

J. Webb Mealy, Critique of PROBLEMS WITH PREMILLENNIALISM By: Sam Storms

[Sam Storms: Oklahoma City, OK > Problems with Premillennialism](#)

I quote the entire piece below, and my responses to his points are in **bold**.

Why does the Amillennialist reject the Premillennial interpretation of Scripture? In my own case, further study of what the NT said would happen in conjunction with the second coming/advent of Christ led me to conclude that a post-Parousia millennial reign upon an earth still under the influence of sin, corruption, and death was impossible. I will now briefly examine those texts.

1. 1 Corinthians 15:22-28

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For 'He has put all things in subjection under His feet.' But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all."

The PM interpretation is as follows: In v. 23 Paul says that the resurrection of believers follows the resurrection of Christ. But 2,000 years have already elapsed between these two events. Thus we shouldn't be surprised if there is a similar historical gap between the resurrection of believers at the second coming (v. 23b) and "the end" (v. 24). This gap, says the PM, is the 1,000 year millennial kingdom which follows Christ's return and precedes eternity.

At the end of the millennium, i.e., when "the end" comes, Jesus will deliver up the kingdom to the Father (v. 24a), after having abolished all rule and authority and power. The last of these so-called "enemies" is death. Therefore, according to the PM, death will not be destroyed or defeated or abolished until the close of the millennium, that is to say, at "the end".

The point of dispute is the meaning of "the end" (v. 24). The "end" is when death, "the last enemy" (v. 26), is abolished. The PM insists that "the end" is the close or end of the millennial kingdom, 1,000 years after Christ has returned to earth. The AM insists that "the end" is the close or end of this present age, the age in which we now live.

Note that Storms is not going to address the fact that Paul says only those who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes in glory. Paul's words are simply not compatible with the idea that there will be a single general resurrection when Jesus comes. Paul says that it is only *after* the resurrection of Christ's own that the end will come (presumably attended by the resurrection of the rest of the dead).

If one could demonstrate conclusively what "the end" is or when "the end" comes, the millennial debate would itself come to a decisive end! This is not difficult to do. Both PM's and AM's agree that Christ's reign (v. 25) consummates with the destruction of death. They also agree that the destruction of death signals "the end". Therefore, all one need do is determine the time when "death" dies. Does Paul tell us when "death" dies or when death, the final enemy, will be abolished? Yes.

Several factors enable us to identify the "death of death".

- According to 1 Cor. 15:50-58 (esp. vv. 54-56), death is abolished or is "swallowed up in victory" (v. 54) at the second coming of Christ. Therefore, the reign of Christ described in v. 25, during which he progressively abolishes all rule and authority and power, is presently occurring. Paul is describing what Christ is doing now, as he sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father. When he returns at the conclusion of this present age, he will destroy death, the last remaining enemy. That, says Paul, is "the end."

Storms is doing a sleight of hand move. Death being swallowed up in victory, i.e. being utterly defeated, is not the same thing as death being destroyed, any more than the devil being utterly defeated and swallowed up by the underworld when Jesus comes in glory (Rev. 19:19–20:3) is the same thing as the devil being destroyed. The devil is first *utterly defeated*, then, after the thousand years, utterly destroyed in the pool of fire (Rev. 20:9-10). The same goes for death.

- Another Pauline text which asserts that Christ is currently reigning in this capacity is Eph. 1:20-23 (note esp. Paul's use of the same terminology found in 1 Cor. 15:24 - "rule, authority, power").

Yes, Jesus reigns now in heaven, and this is neither here nor there. In the age to come he will reign on the earth.

- But the PM does not believe Christ will abolish death at his second coming. He insists that death will continue into the millennium (cf. Rev. 20:7-10). But how can this be true when Paul places the destruction of death at Christ's second advent? The destruction of death at Christ's second advent/coming does not leave room for a millennial age in which death persists in its power.

New creation millennialism does not suffer from this critique. As Storms argues below, there will be no ordinary mortals in the Kingdom age.

- The point is this: the second advent/coming of Christ marks the end of death and corruption, the end of sin and rebellion, and the inauguration of the consummated and perfected eternal state.

The second advent of Jesus marks the end of death and corruption *for the faithful*, and for them alone. For premils and amils alike, the unrepentant will face corruption and the second death. Paul in 1 Cor. 15 focuses almost exclusively on the experience of the faithful. For example, he says that

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Few would say that the godless will be raised imperishable in glory and power. Paul is not saying this as a universal principle, applying to all humankind, but only as it applies to the faithful. In the same way, death will be utterly defeated in the case of the faithful when Jesus comes, and sin as well: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:56-57). When Jesus comes in glory, will the Law no longer be a problem for the godless? Will sin no longer be a problem for the godless? I think they will have huge problems with each of these things.

2. 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

"Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The key phrase is Paul's declaration that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 50). Simply put, a corruptible and perishable nature can neither possess nor participate in an incorruptible and imperishable kingdom. Neither the living ("flesh and blood") nor the dead ("the perishable") can inherit the kingdom in their present state. Several factors contribute to make this a strong argument for AM and against PM.

New creation millennialism completely agrees with Storms on this. It is not an argument against a delay of the resurrection of the unrepentant but against a mixed age where mortal and resurrected people rub shoulders on the earth.

- Here Paul insists on the resurrection and glorification of all believers (whether already physically dead or still alive at the second advent; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Only those who have been gloriously transformed in body and spirit shall inherit the kingdom of God (cf. v. 53).

True. See above.

- The "kingdom" in view, according to the PM, is the millennial kingdom. But how can that be? The PM argues that many believers will enter and inherit and enjoy the blessings of the millennial kingdom in their natural, unglorified, untransformed, "flesh and blood" bodies. But that is precisely what Paul denies could ever happen.

True. See above.

- Paul's declaration that unglorified, "flesh and blood" bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God precludes a millennium following the second coming of Christ. The kingdom of God into which all believers are granted entrance at the time of their glorification (i.e., at the second coming of Christ), is the eternal phase of God's kingdom rule. This eternal phase, at the beginning of which Jesus "delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father" (v. 24) follows immediately upon the second coming of the Lord Jesus. It is then that "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (vv. 51-52).

No. This is where Storms is assuming things about a premillennial model that are not true of a new creation millennialism model. The age to come, the (fully-manifested) Kingdom of God, will not have mortals in it, but that does not "preclude" Revelation's millennium from starting when Jesus comes in glory. Storms's terminology of "the eternal phase" is *not biblical*. It is a habit of both amils and premils to talk as though there is an abstract zone beyond history that has no quality at all. Both talk about

“the eternal state,” as though all of creation enters stasis when Christ’s work of redeeming his chosen on the earth is finished. *Nothing* in Scripture encourages this idea. Instead, Christ’s faithful, having been fully trained into his character, actively serve him on the new earth “for the ages of the ages” (Rev. 22:5). His assertion that “This eternal phase, at the beginning of which Jesus “delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father” (v. 24) follows immediately upon the second coming of the Lord Jesus” is completely unsupported by 1 Corinthians 15.

· Finally, according to [1 Cor. 15] vv. 54-55, the end of death at the second coming of Christ is the fulfillment of Isaiah 25:8. There we read that God “will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth.” Both the end of death and the wiping away of all tears are associated in Rev. 21:4 not with the coming of a millennial age but with the eternal state, i.e., the new heavens and new earth.

True, the swallowing up of death for all time does attend the new creation, but note—especially if one believes in ECT—that death, the second death, still hangs over the faithless. The promise of no more death, along with the promise of no more tears and crying, *are for the faithful only*, even in the new creation as described in Rev. 21:1-8. This goes along with the fact that in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul always, when talking about resurrection, is talking *exclusively* about the benefits of resurrection for the faithful, as I said at the end of my critique of point 1.

In addition, as I read Isaiah 24–27 with guidance from John, the narrative of the end has the “hosts of heaven” and “the kings of the earth” tossed into the dungeon of the underworld together when God reigns in glory on Zion (Isa. 24:21-23), resulting in the great banquet on “this mountain,” i.e. Zion, and the doing away with death—for the faithful of all nations—but meanwhile, Moab is left treading water in its own sewage (Isa. 25:10), an image that may be a metaphor for being trapped in the prison of the underworld. Similarly, in Isa. 26:13-19, the shades (Heb. *refā’im*, v. 14) of the oppressors cannot rise, they are trapped in the underworld of Sheol, but the shades (Heb. *refā’im*, v. 19) of the oppressed faithful dead are promised resurrection. Thus, when God comes to vindicate the godly and the oppressed, they will rise to enjoy the glorious kingdom, but their oppressors will not—which is the same story that we read in Lk. 14:14, 20:35, and Rev. 20:4-5, and which can be inferred from 1 Cor. 15:23 and Phil. 3:11.

3. Romans 8:18-23

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”

Observe the following.

· Paul describes the deliverance or redemption of the natural creation as connected with that of the children of God. It is when the sons of God are revealed (v. 19) that the creation itself shall experience

its redemption. That is why the creation is personified as "waiting eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." The creation anxiously awaits the return of Christ and our glorification, for it is then that it too shall be set free from "its slavery to corruption" into that very "freedom of the children of God" (v. 21).

- The creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God (v. 19) because it is into that very freedom that the creation too will be delivered (v. 21). In other words, the creation and the children of God are intimately intertwined both in present suffering and in future glory. As there was a solidarity in the fall, so also there will be a solidarity in the restoration.
- If the creation should somehow fall short of complete deliverance from its present corruption, the finality and fullness of our redemption is seriously undermined. Inasmuch as the natural realm will enter into "the freedom of the glory of the children of God," any deficiency that it might experience must obtain in the case of Christians as well. To the extent that the created order is not wholly and perfectly redeemed, we are not wholly and perfectly redeemed. The redemption and glory of creation are co-extensive and contemporaneous with ours.
- The problem this poses for PM is clear: the consummate redemption of creation that occurs when Christ returns to redeem/glorify his people would appear to preclude any suffering or corruption of creation subsequent to that return. And yet the millennial age for which the PM argues is one that includes the corrupting presence of both sin and death. The question, then, is this:

How can the creation be delivered from the crippling effects of sin and death when we are, namely, at Christ's second coming, if during the millennium it must yet suffer the presence and perversity of its enemies?

It can't. Storms is correct. The new creation belongs at Christ's coming in glory and attends our resurrection, "the redemption of our bodies." But this does not pose any difficulty for new creation millennialism.

- It seems more reasonable to me that Paul's description of the day of redemption for both Christians and the created order (i.e., the second coming of Jesus) is identical with the advent of the new heavens and new earth portrayed in such texts as 2 Pt. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1ff.; Mt. 19:28. If so, there is no place for a "millennium" subsequent to the return of Christ.

Incorrect. What there is no room for is a millennium that has this present corrupt creation as its context. New creation millennialism does not have this problem.

4. 2 Peter 3:8-13

Following his reference to "mockers" who question whether Christ will ever return (vv. 3-7), Peter writes this:

"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will

be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

Here Peter echoes the words of Paul in 1 Thess. 5:2-3, both of whom refer to "the day of the Lord", i.e., the second coming/advent of Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Pt. 3:4,8-9).

- Peter tells us that it is on account of the coming of this "day of the Lord/God" (vv. 10,12), i.e., the second coming/advent of Christ, that the heavens will be destroyed. The end of this present heavens and earth is the effect of the coming of Christ. The "present heavens and earth," literally, the "now heavens and earth" (v. 7), are being reserved for this "day" of judgment.
- Note also that the "present (now) heavens and earth" are contrasted with the former heavens and earth, literally, "the then world" (v. 6). Thus Peter looks at biblical history as consisting of three great periods: 1) the heavens and earth before Noah, which were destroyed by God's judgment, out of which he formed anew 2) the heavens and earth that now are, which are being reserved for destruction, and out of which he will create anew 3) the heavens and earth that shall be, which are the object of our hope. "Since you look for these things," says Peter, that is, for the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (v. 13), be diligent to be righteous.
- Where is there room in Peter's scenario for an earthly millennium intervening between Christ's second coming and the new heavens and new earth? On the contrary, the present heavens and earth will be judged at Christ's return, at which time the new heavens and new earth (not a millennium) shall emerge as an eternal dwelling for God's people.

Storms is correct, to the extent that Storms is imagining a millennium set in the present creation.

- Note Peter's use of the word translated "look for" in vv. 12,13,14. We are to "look for" the day of God (the Lord), i.e., the return of Christ (v. 12). In v. 13 we are to "look for" the new heavens and new earth. In v. 14 we "look for" these things, i.e., the coming of Christ which brings judgment against the present world and righteousness for his people. It seems clear that the object of our expectation, that for which we are to "look," is return of Christ when the present heavens and earth give way to the new heavens and earth. If the new heavens and new earth come at the time of Christ's second advent, there can be no earthly millennial reign intervening between the two. Remember: the PM places the creation of the new heavens and new earth after the millennium (Rev. 21-22). However, if the new heavens and new earth come with Christ (as Peter indicates they will), the millennium must in some sense be identified with this present age and not some future period subsequent to Christ's return.

No, Storms has missed out a logical possibility: that the millennium takes place at Christ's future coming in glory, and the new creation scene of Rev. 21:1-7 also describes Christ's coming in glory—which it obviously does, if you compare the promise of the wedding in Rev. 19:6-9 with John's vision of the Bride on her wedding day in 21:1-2, 9-11.

- Finally, the PM argues that during the millennial age it will be possible for people to come to saving faith in Christ. But Peter's argument is that the very reason why Christ has not yet returned is in order that He might patiently extend the opportunity for men to repent. This is meaningful only if it is impossible to repent subsequent to Christ's return. If souls may be saved after Christ returns, the patience He now displays is unnecessary. The urgency of the moment can be explained only on the supposition that "now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

Babies in the millennium and people coming to faith in the millennium are artifacts of a model that places the millennium in this present creation. If it is in the new creation, then no sinner, and no mortal, will take part in that age, so that the words of Jesus apply: there will be no marriage or giving in marriage, which presumably means that there will be no procreation, in that age (Lk. 20:35-36).

5. Matthew 25:31-46

We read in Mt. 25:31-32 that the Son of Man will return in glory in the company of the angelic host. It is then that he will gather all the nations (cf. Mt. 13:30,39-41,49-50), separate them (cf. Mt. 13:49), and pass judgment (vv. 34-36).

- The judgment that occurs at the second coming/advent of Christ is said to issue in eternal fire (v. 41) and eternal punishment (v. 46) for the "goats" (the unsaved) and eternal life (v. 46) for the "sheep" (the saved).
- In Rev. 20:11-15, this same judgment is described. The unsaved are thrown into the lake of fire. This is commonly known as the Great White Throne Judgment.
- The important point is this: the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15 occurs after the millennial reign described in 20:1-10. But in Mt. 25 the judgment occurs at the time of Christ's second coming/advent. Conclusion: the millennium of Rev. 20:1-10 is simultaneous with the present age; the millennium is now, preceding the second coming of Christ.

My conclusion is that at the second coming/advent of Christ the lost are judged and cast into the lake of fire, to be punished eternally, whereas the saved are granted entry into eternal life, that phase of God's kingdom which consists of the new heavens and new earth. The description in Mt. 25 of what happens when Christ returns simply doesn't leave place or room for a 1,000 earthly reign in between the parousia and the eternal state.

Matthew 25:31-46, read all by itself, sits better with an amillennial reading—a reading in which the final dispositions of both the saved and the lost are decided when Jesus comes in glory, and not later. But it is not to be read all by itself. Jesus alludes in vv. 31 and 41 to Isa. 24:21-23, in which, when God comes to judge the world and to reign in glory, he casts the heavenly (angelic) and earthly rebel powers into the “pit” of the underworld together. Jesus pictures Hades, the underworld, as fiery for the wicked (Lk. 16:24), and the Book of Revelation also pictures the underworld as fiery, like a furnace (Rev. 9:1-2). So when Jesus says in Mt. 25:31 that when he comes he will sit on his glorious throne, that alludes to God reigning in glory as king on Zion in Isa. 24:23, and when he says in Mt. 25:41 that the goats will be sent into the eternal (Gr. αἰώνιος) fire prepared for the devil and his angels (i.e. the rebellious hosts of heaven, see Rev. 12), he is talking about unworthy humans and angels being punished together for a very long time, “many days, and afterwards they will be dealt with” (Isa. 24:22). So either Jesus is abstracting out the final resurrection and judgment of the stubbornly unrepentant (which results not in incarceration but in total destruction, Isa. 27:1-5; cf. 26:10-11, 20-21), or the word αἰώνιος here connotes “very long” or “age-long,” i.e. lasting for the entire messianic age. I prefer the latter interpretations, which brings this passage into line with Isa. 26:14-19, Lk. 14:14, Lk. 20:35-36, 1 Cor. 15:21-23, Phil. 3:11, and Rev. 20:1-10.

6. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

"This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed -- for our testimony to you was believed."

The conclusions drawn from Mt. 25 are re-affirmed in 2 Thess. 1. This passage also indicates that it is at the time of Christ's second coming/advent, not 1,000 years later, that the eternal punishment of the lost occurs.

When does the eternal destruction of the unsaved occur? When shall they pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord? Paul's answer is: "when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day" (v. 10). The climactic and final punishment of the lost is not reserved for a judgment 1,000 years after Christ's return, but is simultaneous with it. And since this judgment is elsewhere said to follow the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15), the millennium itself must be coterminous with the present age.

Eternal destruction here seems, as in Mt. 25, to be referring to age-long destruction. Those who lie in the grave, and whose bodies, indeed, dissolve altogether in the transition between this creation and the new creation, remain in a state of destruction for the entire messianic age, the millennium.

7. John 5:28-29

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

An hour is coming when (lit., "in which") all who are in the tombs, i.e., the physically dead, whether believer or unbeliever, shall hear his voice and come forth in the resurrection.

The PM, however, is unable to accept this straightforward declaration. He insists that a 1,000 year earthly reign of Christ must intervene between the resurrection of believers and the resurrection of unbelievers. He points to v. 25 where the word "hour" encompasses the whole of this present age. Why, then, can't the "hour" in v. 28 also span the 1,000 years of a millennial age? Anthony Hoekema answers this question:

"First, in order to be parallel to what is said in verse 25, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers should then be taking place throughout this thousand-year period, as is the case with the regeneration of people during the 'hour' mentioned in verse 25. But, according to the theory under discussion (Premillennialism), this is not the case; rather this theory teaches that there will be one resurrection at the beginning of the thousand years and another at the end. Of this, however, there is not a hint in this passage. Further, note the words "all who are in the tombs will hear his voice." The reference would seem to be to a general resurrection of all who are in their graves; it is straining the meaning of these words to make them describe two groups (or four groups) of people who will be raised at separate times. Moreover, this passage states specifically that all these dead will hear the voice of the Son of man. The clear implication seems to be that this voice will be sounded once, not two times or four

times. If the word 'hour' is interpreted as standing for a period of a thousand years plus, this would imply that the voice of Jesus keeps sounding for a thousand years. Does this seem likely?" (32)

No, it doesn't.

[Storms's] Conclusion:

My conclusion is that when we examine what the NT says will occur at the time of the second coming/advent of Jesus Christ, there is no place for a 1,000 year earthly reign to follow. At the time of the second coming there will occur the final resurrection, the final judgment, the end of sin, the end of death, and the creation of the new heavens and new earth. As Peter has said, "since you look for these things (beloved), be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (2 Pt. 3:14).

I agree to the extent that Storms is talking about a this-worldly, this-creation reign. Christ brings the new creation with him when he comes. He not only resurrects his people, but he resurrects the living earth itself. But when this happens it will *not* be the time for the wicked dead to be raised. As Isa. 26:14-19, Lk. 14:14, 20:35-36, 1 Cor. 15:23, Phil. 3:11, and Rev. 20:4-5 affirm, only the faithful will rise at that time.