



THE
CROSS
AND THE
MILLENNIUM

PETER COLQUHOUN

In his typical style, Peter lifts up Christ and Him crucified from start to finish.

The Cross and the Millennium draws you nearer to Jesus and brings relevance to the millennium in the context of the cross and the great cosmic conflict. It is Christological prophecy, inspiring theology and devotional reading all rolled into one. A must-read for all those sharing Christ and His end-time teachings and prophecies.

—Gary Webster, Director of the Institute of Public Evangelism, South Pacific
Division of Seventh-day Adventists

The Cross and the Millennium presents a clear and systematic interpretation of the millennium and the premillennial view of the Second Coming. It invites the reader on a fascinating journey to consider the climactic end-time events through the lens of the cross. By applying the Christocentric principles of biblical interpretation, Peter Colquhoun immerses the complex images in the book of Revelation—so often exposed to a variety of theological interpretations—in the truth of the Man of Calvary. He provides a theologically sound and spiritually encouraging interpretation of the millennium theme, as seen from Christ's accomplished and victorious work on the cross.

—Dr John Skrzypaszek, retired director of Ellen G White Research Centre,
Avondale University

This book will make the church rethink its approach to the millennium teaching and ask why it has taken so long to make the cross and Jesus central. This ground-breaking approach to the millennium teaching brings clarity and certainty by linking it to the cross event and allowing Jesus to speak on the topic.

—Dr Bruce Manners, author, *The Command*

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PREFACE

The second coming of “our great God and Saviour” Jesus Christ has been the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) of Christians since the first advent of Jesus, and Seventh-day Adventists look forward to the Second Advent as the next great event in salvation history. However, among Christian denominations, there is considerable confusion about end-time events. Theories about the Second Coming, the millennium and the end of earth’s history abound.

This book sets out to examine these events using a Christological lens—looking at the plan of salvation and the end times through the words and salvation work of Jesus. While the end of the great controversy is evidenced throughout Scripture, we will note that it is the resurrected Jesus Himself who is the sole author of the millennial truths, which He commissioned John on Patmos to write in letters addressed to the seven churches.

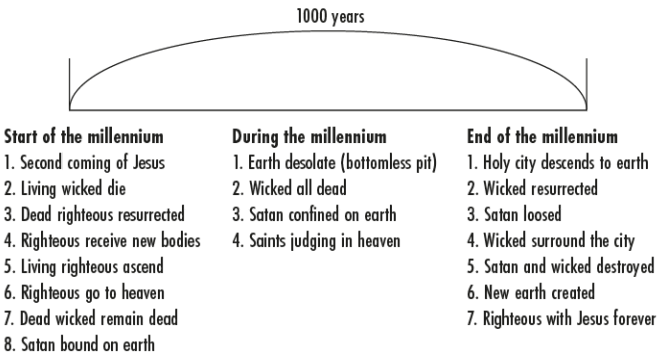
First, we include a brief history of the various and quite complex views of millennial events. Adhering to the important Christocentric principle of interpretation, we will then examine the dynamic and close theological parallels between the cross and the millennium. We will note how the cross is a template that mirrors the future millennial events. Finally, we will carefully examine the contextual evidence showing that the millennial events are a consummation of the salvation and judgment events of the cross. In so doing, we will review the climactic truths concerning the second coming of Jesus, the millennial sojourn of the saints in heaven, God’s dealings with Satan and the unsaved, the second death and the marvellous eschatological fulfilment of the everlasting covenant in the New Jerusalem.

While the term “millennium” refers specifically to the thousand-year period referred to in Revelation 20, in this book the term “millennial

events” is broadly used to refer not only to the thousand years but also to the other important events that lead to the commencement of the thousand years and the triumphal conclusion of the plan of salvation.

Below is a familiar diagram that outlines the important truths of the millennium consistently presented by Adventists. This book will examine the validity of the historical Adventist understanding of this important climax to salvation history through the words and teachings of Jesus, the author of the end-time truths.

A typical outline of the millennial events



As we examine how the cross gives profound meaning to the millennial events as the grand culmination and climax of the plan of salvation, it is my prayer that we may learn to love Jesus more and look forward to His glorious return to planet Earth.

UNDERSTANDING THE MILLENNIUM

The word “millennium” comes from the Latin words *mille*, “thousand,” and *annus*, “year.” The term is used of the period of 1000 years discussed in the Bible and is only mentioned in Revelation 20:1–10; however, its end-time significance is developed in the contextual chapters, Revelation 19–22. Unfortunately, church history is replete with theologies about when these thousand years will take place and what will happen during them.¹ These theories have waxed and waned in popularity according to the presuppositions and methods of prophetic interpretation of the people promoting them. Some interpretations bring powerful political agendas with them.

This has resulted in different and confusing theological views among Christians about the second coming of Jesus and the end times. The danger is that some of these views create thinking that could make many vulnerable to Satan’s deceptions in the final cosmic struggle—a struggle that Jesus warned could “deceive if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24).

Some Christians believe there is a connection between the millennial events and the prophecies and promises made to ancient Israel in the Old Testament. Some believe there will be a “secret rapture” of the saints just prior to the Second Advent, and some believe that the saints will be in heaven with Christ during the millennium. Still others say they will be reigning with Christ on earth. Then there are those who believe there will be another gospel proclamation and a second chance of salvation on earth during the millennial period, followed by a postmillennial Second Coming.

Despite these different theologies, one thing is certain, Jesus, the author of the millennial events, had only one resolution to earth’s history in mind

when He revealed this climactic event to the author of Revelation. It is a resolution we are well able to understand and defend from the Bible. And that is what this book is about.

The events of the millennium are a grand eschatological² fulfilment of the salvation and judgment events of the cross. They are literal events, although there is some metaphorical language used to help portray them. These events bring the attainments of the cross to their triumphant consummation, satisfactorily and comprehensively closing the great controversy between Jesus and His arch-rival Satan. This is what Jesus was anxious to convey in His revelations to John—*that the millennial events are solely cross related.*

It was precisely in the context of the cross and the promise of His coming again in glory that Jesus commissioned John to send His personal messages about the end times to the seven churches (see Revelation 1:1–8). These messages will be important in our exploration of the millennium, and early Christians would have had no difficulty in grasping the language used to describe these events. Most importantly, they would have clearly understood the dynamic connection between the two mighty Christological events of history—the cross and the millennium.

Understanding the issues

In Christendom, there are two primary ways of understanding when the millennium will begin. Premillennialists believe the second coming of Jesus will take place *before* the millennium; postmillennialists believe that Jesus will return in glory *after* the millennium. Seventh-day Adventists have consistently held a premillennial understanding of these events.

However, there is a wide consensus that during New Testament times and the following early centuries, premillennialism was the theological hope of all Christians. A simple reading of the words of Jesus in the Gospels and the preaching and writings of Paul and the other apostles left them in no doubt that the return of Jesus in glory was the next wonderful event in salvation history. This was the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). The resurrection would occur and, together with the living saints, they would be “caught up . . . to

meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–17). L E Froom in his monumental work *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* states, “The early church was distinctly premillennialist in her cherished expectations of Christ’s second advent. His coming and the kingdom were her constant hope.”³

The departure from New Testament premillennialism
Augustine (354–430 AD), the revered church father of Catholicism, wrote an influential book titled *City of God*, which became the model for church–state relations through medieval times to the Protestant Reformation and beyond. In it, he argued that sinful humans need the strong influence of government to help direct daily living.⁴ With such assistance, he felt the church would prosper, like a mighty city of God. He envisioned the possibility of a coming time of glory for the church.

One wonders if Augustine was initially influenced by Emperor Constantine, who a little earlier legislated civil laws mandating Sunday as the rest day for all people. Constantine’s close involvement with the church is also seen in the fact that he summoned two influential church councils—Arles (314 AD) and Niccaea (325 AD)—which influenced church doctrine for centuries.

Regardless of where his ideas came from, Augustine’s thinking soon became a powerful and influential philosophy. The church became a dominant force in all matters of government in the new Christian empire—often referred to by historians as the “Holy Roman Empire.” It was likely this thinking that led Augustine to teach that Jesus would only return *after* the saints reigned with Christ over His spiritual kingdom on earth for a millennial period. Initially, he thought of the millennium being a thousand years, but later thought of it as a general span of time between the First and Second Advents—a theology known as amillennialism. During this time, he believed Satan would be greatly restricted—“chained” (Revelation 20:1–3)—from his baleful influence on humanity. The spiritual reign of Christ with the saints on earth would lead to the eventual Second Advent, when He would judge the living and the dead and establish His eternal kingdom. For

the next 12 centuries, right through to the 17th century, this was the dominant view of the millennium and became known as postmillennialism.

During the Reformation, the principal Reformers did not attempt to refute this position. Indeed, to the eventual chagrin of many, John Calvin sought to follow this model in the city of Geneva. Given their emphasis on Scripture as the sole basis for faith and practice, it seems surprising the Reformers did not adopt the New Testament's emphatic premillennial theology of the end times. Instead, they aimed to replace the Catholic church–state system with a Protestant one, with hopes for a Protestant millennial golden age before Jesus' return.

Nevertheless, there were some Reformers—the Anabaptists—who rejected postmillennial teachings. This came about in part through their recovery of the New Testament truth of baptism by immersion—“believer's baptism”—as opposed to infant baptism. We must not underestimate just how important this was in the Reformation story. Anabaptists taught that baptism by immersion was a voluntary personal choice—a wonderful celebration that declared one's faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as the sole means of salvation and entrance into the Body of Christ.

Believer's baptism exposed the failure of infant baptism to symbolise the gospel truth of the cross and at the same time repudiated one's dependence on the church–state system for salvation. In doing this, it also undermined a key element of postmillennial thinking, which involved the church and state working closely together to usher in a glorious future for humanity.

Soon after they rediscovered the truth of believer's baptism, Anabaptists inevitably recovered the wonderful New Testament truth of the premillennial return of Jesus in glory—a further repudiation of the church–state system of postmillennialism. Sadly, the combined forces of church and state—both Catholic and Protestant—fiercely criticised and condemned the Anabaptists, leading to some of the worst persecution of the Reformation. Many Anabaptists were drowned, a practice that was derisively called the “third baptism.” Because of the awful persecution, postmillennialism remained the dominant teaching until the Second Advent awakening in the 19th century. (See Appendix 1 for further insights into the recovery of

premillennialism during the Reformation.)

Postmillennial thinking was also present in England. When the Puritan Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) overthrew King Charles I, he became Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England and, for a brief period, there was no ruling monarchy. In Cromwell's view, he was one of God's chosen people, through whom God was directing the affairs of the world.⁵ In 1659, the year following Cromwell's death, John Eliot a Puritan missionary to the Indigenous people of North America, published a treatise: "The Christian Commonwealth: or The Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ." Eliot's main argument was that Jesus was the rightful heir to the throne of England and all other nations. This kind of theocratic thinking no doubt added lustre to the concept of a glorious millennium prior to Jesus' return.

In addition, following the French Revolution (1789–1799), humanism and secular rationalism taught that with the right education—and ongoing discoveries in science and industry—humans would set the world on the path to a new golden age. Despite the denial of God during the French Revolution, this golden-age philosophy gave indirect impetus to the postmillennial religious thinking of the times.

In the decades that followed (1790–1840s), there was a great religious awakening, and revivalist preachers and publications strongly proclaimed the belief that the world was on the cusp of a postmillennial golden age.

Futurism

During the Reformation, many studying the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation came to understand the antichrist to be the papacy. This interpretation was powerfully proclaimed by the Reformers and gave much impetus to the Reformation. A Jesuit called Francisco Ribera (1537–1591) was commissioned by the papacy to find an alternative system of prophetic interpretation that would mute the incriminating indictment of these prophecies. Ribera proposed what has become known as the *futurist system* of prophetic interpretation. This was further pushed by another Jesuit, Manuel Lacunza (1731–1801), 200 years later.

Futurism removed the prophetic spotlight from the Papacy by placing the

prophecies about the antichrist in the distant future: the activities of the antichrist would occur towards the close of the millennium, followed by a postmillennial second advent of Jesus.

In England, Daniel Whitby (1638–1726) published a treatise entitled “The New Hypothesis,” which reflected and expanded the postmillennial thinking of the times. He gave Old Testament promises to ancient Israel a double application, spiritualising them to apply to the church. He also taught that by preaching the gospel, Mohammedanism would be overthrown, Jews converted, the papal church and the pope destroyed, and that there would be a thousand years of righteous peace—the millennium. At the end of the millennium, there would be a short period of apostasy, ending in the return of Christ.⁶

Whitby’s ideas were promoted in the United States by Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), one of the most influential clergymen of the 18th century. The idea that a millennial golden age would occur before the return of Christ took root and became the theological focus of many revival preachers of the times. This dominant view was a major factor in the rejection of premillennial New Testament truth by the main churches during the Great Second Advent Movement in the mid-19th century, as they fervently believed the new millennial golden age was about to begin.

The rise of dispensationalism

Whitby’s ideas laid the foundation for new teachings by J N Darby (1800–1882), which became known as dispensationalism. Darby was a theologian and member of the original Plymouth Brethren group in Britain, whose influence led to the creation of the Exclusive Brethren group. Darby taught that there would be a pre-tribulation secret rapture of the saints (living and dead). After some time—but before the millennium—the saints would return with Jesus to planet Earth. Jesus would then, with the saints, reign on earth for a thousand years. Darby’s teaching soon became popular in the United States, which became the bastion for Zionism with a large political influence.

A core belief of dispensational teaching is that there are two peoples of

God: national Israel—the descendants of Abraham—and the church of the New Testament, as defined in the book of Acts. Dispensationalists believe that early in the millennium, the ethnic nation of Israel will accept Jesus as the Messiah and all the Old Testament promises to the nation will be fulfilled, including the literal rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, the restoration of the throne of David and the return of its ancient territory. (See Appendix 2 for an explanation of the conditional nature of God’s promises to Israel.)

Just as many believed Israel would be given another chance to accept Jesus as the Messiah, some dispensationalists teach that those who refused to accept Jesus prior to the tribulation will have a second chance to acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and Lord during the millennium. Some suggest that Israel will play a major role in reaching out to the nations under the reign of Jesus.

Dispensationalism also has elements of postmillennial futurism. It teaches that in the final years of the millennium, an antichrist will arise, followed by the final judgment and the eternal kingdom.

Elements of dispensational teachings are found in many denominations today but are most assertively proclaimed in Pentecostal churches. Scofield’s Reference Bible (a King James Version with extensive marginal notes by American Bible student Cyrus I Scofield, published in 1909 and revised in 1917) supported Darby’s position and popularised his teaching in the United States. The teachings also gained exposure through popular books. *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsay (1970) was declared by *The New York Times* to be the bestselling non-fiction book in the United States in the 1970s.⁷ The “Left Behind” series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B Jenkins, a series of 16 bestselling religious novels (1995–2007), also had very wide circulation. Four films have been made from the series.⁸

The Second Advent Movement

Around the time that Darby was promoting his ideas, a dynamic movement rose up that drew attention to the biblical truth of the premillennial second coming of Jesus. As the world emerged into the 19th century, more and

more people in both the new world of the United States and the old world of Britain and Europe began to carefully study the apocalyptic prophecies of the Bible—particularly the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Bible students recognised the recent overthrow of the papacy and the banishment of the pope by the French troops in 1798 as being a remarkable fulfilment of the papacy receiving its predicted “deadly wound” (Revelation 13:3).

This event brought a close to the prophesied 1260 years of papal reign referred to in Daniel 7:25, 12:9 and Revelation 12:6, 14, marking a timely and dramatic fulfilment of the prophetic Word. Across the globe, this brought incredible attention to Bible prophecy. A new conviction emerged that humanity was entering “the time of the end.”⁹ This led to an irrepressible recovery of the New Testament teaching and cherished faith of early Christianity concerning the premillennial second advent of Jesus.

William Miller, a licensed Baptist minister, was the prominent preacher in the Second Advent Movement in the United States. Through his study of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, particularly the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Miller came to the conclusion that Jesus would return to earth in 1844. He was joined by many preachers from various denominations in expecting Jesus’ soon return—*before the millennium*.

The Great Disappointment that followed when Jesus did not return in 1844 challenged the faith of many of these early Adventists. But a small group emerged with their faith undaunted. They soon came to understand that the phrase in the prophecy of Daniel—“then the sanctuary shall be cleansed” (Daniel 8:14)—did not refer to the earth being cleansed (the sanctuary being the earth was a traditional view) at the Jesus’ second coming, as they had first thought, but referred to the commencement of the pre-advent judgment ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary prior to His second advent.

These students of the Word were committed to the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, and they continued the work of the Protestant Reformation as they recovered truth that had been cast to the ground during the 1260-year reign of the papacy (see Daniel 8:12). Within a short period, a

recovered system of doctrinal truth gave new energy to their faith in the premillennial second advent of Jesus as the “blessed hope” of all Christians (Titus 2:13).

This group of believers chose the name Seventh-day Adventists, with the word “Adventist” (from the word “advent,” meaning “coming”) highlighting their faith in Jesus’ soon return. Today, this movement encompasses the globe, heralding the premillennial second advent of Jesus as the blessed hope for a world in turmoil.

Neo-postmillennialism

Postmillennialism began to enter a steady decline from about the time of the American Civil War, then even more so from the time of World War I. With increasing global tensions, a utopian future began to seem more and more untenable.

Paradoxically, postmillennial thinking has begun to re-emerge in recent years, partly driven by the very issues that led to its demise. The Emerging Church movement is one example. It reflects the postmodern mindset and is thus quite subjective in its theology. Personal experience and even cultural community thinking are valued over the Bible as the source of absolute truth. It has been described as “essentially a post-modernised Christianity, an amorphous liberal Christianity that ‘speaks hip’ fluently and constitutes a group of millions.”¹⁰

Being strongly ecumenical, the Emerging Church movement makes theological compromises to build unity among its members. It is mostly aligned with the left wing of American politics. It also seeks alliances with legislative bodies to give impetus to its theological social agenda. This is designed to help create a millennium of peace to prepare for Jesus’ return. The movement may have had a lessened impact over the past few years; however, philosophically it is present in left-wing cultural thinking.

The New Apostolic Reformation is another movement promoting postmillennial thinking. In a *Christianity Today* interview, Bob Smietana spoke with academics Brad Christerson and Richard Flory, authors of *The Rise of Network Christianity*, about the New Apostolic Reformation—or, as

they prefer to call it, “Independent Network Charismatic (INC).”¹¹ The uniqueness of this movement is that congregations—some of them megachurches—are led by self-proclaimed apostles and prophets, who impose a new spiritual authority in church leadership, not dissimilar to papal authority. Bob Smietana introduced them in this way:

Their real power lies in their innovative approach to selling faith. They’ve combined multi-level marketing, Pentecostal signs and wonders, and postmillennial optimism to connect directly with millions of spiritual customers. That allows them to reap millions in donations, conference fees, and book and DVD sales. And because these INC apostles claim to get direction straight from God, they operate with almost no oversight.

Note the phrase “postmillennial optimism.” Florey unpacks this further: For most of the 20th century, most Pentecostals and evangelicals were premillennial—they imagined that God’s reign would appear in full only *after* the second coming of Christ. But the INC movement is explicitly *post*-millennial. In their minds, God’s kingdom can come to earth before Christ returns—and, by the way, it will be in America. There is this interesting combination of America first, Americans as God’s chosen people, and a romantic vision of God working it out through the people he chooses.

A strong focus of those involved in the New Apostolic Reformation is what they call dominion or kingdom theology. By exerting influence on governments around the world, the movement seeks to work with God to reclaim the dominion of this earth from Satan and usher in a new age of peace and prosperity in the end times. This is essential, it claims, to prepare the way for Jesus to return and set up His eternal kingdom.

The concept of the “seven mountains” of influence is popular among those involved in the New Apostolic Reformation. The seven mountains of influence are: business; government; media; arts and entertainment; education; the family; and religion. They believe that God will appoint people to high positions in these areas and use them to fulfil His will.

“These leaders will be listening to God,” says Christerson, “and He will use them to supernaturally make America or the world into the kingdom of God.” People in the New Apostolic Reformation were at the forefront of describing Donald Trump as a king Cyrus figure with claims such as “He is not one of us, but God is using him to defeat our enemies and restore our nation.”

“The New Apostolic Reformation is claiming to usher in the most significant changes in Protestantism since Martin Luther,” says Trevor O’Reggio. “The stated goal of the new movement is to eradicate denominations and form a unified church that will be victorious against evil.”¹²

The New Apostolic Reformation has repudiated the idea of a secret rapture, which is held by a majority of mainline Protestants. Rachel Tabachnick says that, “Instead of escaping the world (in the rapture) prior to the turmoil of the end times, they teach that believers will defeat evil by taking dominion or control over all sections of society and government, resulting in mass conversions to their brand of charismatic evangelicalism and a Christian utopia or ‘Kingdom’ on earth.”¹³

They believe in the coming of Christ but understand that it will take place long after they have prepared the earth for his coming. This is not a new idea but a new reformulation of the concept that Jesus will come to an earth prepared for Him—postmillennialism, again. (For a summary of the problems with the postmillennial teachings of the Emerging Church movement and New Apostolic Reformation, see Appendix 3.)

A principle of interpretation

As we consider the ebb and flow of millennial theology, there is, fortunately, a biblical system of interpretation that can be confidently followed. It takes away the confused and conflicting views that arise from the various methods of prophetic interpretation. Theologians call this the Christocentric principle. It is often spoken of, but not always consistently applied and often even ignored. However, it is critical in determining truth. What it means is that all biblical truth must faithfully reflect the redemptive

teachings and words of Jesus. Any millennial theology that ignores the words and teachings of Jesus, who alone is the author of the millennial truth, must immediately be suspect.

The Christocentric principle comes from Jesus Himself. He put Himself at the centre of the closing events of this earth's history, just as He was the centre and focus of the cross events. Based *solely* on His triumph on the cross, Jesus made specific and comprehensive end-time promises to the seven churches in Revelation 1–3, representing the Christian church throughout the ages. He then directly linked their fulfilment to His premillennial return in glory at the close of the age.

A careful reading of the millennial chapters of Revelation—chapters 19–22—reveals the dramatic episodes of the millennium as the grand consummation of Jesus' achievements on the cross and of His personal, pastoral promises to the churches. The correlation is logical, dynamic and absolutely necessary in the plan of salvation.

The whole saga of salvation history is founded on Jesus' plan, His work and His action from beginning to end. As many New Testament scholars say, "Eschatology is Christology," which is a powerful and true statement. This means the closing episodes of earth's history are completely bound up with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He is the One who is the "First and the Last" (Revelation 1:11; 22:13). Only through the prism of Calvary can one see a complete harmony of salvation truth in the person of Jesus, who is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Rather than simply restating the Adventist understanding of the millennium, the aim of this book is to allow the words of Christ—the "Testimony of Jesus"—to explain in context the passages of Revelation on this theme. This means beginning with the cross and allowing the cross-related truths of the millennial visions to speak for themselves. A wider reference to other biblical passages, as engendered by the text itself, is included where helpful or necessary.

When we take this approach, we discover that the millennial events are not promises involving ancient Israel but a meaningful encounter with the Man of Calvary. We can allow Jesus, "the Lamb who was slain" (Revelation

5:12), to speak to our hearts His words of love and grace—just as He spoke to the seven churches.

Jesus is the central motif of Revelation, and He spoke about Himself, salvation and the end times. The glad tidings from Jesus are wonderfully summed up in His proclamation to John: “Do not be afraid, I am the First and the Last. I am He who was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” (Revelation 1:17, 18).

Any presentation that ignores this Christological principle (meaning, the words and teachings of Jesus) for understanding the millennium must be immediately suspect. He alone is the author of truth. When we look at the millennium through the words and works of Jesus, we see a kaleidoscope of many-coloured truths about salvation manifesting perfect harmony in bringing the great controversy between Christ and Satan to a close. The ultimate salvation of God’s people, the fate of Satan and the wicked, and the events of the millennium and beyond all paint a picture of the triumph of God’s love.

The promises of Jesus to the seven churches of Revelation reassure us that this tragic world will not go on interminably. Because of the good news of the cross, Jesus now has and holds the future of the world in His hands—and the last days of the world as we know it have indeed come.

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