God.

[41] Stated differently, they are so committed to what they have determined the text must have meant in the original context that they then contort the obvious statements of NT testament passages because they "know" the NT author could not have seen his current situation as a fulfillment. It is much simpler and more faithful to Scripture to admit that the NT writers did know what they were talking about when they said the text is being fulfilled, and thus we must factor in the NT use of the OT into our hermeneutical understanding. Modernist philosophical presuppositions of what meaning means should not carry the day over Scripture. See Michael S. Horton, "A Covenant Theology Response," 186 (footnote 2).

[42] See Abner Chou, "The Hermeneutical Evaluation of the Christocentric Hermeneutic," *TMSJ* 27.2 (2016): 127-133, for his rejection of biblical theology and the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament as having importance on our hermeneutical methodology.

*did not change, rather the context of the later revelation clarified the meaning***.** This is how language works; the mystery is that God has spread His revelation out over thousands of years and brought it to completion as he spoke "in Son" (Heb. 1:2).

It is rather telling that interpretations from progressive dispensationalists and historic premillennialists have not fallen into the extreme errors sampled above. This is because they have allowed the NT use of the OT to shape their formulations and methodology. They recognize that typology is a feature of divine revelation. As Russell Moore has demonstrated, this also makes some of the overarching structural differences between newer forms (within the last 40 years) of premillennialism and amillennialism closer than the historical divisions of the 1930s-1970s.[43]

The larger point remains: one does not do grammatical-historical exegesis in a vacuum, apart from how one understands what the Bible is and how God progressively reveals Himself to us. One cannot do grammatical-historical exegesis as a *tabula rasa* with no presuppositions. If we are going to arrive at the right understanding of Scripture, we have to hold to the hermeneutical commitment that Scripture alone is the final interpreter of Scripture *and* we must include in our hermeneutical convictions a notion of biblical theology that God has progressively revealed Himself.[44] Just as faith without works is dead, so grammatical-historical exegesis without a conception of the unfolding of redemptive-history is vacuous.

In the Bible Fellowship Church, we embrace grammatical-historical interpretation. Yet, for us, this has not been used in such a way that we deny the "already/not yet" nature of the Kingdom of God, promise and fulfillment, and biblical eschatology. While there are sharp differences between classical dispensationalism and amillennialism, we already land on a position that recognizes the unfolding story of redemption as something that climaxes in Christ with an "already/not yet"—something our amillennial brothers are also zealous to preserve.

The second area of difference between the premillennialist and amillennialist: to what extent should the nature of redemptive-history be incorporated into our hermeneutical method?

When it comes to the differences between amillennialism and premillennialism, often the main difference is, *How much weight should progressive revelation be given?* This is most obvious when it comes to how we consider Christ fulfilling Old Testament passages regarding His reign. Yet factoring in progressive revelation is, at its core, about letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

We are largely operating within the same frame of reference and the same set of rules, namely, "Read the text as God intended," *but trying to balance out how much do I allow*

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[43] Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: A New Evangelical Perspective*; on the causes and history of the early rupture in the 1930s and 1940s; see also Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift*. Mangum shows that there was a lot of misunderstanding and entrenchment; dispensationalists in particular thought the covenant theologians were against premillennialism whereas covenant theologians could accept premillennialism but not some of the idiosyncrasies of Scofield and Chafer as they related to the people of God and soteriology. Unfortunately, the misunderstanding and talking past each other abounded.

[44] See especially McCartney, "The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," 112-16.

Scripture to interpret Scripture <u>and</u> am I bringing the right text to bear in my understanding? This is largely why the premillennialist who believes in inaugurated eschatology feels like the amillennialist is doing too much "spiritualizing" but the amillennialist feels like the premillennialist is ignoring the climax of redemptive history and what the NT teaches us in understanding the OT. There are, of course, extremes on both sides even as we look for common ground.[45]

It is an important difference but not one that requires us to cut across fellowship within the church *if we understand we are all largely playing by the same hermeneutical rules and more importantly have the same underlying theological commitments to Scripture, truth, and meaning.* We are wrestling with the data of Scripture and the way we see Scripture interpreting Scripture. We are also asking, To what extent do we factor that into our theology? We are seeking to focus the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the person and work of Christ while balancing the "already/not yet" tension that we (the BFC) find within the New Testament.[46] In more recent decades, premillennialists have learned from amillennialists to incorporate aspects of the "already" and amillennialists have recognized the need to be clear on aspects of the "not yet" and avoid the just defaulting to "spiritualizing."[47]

c. Apocalyptic literature and the Book of Revelation

One of the challenges of interpreting The Book of Revelation is the nature of apocalyptic literature.[48] As we noted above, the very nature of the genre intends for there to be symbolism.[49] But when does an interpreter press the symbolism for a more specific, more direct literal referent, and when is the literal referent vague, less precise, or even not intended?[50] There is no one answer and it depends upon the text one is studying.

Most responsible interpretations of The Book of Revelation acknowledge that the book combines the genre elements of epistle/letter,[51] prophecy, and apocalyptic. It is the overlap of

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[45] We have tried to illustrate the extremes on the premillennial side above.

[46] We already reject as extreme articulations that see no elements of the kingdom being inaugurated in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. The very notion of proclaiming "Jesus is Lord" and the gospel echoes back to the Isaianic concept of *gospel* and proclaiming, "Your God reigns" (Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1).

[47] Sam Storms makes the following admission: "Among many amillennialists of the past, most Old Testament prophecies which appeared to teach an earthly kingdom were understood *not* as pointing to future, physical, geo-spatial realities, but were to be interpreted figuratively. In other words, they were viewed as *spiritual* blessings now being fulfilled in the Church. Recently, however, and as noted in a previous chapter, Anthony Hoekema has popularized (although he did not invent) a view which takes a more serious, or should I say *more literal and earthly,* perspective concerning these prophecies" (Emphasis original. *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative*, 426); he cites Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979). Hoekema himself notes that in the past, amillennial exegetes have failed to keep the earth in mind, focusing on how kingdom promises are fulfilled in the church age or in heaven (206). He strenuously argues for these being fulfilled in the future on the new earth. "It is an impoverishment of the meaning of these passages to make them apply only to the church or to heaven" (206). This kind of future fulfillment *on earth* in the new heaven and new earth should be welcome in the BFC.

[48] See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 12-15 for a brief introduction to the genre and mind-set of apocalyptic.

[49] Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 50-69.

[50] Osborne, *Revelation,* 15-18, on the false dichotomy between literal and symbolic.

[51] Especially chapters 1-3.

these elements that lead Stephen Smalley to remark, "In terms of literary genre, Revelation stands all on its own."[52] The schools of interpretation can be broken down into the following: (1) historicist, (2) preterist, and (3) idealist,[53] though as Grant Osborne notes, most contemporary scholars offer an interpretation that blends these approaches.[54] Beale calls for a "redemptive-historical form of modified idealism."[55] Osborne proposes a blend of the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods should maximize the strength and minimize the weaknesses of each approach.[56] How one answers the genre question will impact the nuances one sees in interpreting the text. On one level, the standard dispensational futurist reading is "simple" in how it views the structure, but one may rightly question, "Does it sufficiently understand the nature of apocalyptic literature and factor that into interpretation?"

Another hotly contested area of The Book of Revelation concerns the structure of the book. This is particularly pronounced when it comes to how we should structure the judgments of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls: are they sequential or are they cyclical?[57] If they are sequential, are they a straight sequence[58] or is there a staggered start?[59] Further still, do they unpack progressively?[60] One can survey all the commentaries for the various options and note that all the commentators defend their views by standard grammatical-historical interpretation.[61]

The position one takes on the structuring of judgments will in some way impact how one sees the structure, not only the whole Book of Revelation but particularly the relationship between chapters 19 and 20. Does chapter 19, culminating with the Lord's judgment and the marriage supper of the Lamb, indicate an end of a sequence(s), followed by chapter 20 turning a new page to survey what was covered in the whole of the book (an amillennial view)? Or does chapter 19 flow sequentially into chapter 20 (a premillennial interpretation)? Answering this question goes beyond just choosing between taking Revelation 20 "literarily" or "symbolically." However, Eckard Schnabel remarks that everyone agrees that there is chronological order

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[52] Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of Saint John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 6. On p. 8 he calls it "apocalyptic deepened by prophetic insight, and also a prophecy intensified by apocalyptic vision." This is helpful because some apocalypses in Second Temple Judaism are focused more on addressing the present suffering of the community and interpreting circumstances of the present in light of symbolism with less prophetic elements, even if they keep in view the final vindication of the people of God.
[53] Osborne, *Revelation,* 19-22; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 10-14. Ladd also adds futurist but distinguishes in a different way from a historicist position, whereas Osborne considers the classic dispensation approach to the historicist approach. For Ladd, historicist limits its view to the church age, whereas Osborne is focusing on "historical" as real events that may or may not happen in future history. We won't solve the debate here because it is more a matter of different labels.
[54] Osborne, *Revelation,* 21.
[55] Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 48.
[56] Osborne, *Revelation,* 21.
[57] Cyclical meaning seal 1, trumpet 1, and bowl 1 all referring to the same event, and so forth.
[58] Straight sequence would be seals 1-7, followed by trumpets 1-7, followed by bowls 1-7.
[59] Staggered sequence could be something like trumpet 1 starts somewhere in the midst of seals 1-7 and bowl 1 starts somewhere in the midst of trumpets 1-7 and may or may not overlap with the seals.
[60] In this scheme, bowl 7 is unpacked by trumpets 1-7, and trumpet 7 is unpacked by bowls 1-7.
[61] Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative,* has a helpful overview of the variety of options on pp. 394-406.

between 19:11-21 (the Second Coming), 20:11-15 (the judgment), and the new heaven and new earth (21:1-22:5). "The question is where 20:1-6 /7-10 belongs."[62]

It is beyond the scope of this study committee to solve these issues and tease out the nuances of the apocalyptic prophecy in The Book of Revelation. But this is precisely our point. A doctrinal statement is designed in its nature to guard the boundaries, particularly between orthodoxy and heresy on one level *and* on another level between conditions of church fellowship and non-fellowship.[63] Doctrinal statements do not typically offer interpretations of individual passages or books of the Bible but scope out the boundaries that are within or without.[64]

It would be our contention that a believer within the Bible Fellowship Church should be free to interpret the whole of Revelation in ways consistent with grammatical-historical interpretation. The method of grammatical-historical interpretation should prescribe the method, not dictate the interpretation one lands upon (assuming it is defended by handling the text). *If* the Bible Fellowship Church has a concern for proper hermeneutical methodology,[65] *then* we should not police this by a theological position on one issue in eschatology.

Given the nature of differences in the interpretation of Revelation as a whole, and Revelation 20 more narrowly, we do not see sufficient warrant for excluding someone serving as a minister in the Bible Fellowship Church over this issue. Furthermore, given the nature of the complexity and the presence of faithful, godly people on both sides of the debate, we do not find warrant for the BFC retaining an exclusively premillennial position in its doctrinal statement.

d. Should a millennial view be a singular distinction over which we divide church fellowship?

We do not believe that the Bible Fellowship Church should mandate that there is only one acceptable position for the interpretation of Revelation 20 and the millennium if one is going to be qualified to serve as a pastor or elder within the Bible Fellowship Church. The hermeneutical issue of Revelation is too complex, and the balance of reading all of Scripture is far weightier. The history of Protestant confessions (especially among English Puritans whether Baptist, Presbyterian, or Congregationalist) illustrates that a precise eschatological timing was never a basis for excluding fellowship within a church body.

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[62] Eckhard Schnabel, *40 Questions About The End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 274.

[63] See appendix three on theological triage. As an example, our Presbyterian brothers are (in the conservative denominations, at any rate) considered to be orthodox in their beliefs on a host of issues such as the Trinity, Christology, justification by faith alone, etc. But because of their views on the ordinance of baptism, we part ways with them on church fellowship inside the local body.

[64] So, for example, a Calvinist might find that unconditional election is not mentioned or considered in Mal. 1:2-3—"I loved Jacob but Esau I hated"—but might interpret his larger doctrine based on other texts in ways that are thoroughly Calvinistic. We wouldn't exclude them over one verse.

[65] Both in the history of the BFC and more broadly evangelical discussions, the hermeneutical principle is often cited as the reason to remain premillennial. But this lets the tail wag the dog. It becomes a position where, "If you don't agree with my interpretation of the text, then you aren't interpreting it with the right method." Consider the debates between Calvinists and Arminians, we may disagree vigorously and debate the meaning of texts but typically neither Calvinists nor Arminians will accuse the problem as being a bad hermeneutical methodology: as in, "You don't take the text literally."

There are Baptist churches today that make premillennialism a doctrine to divide over in terms of church fellowship. Perhaps there are some who would wish the Bible Fellowship Church to continue in this tradition. We offer four points in response to the notion as to why it is not right for the BFC at this point in our history:

(1) The Baptist churches today that divide over premillennialism often divide more strictly over dispensational premillennialism. This means that one cannot affirm other views on the timing of the rapture *and* one has to affirm more rigid dispensational views of biblical theology and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The BFC wisely allows for various views on the timing of the rapture and on the nature of biblical theology and OT/NT connection. We believe it would be a minor thing *for us to drop our strong stance of premillennialism***.** Put another way, there are a number of issues where we are already closer to amillennialism than classical dispensationalism.[66]

(2) The reason premillennialists often will divide their church over premillennialism is precisely because they believe that grammatical-historical interpretation is at stake. In these scenarios, *if* one denies the millennium *then* one is denying the unchanging promises of God *and* one is undermining God's oaths/promises and the sufficiency of Scripture. We have already shown that this is not the case.

(3) The BFC is already in a position where we have amillennialists as pastors and we affirm them as brothers and ministers competent to rightly handle the Word of God. In other words, their amillennialism does not exclude them from fellowship and retaining ministerial credentials.

(4) Those who hold to a premillennial position could continue in their convictions and continue to faithfully preach and teach it. To keep true peace and unity, one would fairly represent opposing views without demonizing other positions ("They don't take God's Word seriously"), thus modeling brotherly charitable disagreement. Those holding to a premillennial stance could affirm that doing so is an important distinction while also upholding that we are united with the majority of our positions with the amillennialists in our denomination.[67] Eschatology is important, *but* we need to balance out that agreeing to disagree for the unity of the body is more important than dividing. Both doctrine and practice matter.[68] Pastors can model theological triage.[69] It is our belief that there is more that should unite us with amillennialists than should divide us in church fellowship.

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[66] See appendix 1 and 2.

[67] This is especially true when we consider the scope of the doctrines in the AOF. But it is also true that all parties remain orthodox on eschatology and affirm positions that fit within historic Protestant confessions.

[68] Dissensions and factions are works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). As Paul shows us in Galatians (see chapters 1-2), we must determine when a doctrine is something we should divide over and exclude someone from fellowship and when it is more important to pursue peace and avoid dissension and division.

[69] See appendix 3.

In short, *if a brother seeking ordination credentials in the Bible Fellowship Church aligns with us on all our other positions but is an amillennialist, we find no basis for making this position alone the sole criteria for exclusion.* If this is true, then we believe we should remove it as a defining position (a "boundary marker") of the doctrinal position of the Bible Fellowship Church as expressed in our Articles of Faith.

We believe that if we remove our premillennial distinctive as being unnecessarily limiting, we could find a larger common core that we agree upon, one that is widely accepted as core elements of Protestant, Evangelical orthodoxy both today and throughout church history.

e. Elements a united eschatology would affirm together

(1) Christ's kingdom was inaugurated in His resurrection and ascension. We already hold this now. Psalm 2, Psalm 8, and Psalm 110 have all begun *now*. The "last days" have started and they were not postponed in Jesus's ascent to heaven.

(2) Christ has begun to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, and New Covenant. The promises are not revoked or replaced, both in what has begun in the "already" fulfillment, and even as we await the "not yet" that will be fulfilled in the future. The future elements are fulfilled *on earth, in future, physical, and geo-spatial* categories.[70]

(3) The spread of the gospel is in some way an advancement of the kingdom as people are being set free from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the Son (Col 1:13-14). The gospel continues to advance and spread until the end of this age.

(4) Christ's kingdom work will continue in this age until His return. Within the BFC, we acknowledge that the kingdom is growing and advancing now. We also realize the final and ultimate hope is judgment, handing over the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24), and the New Heavens and New Earth.

(5) The church is never promised an age of earthly peace and prosperity until the Lord returns and crushes His enemies (2 Thess. 1-2)—there is no "golden age" of the church triumphant until the Lord returns. While the gospel spreads through the whole world until Christ returns and, in the gospel, He saves people from every tongue, tribe, and nation until He returns, the church continues to preach Christ crucified and share in His sufferings, filling up "what is lacking in Christ's affliction" (Col. 1:28). The only triumph of the church in this age is her bearing the cross, awaiting the future hope of glory. The church lives the entirety of the remainder of this present evil age as strangers and exiles whose citizenship is in heaven,

[70] Here we are borrowing the amillennialist words in Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative*, 426. See also Hoekema *The Bible and the Future,* 274-79, on the importance of the new earth for fulfillment and that amillennialists do not "spiritualize" but see literal future fulfillments on earth. See footnotes 16 and 47 above. We do recognize the differences between how the future fulfillments unfold, but the common ground is future and literal. Vern Poythress writes, "The emphasis on the new earth helps to bring the traditional millennial positions closer to one another. If all are able to agree that the new earth represents the most intensive fulfillment, arguments about fulfillments of a lesser scope will seem to be less crucial" (*Understanding Dispensationalists,* 47).

waiting to be revealed. Until the return of Christ, believers are called to suffer with Christ and endure (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12) as all creation will continue to groan in birth pains until the resurrection of believers, their full adoptions as sons (Rom. 8:20-23).

(6) Only the return of Christ is the liberation of God's people from the evil of this world, the deliverance of the saints from persecution of their enemies, the future aspect of our reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12), and the establishment of peace on earth. The return of Christ will manifest his kingdom and bring to fulfillment the unrealized aspects of the Abrahamic, Davidic and New Covenants.

(7) The believer is to live in active anticipation of the nearness and imminence of Christ's return. Regardless of one's belief in the timing of the Rapture, we all hold that the Second Coming of Christ will lead to the judgment of the wicked (Rev. 19; 2 Thess. 1:5-12). The day of the Lord will not happen until the man of lawlessness is revealed, and only the return of the Lord will remove this final antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3-10). *The church is not promised an age of prosperity prior to the return of Christ.*

If we unite around these seven beliefs in our eschatology, we do not deny that there would be different nuances within the boundaries. The individual interpretive decisions would be a matter of personal liberty and conscience, to be held captive to the Word of God. One would faithfully preach them without demonizing differing views within the denomination.

Here is where lines of freedom would be allowed:

(1) Imminence could be understood in a manner consistent with pre-tribulation premillennialism, historic premillennialism, or amillennialism. Living in expectation of Christ's return would continue to rule out postmillennialism, which sees a long age of peace and prosperity[71] before Christ's return. Holding to imminence of Christ's return would mean that full preterism would continue to be excluded from our denomination.

(2) Both the amillennialist and the premillennialist could affirm that in 2 Tim. 2:12, the "we will reign with Christ" remains future, after Christ's Second Coming, but differ on how the timeline plays out. Is it only in the New Heavens and New Earth? Or is there a phase between Christ's return and the final judgment and therefore before the New Heavens and the New Earth?

[71] Different species of postmillennialism define it differently. For some reconstructionists and theonomists, it is political and nationalist with the laws of Old Testament Israel being strictly obeyed around the world. Others hold to more neutered forms of a Christian nationalism that involves Christian ethics and affirms creedal orthodoxy by nations. This leads to an absence of wars and national conflicts. Still others would define it more in terms of triumph of gospel evangelism and general cultural ascendency of Christians simply by virtue of the vast majority of the earth's population being regenerate and converted. Regardless of the flavor and nuances, the fact remains all postmillennialism directs our hope to something happening here on earth across the entire globe *before* the Lord's return. Anticipation of the Lord's return is not near in the conventional sense but marked with an ever-looming asterisk: *only after the church is sufficiently triumphant enough. This line of thinking runs contrary to the expectation we see throughout the New Testament as well as the assurance that the believers' *only* deliverance from bearing the cross in this life is the Lord's return.

(3) Regarding the return of Christ leading to the liberation of God's people: The pre-tribulation premillennialist sees this in stages: first for the church in the Rapture, and then for Israel and those saved in the tribulation. For premillennialists of various types, the kingdom is manifest and then is worked out even more progressively during the 1,000 years so that Adamic-Davidic dominion in the presence of His enemies happens during this phase. *Yet the premillennialist also realizes that the final enemy, death, has yet to be fully defeated during the millennium.* The amillennialist would see the return of Christ leading right into the final judgment.

(4) One would be also free to adopt Tom Schreiner's newer, more hybrid view of "new creational millennialism."[72] He argues that when Christ returns, He transforms the earth to the new creation with the resurrection of the saints. He argues that Revelation 19 is clear that all unbelievers are judged and cast away so that there are *no unrighteous present in the millennium*. He then argues that at the end of the millennium, the wicked dead are resurrected and, to show the depth of their hatred for God, they are allowed to rebel one more time.

The Bible Fellowship Church has always been a denomination that follows the Scriptures and corrects its tradition based on what the Scriptures say. This committee is not advocating one eschatological schema as *the* biblical one; rather, we are making a case that the Bible is not so clear so as to prevent the premillennialist and amillennialist from sharing fellowship in one body.[73] Opening up our eschatology to include an amillennialist interpretation lets people follow their conscience as it is captive to the Word of God in their application of careful study and exegesis. We would be determining that there is enough freedom within shared boundaries that we need not bind the denominational conscience to a single view of the millennium.

Since we have already granted exceptions to men in ministry *and* members are allowed to be in sympathy with our doctrinal statement, not full agreement, we believe that, as a matter of consistency and integrity, we declare openly that amillennialism is welcomed within the BFC, and we acknowledge that the amillennialist and premillennialist agrees on the same broad core commitments in the study of Scripture. We have more to unify over than we have to divide over.

It is the conclusion of this study committee that the Bible Fellowship Church should change its doctrinal statement to a position of a united eschatology that can include amillennialists who hold a firm commitment to an "already/not yet" doctrine of eschatology *and* recognize that until the end of this age, the church is to live expectantly for an imminent return and will, until His return, live in the tension of the overlap of the age since there is no peaceable age of the church until Christ returns to conquer His enemies. Regardless of one's sequencing,

[72] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023).
[73] The BFC takes the same approach to cessationism vs. continuism and the age of the earth/days of creation. We hold that the differences of position are not strong enough to divide the body.

the next major events in eschatology include Rapture,[74] the revealing of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:1-4), and the return of Christ.

4. Recommended Next Steps

We recommend the following next steps:

(1) The 2025 BFC Conference receive the committee's work.

(2) The 2025 BFC Conference instructs the committee to continue its work with a view toward bringing a recommended proposal for changes to the Articles of Faith in 2026.

Be it **Resolved**, that Conference instructs the Study Committee on the Millennium to continue its work. And be it further
Resolved, that Conference encourages the committee to bring to the 2026 BFC Conference proposed changes to the Articles of Faith consistent with the sentiments of the committee's 2025 report.

(3) The Millennium Committee hosts a mini-conference of some kind in 2025 and invites interested pastors, elders, and laypersons to hear our research and engage the issue.[75] This allows those outside of BFC Conference to attend and to consider the issue and be persuaded.

(4) The Millennium Committee presents proposed changes to the AOF in 2026. The normal process of AOF amendment approval commences (see Article 701, Amendments to the Articles of Faith).

[74] Historic premillennialism and amillennialism have the church's rapture as occurring at Christ's return.
[75] This would be similar to what the Kingdom of God Study Committee did in February, 2011.

Appendix 1: A chart[76] of the variation between premillennialism and amillennialism

A quick sketch of where various premillennialism and amillennialism differ and where they agree:[77]

	Classic Dispensational	**Progressive Dispensational**	**Historic Premillennial**	**Amillennial**
Abrahamic Covenant fulfillment	Postponed to millennium	Inaugurated in Christ (Gal. 3); fulfilled in millennium and beyond	Inaugurated in Christ (Gal. 3); fulfilled in millennium and beyond	Inaugurated in Christ (Gal. 3); fulfilled literally[78] now and beyond
Davidic Covenant	Postponed to millennium	Inaugurated; fulfilled literally in millennium and beyond	Inaugurated; fulfilled literally in millennium and beyond	Inaugurated; fulfilled literally in New Heaven and New Earth
Is Christ presently reigning on the Davidic throne?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Covenant	Varied (some argue strongly for postponement; others for only spiritual benefits to the church)	Inaugurated; fulfilled literally in millennium and beyond	Inaugurated; fulfilled literally in millennium and beyond	Inaugurated; fulfilled literally in New Heaven and New Earth
Who is the New Covenant for?	Israel (some argue Christians partake; other say Israel only)[79]	Israel, with the church now grafted in	God's people both Jew and Gentile; church experiences now	God's people both Jew and Gentile; church experiences now

[76] Can you even do eschatology without making a chart of some kind?

[77] We are excluding postmillennialism here because our proposal is to expand our view to allow for amillennialism; we also have limited space. Classical dispensationalists who deny an inaugurated eschatology are not a fit for the BFC already, but we include them to illustrate their distinction from the other views and how some of our views are closer to being in a position that an amillennial interpretation would agree with. We are also excluding the view of full preterism.

[78] It is not a spiritualized blessing. Its fulfillment is future, physical, and geo-spatial over the whole earth.

[79] Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 172, focuses on payment by the blood of Christ but denies inauguration or fulfillment of the New Covenant. The only thing the church administers today is the payment; the eschatology of the covenant is not inaugurated or fulfilled for Ryrie (172-174).

	Classic Dispensational	Progressive Dispensational	Historic Premillennial	Amillennial
Isaiah 11 (sample OT kingdom passage)	Future millennium	Future millennium	Aspect inaugurated; future millennium; New Heavens and Earth	Aspect inaugurated; New Heavens and Earth
Kingdom of God in the Gospels	Postponed	Inaugurated with "already/not yet"	Inaugurated with "already/not yet"	Inaugurated with "already/not yet"
Israel and Church[80]	Two peoples (very distinct)	Ultimately one people but modified typically with some kind of grafting in of Gentiles[81]	Typically one people of God with distinction between Old Covenant and New Covenant	One people of God, sometimes with difference in administrative aspects between Old Covenant and New Covenant
Who is united to Christ and "in Christ"?	Only the church. Not Jews.	Old Covenant people of God and New Covenant people of God.[82]	Old Covenant people of God and New Covenant people of God	Old Covenant people of God and New Covenant people of God
Christ's return	Imminent, as in "any moment;" pre-tribulation	Imminent, as in "any moment;" pre-tribulation	Varied (different definition of imminent; disagreement over if tribulation is 7 years of Daniel 9)	Imminent. The next phase eschatology

[80] As one moves further to the right, the options vary more on the nature of unfolding of biblical theology and the nature of the covenants. Not all historic premillennialists and amillennialists would be covenant theologians in the sense of the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). However, even with progressive unfolding, there is general agreement of a soteriological unity between Israel and the church despite how one nuances the relationship to salvation in Christ prior to His coming and salvation in Christ after His coming, with the key eschatological fulfillment ideas of the Holy Spirit and the New Covenant.

[81] Darrell L. Bock, "Progressive Dispensationalism," 128, 136-37; Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 176-77. One of Ryrie's big issues with progressive dispensationalism is that progressive dispensationalists do not keep the radical Israel/church distinction.

[82] The progressive dispensationalist removes the hard wall between Israel and the church. He still holds some distinct future national elements for the future of Israel but holds that the Abrahamic Covenant promises have begun in the New Testament (per Gal. 3, etc.).

	Classic Dispensational	Progressive Dispensational	Historic Premillennial	Amillennial
"Rapture"	For church; separated by seven years from Second Coming	For church; separated by seven years from Second Coming	Rapture is Second Coming; we meet Christ in air and come down	Rapture is Second Coming; we meet Christ in air and come down
Tribulation	7 years; future; church is absent	7 years; future; church is absent	Varied; 7 years or this entire age (worsens towards end?); church participates in it	This entire age (worsens towards end?); church participates in it.[83]
Second Coming	Future, literal, bodily, after tribulation	Future, literal, bodily, after tribulation	Future, literal, bodily, after tribulation	Future, literal, bodily, after tribulation
1 Cor. 15:23-24	Gap between resurrection and the "then the end, when He hands over the kingdom"	Gap between resurrection and the "then the end, when He hands over the kingdom"	Gap between resurrection and the "then the end, when He hands over the kingdom"	No gap between resurrection and the "then the end, when He hands over the kingdom"
1 Thess. 4-5	Ch. 4 is Rapture and distinct from Ch. 5, which is Second Coming	Ch. 4 is Rapture and distinct from Ch. 5, which is Second Coming	Chapters 4 and 5 are the same events; meeting Christ in clouds and then we continue to earth with Him	Chapters 4 and 5 are the same events; meeting Christ in clouds and then we continue to earth with Him
2 Thess. 1	Second Coming; 1:6-10 can't apply to church now since it relates to Second Coming	Second Coming; 1:6-10 can't apply to church now since it relates to Second Coming	Second Coming; 1:6-10 applies to church now	Second Coming; 1:6-10 applies to church now

[83] In theory, an amillennialist position could take Daniel 9 as indicating a seven-year future tribulation before the Lord's return, but this view is typically not associated with such a view—and we are unaware of a published scholar in the amillennial camp who takes this position.

	Classic Dispensational	Progressive Dispensational	Historic Premillennial	Amillennial
2 Thess. 2	Day of the Lord is Second Coming; speaks to tribulation as man of lawlessness is revealed; church raptured before it happens	Day of the Lord is Second Coming; speaks to tribulation as man of lawlessness is revealed; church raptured before it happens	Day of the Lord is Second Coming; speaks to tribulation as man of lawlessness is revealed; something church can anticipate	Day of the Lord is Second Coming; speaks to tribulation as man of lawlessness is revealed; something church can anticipate
How many future bodily resurrections?[84]	Three (at Rapture; at return; resurrection of wicked before judgment)	Three (at Rapture; at return; resurrection of wicked before judgment)	Two; at return of Christ and before judgment	One; at return of Christ
Rev. 19-20	Sequential	Sequential	Sequential	Rev. 20 starts over to summarize whole of church age
Binding of Satan	Future/ Millennium	Future/Millennium	Future/Millennium	Present activity as gospel is for nations.[85]

[84] It is interesting that on this point, the amillennialist will strongly emphasize that he is taking Daniel 12:2-3 literally, that there is one resurrection, while the premillennialists have to place emphasis on the unfolding of progressive revelation for multiple phases of the resurrection.

[85] Typically connected to Jesus' binding of the strong man in the Gospels.

	Classic Dispensational	Progressive Dispensational	Historic Premillennial	Amillennial
Rev. 20:4 "They came alive"	Future before Millennium	Future before Millennium	Future before Millennium	Varied; but typically[86] their life in heaven as they cry out under the throne after martyrdom (Rev. 6:9-11)
Is there a sense that the saints reign now with Christ?	No	Yes, spiritually in union with Christ	Yes, in union with Christ	Yes, in union with Christ
Main emphasis on when the saints reign with Christ on earth?	Jews: in the millennium; church: varies	Millennium	Millennium and New Heavens and New Earth	New Heavens and Earth
Armageddon	Future	Future	Future	Future
Judgment	Future/literal	Future/literal	Future/literal	Future/literal
Hell[87]	Literal	Literal	Literal	Literal
New Heavens & New Earth	Future/literal	Future/literal	Future/literal	Future/literal

Appendix 2: The BFC's division from some forms of premillennialism

It is worth noting that we often do ourselves a disservice when we treat all premillennial positions as basically variations within the same broad camp. This ignores deep divisions that are far more important than a position on the millennium.

For example, one issue that is of deep concern for how we view salvation and union with Christ is whether or not there are one people of God (all saints through all time) or two people of God (Israel and the church).

Premillennialists who are covenant theologians or progressive covenantalist (different than covenant theology!) are much closer to amillennialists on a point like this. Both covenant theology and progressive covenantalism allow you to be amillennial or premillennial. However, classic

[86] At least this is typical of new views like those of Sam Storms and G.K. Beale. The classical Augustinian perspective is that 20:4-6 is spiritual regeneration (cf. Beale, *Revelation,* 1011). The modern amillennialist interpretation of these verses is further proof they are not "spiritualizing" it. They are not equating it with regeneration or the spiritual life of Eph. 2:4 *but* they are saying that the believer who dies during this age is alive in the presence of God (even though his body is dead). One may disagree with the interpretation without taking a cheap shot at the interpretation by calling it "non-literal." They are seeking to understand the right meaning that God intended.

[87] There are certainly non-literal views that could adopt any one of the timing positions; our point is that we would all be unified around this as conservatives are.

dispensationalist premillennialists hold to a very different species of premillennialism when they affirm two ever-distinct peoples of God (Israel and the church). It ends up being quite different from a historic premillennialist who sees Gentiles and the church as one redeemed people with Old Testament Israelites all in union with Christ the Messiah—a deep common commitment they share with amillennialists. Unfortunately, we gloss over the depths of the divide between types of premillennialism when making the least common denominator the label "premillennialism." Sometimes the steps you take before you get to premillennialism are more important than your premillennial conclusion.

As another example, the historic premillennialism of G.E. Ladd has much in common with amillennialism in terms of its inaugurated eschatology and is vastly more different than the classic dispensationalism of Ladd's day. Ladd was premillennial but much closer to the amillennialist in the broader overarching reading of Scripture with an "already/not yet" eschatology. The BFC has already aligned itself around a view of inaugurated eschatology that would reject extreme views of premillennialism which see the kingdom of God postponed until the millennium. We intentionally exclude classical dispensationalism after we adopted the work of the Kingdom of God study committee and the changes made to the AOF from that study.

We have already recognized we are very distinct, as a denomination, from some of the extreme features of older dispensationalism. The framing of our AOF is already a type of premillennialism that is closer to amillennialism on other core issues like the nature of the people of God and the structure of inaugurated eschatology. Our approach to redemptive history and the unity of the Old Testament and New Testament rejects some of the extreme elements of classical dispensationalism.

Appendix 3: A note about theological triage

The study committee has found recent works on the concept of theological triage to be very helpful in our thinking. These works include the following:

Albert Mohler "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity" https://albertmohler.com/2004/05/20/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity-2/

Gavin Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020)

Gavin Ortlund, "What is Theological Triage?" https://ps.edu/what-is-theological-triage/

Joe Rigney, "Triage in the Trenches: When Do Second-Tier Issues Divide?" https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/triage-in-the-trenches

Trevin Wax "Theological Triage in the 21st Century" https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/theological-triage-in-the-21st-century/

Theological triage as an idea draws on an analogy from the medical field. In a hospital emergency room, when a patient comes in one must quickly assess the patient's level of medical crisis. If, for example, if one is having chest pains, he is treated immediately because it is a matter of life or death. If, however, one has a serious wound like a broken leg, such a patient may

be moved into a room and looked over by a nurse but have to wait for a doctor and a cast. If one is suffering a sickness that is serious but not a matter of life and death, he may end up waiting in the lobby until there is an open room and time for treatment. The point is that the severity of the issues determines the level of the response.

So it is with theological triage. Proponents have typically broken the issues up into three tiers: (1) matters of orthodoxy & salvation; (2) matters of church fellowship; and (3) matters of brotherly disagreement within the church. Examples of the tiers could be as follows:

(1) Creeds, Trinity, Deity of Christ, justification by faith alone. Denial of a doctrine in this area means you are not a Christian or saved.

(2) Issues like baptism and ecclesiology. Lutheran vs. Reformed vs. Baptist vs. Anglican. We might consider Calvinism vs. Arminianism in this category. Brothers in Christ can disagree *but* their mutual salvation is not questioned, though such issues are important enough to divide churches over them.

(3) Issues of particular passages or interpretation. For the BFC, we would include age of the earth in this category. We would include distinction between dispensationalism and covenant theology as Tier 3 issues.

The question before us is, "Should the issue of the Millennium be a tier 2 issue or a tier 3 issue?"

The particular challenge in the BFC as it is right now is that the Millennium technically falls into a tier 2 issue *but only for pastors and elders, and only if they are refused an exception***.** Right now, the Millennium is an issue for which we exclude one from coming into the denomination as a pastor. Right now, a member may not be elected as an elder if they are not premillennial. But right now, the Millennium is Tier 3 for the person in the pew, who is not excluded from membership over this issue.[88]

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[88] This might be akin to how a Presbyterian views baptism. He will accept various modes of baptism but pastors must affirm infant baptism as a sign of the covenant. But for a Baptist, baptism is a Tier Two matter for all members, as you cannot join a church unless baptized as a believer.

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