

The Nature of the Kingdom in Both Testaments

Rebuttal

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Dr. Couch seems to have forgotten that he is debating a progressive dispensationalist and not an amillennialist. He argues for two major points, neither of which are in dispute in this debate. This is typically called a "red herring." The first part of his paper was devoted to demonstrating pre-millennialism from the Old Testament prophecies, and the second part was devoted to refuting the idea that the present age is the Kingdom.

Neither of these two major points divide us.

1. The Old Testament predicts a future physical Kingdom, where Israel will be the head of the nations. A literal understanding of these Old Testament promises is essential to a biblical eschatology. The New Testament does not contradict this, but affirms it.

2. The present age is not the Kingdom age. The realization of the Kingdom of Messiah is yet to come at the second coming.

Since we agree on these major issues, that makes us both pre-millennialists and dispensationalists.

Another tactic Couch has repeatedly employed is the use of **prejudicial language**, like his reference to himself as a "biblical dispensationalist," in order to prejudice the reader against whatever I might present in my rebuttal. Of course, if Couch's view is "biblical dispensationalism" mine must therefore be "unbiblical." Likewise, he sought to prejudice the audience in the former "Dichotomy vs. Continuity" section by referring to his side as "true dispensationalists" (implying that progressives are "false dispensationalists"). But let's find out exactly how "biblical" Couch's dispensationalism really is, regarding the finer points of his essay.

Early in his paper, Couch makes the following incorrect statement, "*Coming into the prophetic mix is the fact that Solomon, the son of David, would have coming forth from him a nation.*" One wonders which translation Couch is using. Where in Scripture does a nation come forth from Solomon? The nation of Israel existed since Jacob and the twelve tribes that sprang from him. No nation sprang from Solomon. Solomon was one king of Israel, and built the House of the Lord. I realize this point is irrelevant to the debate. However, it shows that Couch is not as careful as he should be with his statements.

After citing several Old Testament prophecies of the Kingdom, Couch says, "*A biblical dispensationalist, using sound "normal hermeneutics," that includes a simple understanding of CONTEXT, can see that these passages do not include a reference to*

the church during this kingdom period." But where has Couch demonstrated his "sound, normal, hermeneutics?" Certainly not here! He implies that since the "Church" is not mentioned by name in the Old Testament passages he cites, the Kingdom is not the destiny of the Church (attempting to justify his "heavenly destiny" ideas)! Is that "sound, normal, hermeneutics?" I don't think so. It is "begging the question." That the "Church" (by Couch's definition) is not explicitly mentioned proves nothing at all. This absence can be explained by the fact that Couch's definition of the "Church" is incorrect. He is assuming (based on his own presuppositions) that the "Church" is something completely distinct from God's promised dealings with Israel. His pointing out that this kind of "Church" is not mentioned in the passages he cites proves nothing at all, because his own definition of "Church" is in dispute in this debate! Couch is assuming what he is trying to prove.

His attempt to show that the "Church" (by his definition) has no destiny in the Kingdom, based on its alleged absence in the OT passages he cites, is completely negated by his own admission a few pages later. Couch writes, *"The resurrected church saints, in their new bodies, will be there in the kingdom to enjoy the Savior's reign. In that limited and relatively undefined sense, the church will be part of the kingdom. But there are no verses of Scripture that would call for a permanent and specific rule for the church."* Couch also writes at the end of the first section, *"HOWEVER, Church saints will be in the kingdom; biblical dispensationalists have never denied this fact. But, the Church is not the central kingdom people. Regathered Israel has the promise of a re-gathering, rejoicing in the land, and their Messiah ruling as king over them."* One wonders why the Old Testament passages he cites did not mention this "Church" (that he now admits is IN the Kingdom)!

So, what is Couch's point by first denying the Church a place in the Kingdom using an argument from silence in the Old Testament passages, yet admitting the Church in the Kingdom when faced with New Testament passages? Couch is trying to have his cake and eat it too, just like he does with Israel's new covenant! In Couch's view, the Church receives "spiritual blessings" from Israel's new covenant that has not even been established with the party to whom it was promised! Yet he seeks to maintain his dichotomy between two separate "peoples of God." And now he claims that the Kingdom is exclusively Israel's destiny, yet has the Church hanging around for 1000 years on earth with nothing specific to do!

This makes me wonder what Couch will do with the saved prior to Abraham! Are they part of Israel or the Church in Couch's theology? Or is there a third "people of God" with some other destiny? Certainly we can use Couch's own argument from silence against him to show that they have no inheritance in the Kingdom, since they are not specifically mentioned in the passages he cites. And unlike the Church, the saints from Adam to Abraham were known to the intended hearers of these prophecies. Perhaps Couch is willing to admit them into the Church with a "heavenly destiny" instead! Are they also just hanging around the Kingdom with nothing specific to do?

To Couch, Israel is now on standby while God does something entirely different with the Church. But in the Kingdom, the Church will be on standby while God does something

with Israel for 1000 years. Since Jesus Christ is the King, and will be occupied reigning on David's Throne during the Millennium, and since the promise to the Church in 1 Thess. 4 is that Christians will *"ever be with the Lord"* after His coming, one wonders how Couch can continue to draw this dichotomy! I suppose Jesus will have to carefully budget His time so he can spend some reigning on David's Throne, and some being with us "Church saints." I wonder what became of that "heavenly destiny" of which Couch is so fond? Is the Church's "heavenly destiny" simply seven minuscule years in heaven, only to evacuate our inheritance to hang around on earth as alien non-citizens for 1000 years with nothing to do? What kind of inheritance is that???

One quick observation here. At the beginning of his paper, Couch stated that there are *"hundreds and hundreds"* of verses in the Old Testament that refer to the Millennial Kingdom. But, when he gets to the New Testament in the second portion of his paper, Couch says, *"The book of Acts has only seven references to the kingdom of God"* and then attempts to disconnect all seven from the Church. What Couch is doing here is playing a numbers game. Since there are *"hundreds and hundreds"* of verses in the Old Testament about the Kingdom written to Israel, and only a dozen or so in Acts and the Epistles, you the reader are supposed to conclude that the Kingdom must be related to Israel and not the Church. While Couch does not state this explicitly, his language clearly implies it. But, we must ask Couch to "do the math" for all the New Testament verses that speak of our destiny. There are quite a few that point (literally) to the eschatological Kingdom of God as our inheritance. But not a single verse has heaven as our destiny when interpreted literally. I have repeatedly challenged Couch to produce these passages that speak of a "heavenly destiny" for the Church. So far, all he has done is given some vague references that have no bearing on the subject, and forced his view into them. So, if the ratio of "Kingdom" verses between the Old and New Testaments carries any real weight, that goes double for the ratio of "destiny" verses (Kingdom vs. Heaven) in the New Testament! And so far, the "heavenly destiny" idea has proven to be an orphan in both Testaments!

The bottom line here, dear reader, is that Couch is using faulty reasoning in order to maintain his dichotomy between Israel's "Kingdom destiny" and the Church's alleged "heavenly destiny." His argument is one from SILENCE in the Old Testament, by TAKING FOR GRANTED his definition of "Church," pointing out that this fabricated "Church" is not found in certain Old Testament passages, and then concluding that the Church's destiny is not Christ's Kingdom. Well, that should come as no surprise! His definition of the Church is not in the New Testament either! The Church is the redeemed remnant of Israel, and the redeemed remnants of all the other nations as well, combined in one body by the common bond of the cross of Christ. Without the cross, Israel has no inheritance in the Kingdom, and neither do the Gentiles. **This is why Jesus told the Pharisee, Nicodemus, that his inheritance in the Kingdom was conditional on his being "born again."**

John 3:3-7

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a

second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

(NKJ)

Jesus did not tell this educated Jew that he should abandon his hope in the coming eschatological Kingdom promised to Israel in the prophetic Scriptures. He explained to him the ONLY WAY that he, as a Jew, could realize his inheritance in the coming Kingdom. It was not merely by being born a Jew (as Couch's view implies). It was by being "born again" of the Spirit, by becoming a Messianic believer! This is the ONLY way any Jew can have an inheritance in Christ's coming Kingdom, and the ONLY WAY that the Jews to whom those prophecies were made will be resurrected to inherit the land God promised to Abraham (See Heb. 9:15 & Heb. 11:39-40).

Most of the specific promises to Israel in the Old Testament, about the coming Kingdom, are limited in scope to that one nation rather than a broad panoramic view of Christ's world-wide Kingdom (although Daniel does seem to offer a broader view). Therefore, passages written exclusively to Israel about her inheritance cannot be used to discount the redeemed from the nations also fully participating in, and finding their inheritance in, Christ's Kingdom. This is particularly true with an argument from silence.

In the New Testament, Couch's main argument is totally irrelevant to the question before us. (Another red herring). He seeks to disprove the amillennial view of the Kingdom, that the present age is the kingdom prophesied by the Prophets. Perhaps he has forgotten the fact that as a progressive dispensationalist I also agree that the Kingdom concerns the "age to come" and NOT this present dispensation. Or perhaps he seeks to deflect the force of my argument pointing out the complete vacuum of Scriptural support for his "heavenly destiny" concept.

COUCH'S HERMENEUTICS 101

Let me remind the reader that in the last segment of this debate, I challenged Couch's alleged evidence for his "heavenly destiny" of the Church point by point. All he initially provided were a few vague verses, not a single one indicating a future "heavenly destiny" for the Church when interpreted using the normal grammatical / historical method of interpretation (that Couch claims to champion)! In his reply to my challenge, Couch merely heaped explicit and implicit ad hominem attacks on my character and interpretive skills. Instead of demonstrating his "sound hermeneutics," Couch gave us an appeal to emotionalism, by the very moving reference to his grandparents deathbed expectation of a "heavenly hope." Likewise, you the readers were scared senseless by the threat that, horror of horrors, Warner is trying to take away your "heavenly hope," as if an inheritance with Christ in His Kingdom, and ruling with Him, was just one step up from purgatory! Yet, he failed to give you an exegesis of a single passage of Scripture that indicates a "heavenly destiny" using that "sound, normal hermeneutics" he likes to talk about, but fails to practice. I for one am tired of hearing claims ABOUT sound

hermeneutics. I would like him to DEMONSTRATE from the CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT why my interpretations are wrong. And I would like him to demonstrate his own interpretive skills with actual passages of Scripture which prove his "heavenly destiny" theory. But, rather than exchange charges of bad hermeneutics, let's look at a some examples where Couch himself has badly missed the high exegetical standards which Premillennialists seek to attain.

EXAMPLE #1

In his attempt to validate his (semi-gnostic/amillennial) "heavenly destiny" ideas, Couch appealed to passages that use the word "glory" in relation to the Christian's hope. He then claimed the word "glory" in Scripture is actually a place, implying that the passages that link our future with "glory" are referring to heaven, based solely on his definition of the word "glory!" He writes, "*While it is true that the word "glory" is sometimes used as a "state" of being, or a specific description of God or Christ, **it is also used as a place**, contrary to what Warner says.*" This statement by Couch is simply not true. And his listing some verses that contain the word "glory" in reference to the hope of Christians badly skews these passages because of his false definition of "glory."

Couch provides absolutely no evidence that the word "glory" is used **as a place** anywhere in Scripture. He offered no verses where the context indicates this. Perhaps he has confused the Baptist Hymnal with authoritative Scripture. (Incorrect theology in Hymns does have this effect, and perhaps has had that effect on Couch). I would ask Couch to produce the Scriptures where "glory" is "also used as a place." None of the Greek Lexicons I checked suggest that "glory" (Gk - doxa) is a place. Thayer's Greek Lexicon gives the following definition(s) gleaned from an exhaustive analysis of all the passages that use the word.

"1391 doxa-

1) an opinion, a judgment, a view

2) an opinion, an estimate, whether good or bad concerning someone in the New Testament always a good opinion concerning one, resulting in praise, honor, and glory

3) splendor, brightness

a) used of the moon, sun, stars

b) magnificence, excellence, preeminence, dignity, grace

c) majesty

1) a thing belonging to God; the kingly majesty which belongs to Him as supreme ruler, majesty in the sense of the absolute perfection of the deity

2) a thing belonging to Christ

a) the kingly majesty of the Messiah

b) the absolutely perfect inward or personal excellency of Christ; the majesty

3) used of the angels; as apparent in their exterior brightness

4) a most glorious condition, most exalted state

a) used of that condition with God the Father in heaven to which Christ was raised after He had achieved his work on earth

b) the glorious condition of blessedness into which is appointed and promised that true Christians shall enter after their Savior's return from heaven"

Nowhere in that list do I see "glory" as a synonym for "heaven," or any indication that "glory" is the name of a place. Thayer sees "glory" as an abstract noun, a "condition" rather than a physical place. Yet, in opposition to this, all we have is Couch's dogmatic statement and the Baptist Hymnal!

Lest anyone reading this paper think that I have not proven my case by merely appealing to Greek lexicons, please remember that one cannot conclusively prove a negative. However, the burden of proof is clearly on Couch to back up his statement with properly exegeted passages of Scripture that use "glory" as a place! Until he successfully does this without assuming what he is trying to prove, you the reader should be asking, "where's the beef?" His interpretation here is a novelty of his own presuppositions which he is forcing on the text of Scripture.

Secondly, Couch's appeal to the word "glory" being associated with God who is in heaven is no proof of his claim either. Couch writes, *"in many passages where the "glory of God" is mentioned, it really is referring to Him in heaven."* True enough. But it does not logically follow that heaven is called "glory." The glory of God is ever present with Him, and radiates from His person, regardless of where He is. If He is in heaven, His glory is there. But, His glory is not limited to heaven. Take Ezekiel's vision in Ezk. 1: for example. The prophet saw God's glory coming toward him (while on earth) from a northerly direction. In several Old Testament appearances of the preincarnate Christ, we have Him appearing in glory to people on earth. Ezekiel describes the "glory of the Lord" returning to the Temple in the Millennium (Ezk. 43:4-7). So, clearly, the "glory" that Couch is referring to radiates from God's own person, and is not the quality of heaven, never mind heaven itself.

When Jesus comes He will appear to the world in "glory" in the sky (Matt. 24:30, Titus 2:13). We will be caught up together with Him in the clouds. Therefore, as Paul says in Col 3:4, *"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."* And in 1 Thess 4:17, *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* We can rightly infer from these passages that the saints will continue to share in Christ's glory no matter where He is.

Paul plainly connects our being "glorified" with the restoration of the earth when the curse is removed, that is at the coming of Christ's Kingdom to earth. He writes, *"and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be **glorified** together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the **GLORY** which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God"* (Rom. 8:17-19). Paul connects this removal of the curse from creation, under which the earth now groans, with the *"redemption of our body"* (vs. 23). Paul writes that *"the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the **glorious** liberty of the children of God"* (vs. 21). Here we have the "earthly

(Kingdom) destiny" being connected with our being "*glorified together*" and the "*glory that shall be revealed in us.*" So, "glory" as our future hope has been shown to be connected with this earth when Christ's Kingdom comes, and the curse is removed. Therefore, even in the passages that Couch cites where glory is connected to our future hope, there is no reason to assume (as Couch does) that this means our destiny is "heavenly." It is plain that "glory" is that of the Lord Himself, and also ours in a glorified body, and is NOT a place. Therefore, Couch's argument proves nothing at all, except that he has failed in a very basic exercise of properly defining a word from its biblical usage, and wasted a lot of space forcing his incorrect "heavenly destiny" suppositions on Paul's writings.

Furthermore, even IF Couch could produce that very illusive passage which clearly identifies heaven as "glory," because there are so many passages that link "glory" with Christ Himself, and our future "glory" as simply sharing Christ's at His coming, one must take a giant leap of logic (as Couch does) to conclude that the passages he produced are pointing to a heavenly destiny for the Church apart from the saints in general. So, in short, Couch has provided NO valid evidence at all. Then he assumes his evidence to be correct, and makes another giant leap of logic to arrive at his intended goal. All this is based on his incorrectly defining the word "glory."

Both Couch and I have agreed that the "heavenly destiny" issue settles this entire debate (see his closing comment in the first rebuttal in topic I). Couch has come up with absolutely NOTHING of any substance to substantiate his "heavenly destiny" for the Church, and that our future destiny is radically distinct from other (alleged non-Church) saints. Not a single passage he has brought forward, when literally interpreted, supports his main point in this debate! Is it any wonder that amillennialists before him have relied on allegorical interpretations of Old Testament promises in support their "heavenly destiny" ideas? At least they can point to passages of Scripture, and consistently use their acknowledged methodology (allegory) to arrive at their conclusion. Yet, Couch is left in the extremely awkward position of claiming a literal methodology, but not being able to demonstrate THE major tenet of his theology using that methodology! Its "the emperor's new clothes" scenario within traditional dispensationalism! There is an utter vacuum of Scriptural support for a "heavenly destiny" for the Church! And Couch's inability to come up with a passage that, when literally interpreted, plainly teaches this demonstrates that his theology is driven by presuppositions and not sound exegesis. This is a glaring instance of the inconsistency in the traditional (non- biblical) dispensational approach, and why it MUST ultimately be radically modified by consistent literalists. I have shown by my quote from Darby, in the previous session, that he used a double standard in his approach. And now right before our eyes, Darby's disciple, Couch, has demonstrated the manner in which traditional dispensationalists derive their "heavenly destiny" ideas for the Church. While they claim the high road in biblical hermeneutics, when it comes to practice, they fail to practice what they preach. We have a lot of noise about "hermeneutics" and literal interpretation, and "CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT," but very little in the way of demonstration. And if Couch's performance so far in proving his case is any indication of the outcome, the debate is over almost before it began.

EXAMPLE #2

Romans 16:25-26 is the Achilles' heel of Couch's "Mystery program." To Couch, the "mystery" is something wholly absent from the Old Testament Scriptures (an absolute necessity to maintaining his dichotomy between programs and destinies). In contrast, my progressive dispensational view is that the word "mystery" merely implies something enigmatic, contained in the Old Testament Scriptures in cryptic language, but the meaning withheld until Christ revealed it to His disciples. Just what does Couch think the word "mystery" means? If it is something wholly unheard of, it is not a "mystery." If it is something fully revealed, it is also not a "mystery." Here is Webster's definition.

mystery

Pronunciation: 'mis-t(&-)rE

Function: noun

Inflected Form(s): plural -ter·ies

Etymology: Middle English mysterie, from Latin mysterium, from Greek mystErion, from mystEs initiate

Date: 14th century

1 a : a religious truth that one can know only by revelation and cannot fully understand b (1) : any of the 15 events (as the Nativity, the Crucifixion, or the Assumption) serving as a subject for meditation during the saying of the rosary (2) capitalized : a Christian sacrament; specifically : EUCHARIST c (1) : a secret religious rite believed (as in Eleusinian and Mithraic cults) to impart enduring bliss to the initiate (2) : a cult devoted to such rites

2 a : something not understood or beyond understanding : ENIGMA b obsolete : a private secret c : the secret or specialized practices or ritual peculiar to an occupation or a body of people d : a piece of fiction dealing usually with the solution of a mysterious crime

3 : profound, inexplicable, or secretive quality or character

If Couch's definition of "mystery" means something previously totally unheard of, how is it a "mystery?" It would simply be "unknown." After its being revealed, it would be fully "known." Again, "mystery" is not a good word to describe Couch's concept he is imposing on Paul. What Couch proclaims was never a "mystery" simply by the definition of the word! When Paul writes of a "mystery" that was kept secret since the beginning, he is referring to its meaning being hidden and kept secret. That is the meaning of the word "mystery" as in 1a & 2a in Webster's definition above.

Paul also used the word "revealed" in relation to the present status of the "mystery." What does "revealed" mean? The most common definition is "uncovered" or "unveiled." This too implies it was formerly "hidden" in the sense of not being understood, rather than wholly unheard of.

I have proven my definition of "mystery" by citing passages that use the word in this manner. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, to define a word by its context, is a basic exercise of sound hermeneutics. Here is one such passages where the context plainly defines the word "mystery" for us.

Mark 4:10-12

10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.

*11 And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know **the mystery** of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables,*

*12 "so that '**Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand**; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.'* "
(NKJ)

Whether the "mystery" mentioned here by Jesus is the same "mystery" mentioned by Paul is irrelevant to my point. What is important here is how the word was used by Jesus. A "mystery" according to Jesus was an enigma, a kind of riddle, known but not understood without revelation from God. In the above case, Jesus' parables were heard by the people, but the meaning was withheld from them. They HEARD the parables, but they did not really HEAR them. They SAW, but could not really SEE. This is what Jesus calls a "mystery."

Carrying this concept into Paul's use of the word "mystery," we see that there is no reason to conclude (as Couch does merely from his wrong concept of the word "mystery") that the "mystery" is wholly missing from the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies to Israel.

Couch thinks that Paul alone was the conduit for the "mystery." But once again finds himself in league with Gnosticism. Because of their "dichotomy" approach to the Old and New Testaments, the followers of the Gnostic heretic, Marcion, claimed that Paul alone received the revelation of the "mystery," not foreseen in the Old Testament, or directly revealed to the other Apostles. Irenaeus, who soundly refuted the second century Gnostic heretics with the literal interpretation of Scripture, wrote, "*With regard to those (the Marcionites) who allege that Paul alone knew the truth, and that to him the mystery was manifested by revelation, let Paul himself convict them, when he says, that one and the same God wrought in Peter for the apostolate of the circumcision, and in himself for the Gentiles.*" (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book III, ch. XIII, 1)

But, lets let the Scriptures convict Couch rather than merely Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John.

Rom 16:25-26

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began

*26 but now has been made manifest, and **by the prophetic Scriptures** has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith--*

(NKJ)

Paul plainly stated that the "mystery" was currently being revealed "*by the prophetic Scriptures.*" While grammatically the term "*prophetic Scriptures*" COULD refer to the

Epistles of the Paul (as Couch claims), the term itself certainly does not demand it or even imply it. There is nothing in the context to suggest Couch's claim. It is based solely on his presuppositions.

Couch quotes Godet who claims the absence of the definite article in the phrase "*prophetic Scriptures*" indicates new revelation.

*"Paul himself feels that the letter he has just written (Romans) has this character, and that it ranks among the means which God is using to carry out the publication of this new revelation. It is therefore of this very letter, as well as of the other letters which had proceeded from his pen, or from that of his colleagues, that he is speaking in our Romans passage. And from this point of view **the absence of the article [before prophetic] is easily explained.** Paul really means: by prophetic writings." **It is as it were a new series of inspired writings coming to complete the collection of the ancient and well-known books, even as the new revelation is the completion of the old.**"*

But, Godet is too hasty to eliminate the Old Testament reference. An examination of the use of the word "Scriptures" both with and without the definite article does not uphold Godet's point, but rather refutes it. There are other cases in the New Testament where "Scriptures" appears without the article. In ALL of these cases the Old Testament Scriptures are definitely in view in the contexts. The grammatical difference in the passages where no article is used may be due to the use of an adjective to modify "Scriptures."

For example, Rom. 1:2 has "*holy Scriptures*" without the article; 2 Tim. 3:16 has "*all Scripture*" without the article; and 1 Pet. 1:20 has "*prophetic Scriptures*" again without the article. In all three cases the contexts plainly indicate the writer had the OT Scriptures in view. This is no different that what we have in Rom. 16:26 with "*prophetic Scriptures.*" If the absence of the article does not indicate "*a new series of inspired writings*" in these other passages, why should it in Rom. 16:26? In all three cases mentioned, there is no article, and "Scriptures" is preceded by an adjective (exactly as in Rom. 16:26). So, Godet is simply wrong to conclude that the absence of the article indicates "*a new series of inspired writings.*" And Couch's quoting him as an authority to prove his point falls flat.

Furthermore, Couch's claim is contrary to all the evidence of NT usage of the word "Scriptures." The Greek word is used some 48 times in the New Testament, and in every other case it refers to the Old Testament Scriptures. In no case can it be shown to clearly refer to New Testament documents. So, once again, Couch fails the simple exercise of properly defining a word based on its normal usage in the New Testament, and particularly by the same writer, Paul.

Couch has also failed to consider the CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT of Paul's Roman Epistle, and is instead forcing his dispensational presuppositions on Paul. Paul opened this Epistle with the following words.

Rom 1:1-6

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, **separated to the gospel of God**

2 which He **promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,**

3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,

4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship **for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,**

6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

(NKJ)

Note that Paul's very FIRST point in his Roman epistle is identical to his very last point in the very same epistle. Paul's "signature" and very last statement in all his other epistles is "grace to you." Yet, in Romans, after signing off with his usual "grace to you" signature, Paul adds a post-script in order to remind his readers of the very first point he made in this Epistle, obviously a point he wanted to stress.

Rom 16:24-27

24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according **to my gospel** and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began

26 but now has been made manifest, and **by the prophetic Scriptures** has been **made known to all nations**, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith--**

27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

(NKJ)

Lets compare these first and last passages of the Roman Epistle point by point. Both refer to the Gospel and Paul's commission to the Gentiles.

1. In ch. 1 he refers to himself as being "*separated unto the Gospel of God,*" and in ch. 16 he says "*my Gospel,*" both statements connecting Paul himself to the Gospel.

2. In ch. 1 he says this Gospel was "*promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,*" and in ch. 16 he says the same Gospel has been manifest "*by the prophetic Scriptures.*"

3. In ch. 1 he indicates the dissemination of this Gospel among the Gentiles "*for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,*" and in ch. 16 he says, "*made known to all nations ... for obedience to the faith.*"

Also notice that Paul plainly equated the "mystery" with the Gospel in 16:25. Couch has already admitted that the Gospel was contained in enigmatic form in the Old Testament. Therefore, the "mystery" was contained in the Old Testament!

There is another reason to think that this passage eliminates Paul as being the first to comprehend the mystery. Notice:

Rom 16:25

*25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to **my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ**, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began*
(NKJ)

The first thing we should observe from the grammar is the use of the definite article with "kai," the Greek word usually rendered "and." Typically, when "kai" separates two nouns, and both nouns also have the definite article, they are referring to two different things. In this case, we have Paul's GOSPEL and the PREACHING of Jesus Christ. Since both "Gospel" and "preaching" have the definite article, Paul was listing these as separate things. If Paul meant "the preaching ABOUT Jesus Christ," he would not have used the definite article before "preaching," because the Gospel Paul preached WAS the preaching ABOUT Jesus Christ. Paul meant to distinguish his own preaching from "*the preaching of Jesus Christ*" by his use of the definite article. Otherwise, he would have said, "my Gospel and preaching of Jesus Christ."

The second thing we should observe is the construction of the phrase, "*the preaching of Jesus Christ*." In Greek, it is "*to khrugma Ihsou Xristou*." "The preaching" (to khrugma) is in the accusative case, meaning "preaching" is the object of the verb, and not "Jesus Christ." Instead, "Jesus Christ" is in the genitive case, meaning "of" or belonging to (used as a possessive). In other words, it could properly be translated "**Jesus Christ's preaching**." That this is the correct rendering can be shown from the following verse which uses exactly the same construction in the Greek.

Matt 12:41

*41 "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at **the preaching of Jonah**; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.*
(NKJ)

Here, we also have the definite article, "preaching" is in the accusative case, and "Jonah" in the genitive case. Once again, we could properly translate this "*Jonah's preaching*." The context clearly bears out this rendering as correct (rather than "the preaching ABOUT Jonah").

Consequently, we could translate Rom. 16:25 as follows; "*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, and Jesus Christ's preaching about the revelation of the mystery, kept secret since the world began.*"

I have rendered the Greek word "kata" as "about," the most common rendering of this word, and one that fits the context well.

Of course, if Paul was speaking of Jesus' own preaching about the mystery, where is that recorded in Scripture? The answer is in Luke 24. The day of Jesus' resurrection, He fully revealed the "mystery" to His disciples. First, He revealed the mystery to two of them on the road to Emmaus. Later that afternoon He revealed the mystery to the rest of them as they met together.

Luke 24:25-27,32,44-47

25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

*27 And **beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. ...***

32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" ...

*44 Then He said to them, "**These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.**"*

*45 **And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.***

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

*47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be **preached in His name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem.*

48 "And you are witnesses of these things.

(NKJ)

What we have here, dear friends, is the "revelation of the mystery" directly by the preaching of Jesus Christ to His disciples out of the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures. You can see the "revelation" of the mystery in the statement, *"then opened He their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures."* This was a supernatural act of Jesus Himself, coupled with His own expounding every Old Testament passage that spoke of Him. Prior to this, the disciples did not clearly understand any of these Old Testament passages, and neither did the Jewish leadership. And it was further hidden from the Jews by the parables of Jesus. Yet, just seven weeks later, Peter preached his first sermon, and did a masterful job of expounding the Psalms in such a way that they revealed Jesus death and resurrection! Peter had a good grasp of the "mystery," because his understanding had been opened, and he paid attention to *"the preaching of Jesus Christ"* as He began at Moses and the prophets, and expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Notice also in the quote above from Luke 24, that the ultimate goal of Jesus' revealing the mystery to His disciples was so that *"repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations"* (Luke 24:47). Notice the similar language of Paul, *"made known to all nations ... for the obedience of faith."* Can there be any doubt that Paul was referencing Luke 24? And Paul's statement that the revealing of the mystery was *"by the prophetic Scriptures"* is exactly what Luke records that Jesus first did! He

expounded ALL of the "prophetic Scriptures" contained in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, everything concerning Himself. This explains why Paul used the words "prophetic Scriptures" instead of "Scriptures of the prophets." The latter phrase implies a limited scope only to the section of the Old Testament the Jews called "The Prophets" (Isaiah-Malachi). But, Luke says Jesus revealed the prophetic things concerning Himself from the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. While the Law of Moses is not normally indicated by "the Prophets," it is most certainly included here because Jesus was expounding all of the "prophetic Scriptures" from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms! That even the Psalms are prophetic about Christ is easily demonstrated from Peter's preaching seven weeks later in Acts 2&3.

Luke was Paul's traveling companion, and his written Gospel was used as an aid in Paul's missionary activity. So, it is no surprise that Paul cites Luke here, or at least both cite the same oral tradition.

So that you don't consider my interpretation of Rom. 16:25-26 to be my own "private interpretation," I offer the commentary of John Chrysostom (AD 347- 370), preacher of Antioch and Constantinople, **whose native tongue was Greek**, and who was in a much better position to interpret the ancient Greek than modern scholars.

*"And after saying, "to stablish," he proceeds to give the mode of it, "according to my Gospel;" and this was what one would do to show that as yet they were not firmly fixed, but stood, though with wavering. Then to give a trustworthiness to what he says, he proceeds, **"and the preaching of Jesus Christ;" that is, which He Himself preached.** But if He preached it, the doctrines are not ours, but the laws are of Him. And afterwards, in discussing the nature of the preaching, He shows that this gift is one of much benefit, and of much honor; and this he first proves from the person of the declarer thereof, and then likewise from the things declared. For it was glad tidings. Besides, from His not having made aught of them known to any before us. And this he intimates in the words, "according to the revelation of the mystery." And this is a sign of the greatest friendliness, to make us share in the mysteries, and no one before us. "Which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest." For it had been determined long ago, but was only manifested now. **How was it made manifest? "By the Scriptures of the Prophets."** Here again he is releasing the weak person from fear. For what dost thou fear? is it lest thou depart from the Law? **This the Law wishes, this it foretold from of old.**" (John Chrysostom, Homily XXVII)*

The mystery was contained in the Old Testament Scriptures as an enigma. It was hidden using certain grammatical devices which are clearly uncovered for us in Peter's sermon in Acts 2. The "mystery" was made know by revelation (opening their understanding) and by the preaching of Jesus to His disciples. And Jesus sent them to the Gentile nations with this message. When Paul referred to "*my Gospel*" and "*Jesus Christ's preaching*" he was speaking of the TWO channels the revelation of the mystery had taken. The first channel was orally from Jesus to the other eleven Apostles, who then also preached to the Gentile nations. The second channel was through Paul by special revelation (Eph. 3:3- 4). Therefore, Couch's entire argument regarding the "mystery"

stands soundly refuted, from the grammar, from the context, from agreement with the rest of Scripture. And this view is also shown to be ancient, and a proper understanding of the Greek from the opinion of the ancient Greek preacher, John Chrysostom. And if the "mystery" was first proclaimed by Jesus from *"the prophetic Scriptures,"* traditional dispensationalism's secret "Church age" and "mystery program" are shown to be human inventions imposed on the text of Scripture.

EXAMPLE #3

Couch claimed regarding Eph. 2:12-13, *"Paul proceeds to tell how things have changed for those in Christ. **He does not say Gentiles are "brought near" the Commonwealth of Israel and to the covenants of promise** (though I do indeed believe Jew and Gentile are now sharing the blessings of the New Covenant that was ratified by Christ, and launched at Pentecost!)"* (Bold mine)

But this is precisely what Paul said, that the Gentile believers are "brought near" to the commonwealth of Israel and (Jewish) covenants (plural) of promise. I replied to Couch as follows.

"Dr. Couch denies that Paul meant Gentiles were "made near" to the "commonwealth of Israel" and the "covenants of promise." But I believe his exegesis of this passage is faulty. The clause "made near" implies an antecedent, and begs the question, "made near to what?" The proper antecedent could be "God" in verse 12, because Paul says Gentiles were formerly "without God." But, Paul has just listed four things that were formerly true of the Gentiles in this verse. And all four indicate separation (the antithesis of "made near") from something.

Gentiles were formerly:

- 1. without Christ*
- 2. aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*
- 3. strangers from the covenants of promise*
- 4. without God in the world:*

In contrast to this, Paul says that by being "in Christ Jesus" (the cause), Gentiles who were formerly "far off" are "made near" by the blood of Christ (the result). It would be utterly redundant for Paul to be saying that now by being "in Christ" we are made near to "Christ." What Paul was saying is that by now having #1 above cancelled (becoming "in Christ" after formerly being "without Christ") we are "made near" to the other three things listed in this verse 12. By canceling #1, we cancel all 4. Therefore, by our now being "in Christ" we are "made near" to the "commonwealth of Israel," the "covenants of promise," and to God Himself."

In his closing statement, Couch has still not countered my exegesis of these verses, proving that the salvation of Gentiles in this present age brings us "near" to the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants given to Israel. Not that we become Jews, but that we share in the blessings of God's covenants established with Israel. That both Jew and Gentile comprise a "new man" (the Church) does not indicate a severing of the Jewish branch of the New Testament Church from her roots (as Couch's view requires). Rather, the Jewish believers are able to partake of these blessings ONLY by faith in

Christ, and the Gentiles partake of the blessings of these covenants as well by faith in Christ. This of course implies that the blessings of these covenants promised in the Old Testament Scriptures were not universal for all physical Jews, just because of their heritage. But that they must be entered into by faith.

The Inheritance of the Old Testament Saints

One of the weaknesses of Couch's position is his inability to deal with the Old Testament saints. He attempts to interpret the Old Testament Millennial hope in such a way that these promises only apply to physical Jews who survive the tribulation, entering the Millennium in natural bodies. Yet, one must ask, what of all the saints of old who laid hold by faith on these very promises Couch cites? Just a casual reading of Hebrews 11 shows plainly that all the saints of the former dispensation took these very promises into their bosom, and looked forward to that Kingdom when Messiah would rule on the earth, and fully expected to realize their inheritance in that Kingdom. Hebrews 11 ends by saying, *"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that **only together with us would they be made perfect.**"* (NIV)

That the Old Testament saints' inheritance is linked to the Old Testament promises that Couch cites is abundantly clear from the book of Daniel, where the nature of Christ's coming Kingdom is most clearly delineated. In chapter 12, Daniel's hope was in the resurrection, and being able to partake of his inheritance in the coming Kingdom.

Dan 12:2-3

2 "And many [not all] of those [Daniel's people - the Jews] who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others [unbelieving Jews] to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

3 "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (NAS)

Dan 12:12-13

12 "How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days!

*13 "But as for you [Daniel], go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest **and rise again for your allotted portion** [of the land inheritance] at the end of the age." [cf. the Hebrew word for "lot" (allotted) in other OT passages]. (NAS)*

The Kingdom Inheritance in the Gospels

The hope of the patriarchs was the Kingdom as well, along with the Gentile believers.

Matt 8:11-12

*11 "And I say to you that **many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.***

*12 "But **the sons of the kingdom** will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be*

weeping and gnashing of teeth."
(NKJ)

Those who come from the east and west, who sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the Jewish patriarchs), are Gentile believers. This statement was made by Jesus as He marveled at the faith of the Roman centurion.

Jesus was speaking here to a Jewish audience, whose hope was also the very same Kingdom promised in all the Scriptures Couch cited. Notice, He did not indicate a change in destiny for those who believed on Him. Rather, he contrasted the great faith of this Gentile with the lack of faith of the Jews around Him. And He put the Gentiles (like this Roman Centurion) who will believe in the Kingdom, sharing an inheritance with the Jewish Patriarchs, while many of the Jews to whom it was promised will be excluded from their own Kingdom because of their unbelief. The destiny remains the same for the Patriarchs and the Gentile believers.

Jesus taught His disciples for three years, preparing them to be missionaries to the Gentile nations. Did He teach them about some "heavenly destiny?" No. He taught them about His coming Kingdom. In fact, He promised them THE most prominent places in His Kingdom. Couch keeps saying that the Jews are the "central" people in the Kingdom. Actually, I agree to a point. But it is the Jews who enter the Church through the new covenant who are the central people. Observe who will be ruling the twelve tribes in the Kingdom along with Christ! It is Jesus' (Jewish - Christian) Apostles, sitting on twelve thrones ruling the twelve tribes.

Luke 22:15-20,28-30

15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

*16 For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, **until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.***

17 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves:

*18 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, **until the kingdom of God shall come.***

19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

28 Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.

29 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;

30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

(KJV)

We must ask Couch, are these men "Israel" or the "Church?" What is their "destiny" - heaven or the Kingdom? They cannot be both "Israel" and the "Church" in Couch's

dispensationalism, or else his whole "dichotomy" collapses! If they are "Israel," why did Jesus send them out to preach "*all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" to the Gentile nations until the "*end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20)?

Were they really "Israel saints" on a secret mission to lay the foundations of the Church without themselves being a part of the "Church?" If so, why did Peter, James, and John write of our collective future destiny in their books addressed to the Church (1 Pet. 1:3, 1 John 2:28, James 5:7-8)?

Perhaps they were really "Church saints" in Couch's view! If so, why does Jesus promise them THE most prominent places in His Millennial Kingdom? You see, my friends, **Couch's dispensational "dichotomy" decapitates the Apostles of Jesus Christ!** Couch claims that the future destiny of the Church is completely severed from Israel's destiny, yet the Apostles themselves prove Couch to be espousing a false dichotomy. The Apostles are Jews who came into the Church via the new covenant with Israel, so their destiny is also the Church's overall collective destiny. In fact, the establishing of the new covenant with the Jewish remnant of faith is what actually began the Church. They will fully realize all of the yet unfulfilled promises to Israel as both Jews and Christians! The blessings to Israel are realized by their acceptance of the new covenant that Jeremiah prophesied for Israel! And Gentile believers of this age are "made nigh" to Israel and her promises within the Church, while not being necessarily identical with Israel (regarding the specific land promises to each of the individual twelve tribes). The disciples were all from the tribes of Israel. So, it is not difficult to imagine them as rulers of the twelve tribes in the Kingdom.

What we have at the present time is a remnant of the nation of Israel being brought into the Church, while retaining all of her Millennial promises in which the saints of old placed their hopes. It is only by being within the Church that Israel can receive the blessings of the specific things God has promised that nation! Remnants from each of the Gentile nations are also being brought into the Church, sharing all the spiritual blessings of the new covenant, and fulfilling the portion of the Abrahamic covenant that concerns the Gentiles being blessed by the seed of Abraham (Jesus). Paul himself makes this connection plain in Galatians 3 (see also Acts 3:25-26). **The "destiny" of Israel was and is to enter the Church! And the destiny of the Church is the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Therefore, Israel's partaking of her Old Testament future promises is conditional on individual Jews receiving the new covenant.**

The "Kingdom of God" is a technical term in Scripture that was derived from the Old Testament prophecies. It has the same meaning throughout the New Testament. Couch has agreed that the "Kingdom of God" is the coming Kingdom of Messiah. Matthew's Gospel also frequently used the term "kingdom of heaven" which dispensationalists like Couch acknowledge is the Millennial Kingdom. Why then is it called the "Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew and the "Kingdom of God" in the other Gospels? Simply because the terms were synonymous when the New Testament was written. (This can be proven by a comparison of the synoptic Gospels where the parallel passages in Mark and Luke use "Kingdom of God.") Both terms are rooted in Daniel's prophecy.

Dan 2:44

44 "And in the days of these kings **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom** which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, **and it shall stand forever.**
(NKJ)

The full title is really "**the Kingdom of the God of heaven**" (an everlasting Kingdom) which is to be set up when the Gentile kingdoms are brought to an end by the coming of Christ. It is easy to see why some Jews (like Matthew) would refer to it as "the Kingdom of Heaven" and others as "the Kingdom of God" and still others as the "everlasting Kingdom." At any rate, the reference to "heaven" is clearly NOT meant to indicate that the Kingdom will be IN heaven, but that the coming Kingdom will be FROM heaven.

The Kingdom of God in Acts

- Philip preached Jesus and the Kingdom of God to the Samaritans (Acts 8:12).
- Paul exhorted the Gentile Churches that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).
- Paul preached the Kingdom of God to the Jews in the synagogues (Acts 19:8).
- In his final address to the Ephesian Elders, Paul said he had "preached the Kingdom of God" to them all.
- In his defense before Agrippa, Paul indicated that he was preaching "the hope of Israel" and that he had taught nothing other than what Moses and the prophets said would come (Acts 26:6-7,22).
- While in Rome, Paul met regularly with the Jews of the synagogue, and "he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23). And he told his Jewish brethren that because of the "hope of Israel" he was in prison (vs. 20).

Couch would have you believe, in each of these cases in Acts, the topic was NOT how the hearers themselves might enter the Kingdom of God by faith in Christ (as Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3), but rather Paul's teaching them about this alleged "dichotomy" and that the "Kingdom of God" was postponed, and to forget about it anyway because their destiny would be a "heavenly" one instead! No doubt, in Couch's view, Paul was showing them how crummy the "earthly destiny" promised by God through the prophets is when compared to the "heavenly destiny" of Couch and Greek mythology. I'll bet that message went over really well with these Jews! **"WHAT! You want us to reject the hope of our Fathers in favor of this Greek myth about a "heavenly destiny!"** No doubt that would have been their reaction to Couch's dispensational view and/or the amillennial view.

Maybe, on the other hand, Paul showed them from the Scriptures that the new covenant promised through the prophets had come in the person of Christ. Maybe he told them that unless they were "born again," they would not see the "Kingdom of God" promised through the Jewish prophets of old. Maybe he pointed out the prophecy of Moses, that

those Jews who did not listen to "that prophet" would be cut off from Israel, and not inherit the promises.

Also, Couch's explanation does not really deal with Paul's statement regarding Christians entering the Kingdom through much tribulation. I am not suggesting that "tribulation" in this context is necessarily the "great tribulation." But, I am pointing out that Paul indicates the progression from this present life of "tribulation" directly into the Kingdom. This statement by Luke regarding Paul's teaching is a two pronged refutation of Couch, because it denies him the intermediary time in heaven for the "Church" and at the same time points to the Kingdom of God as the expected hope of the Gentile churches!

The Kingdom of God in the Epistles

Couch is in no better position in the Epistles. His attempts to overthrow the plainly stated hope of Christians in the Scriptures he cites, and substitute a false hope derived from pagan roots, looks rather like someone trying to navigate a minefield! Yet, his arguments fail to address the real issues regarding the Kingdom being the hope of the Church. Rather, Couch seeks to establish that the Church is NOT NOW the Kingdom. OK, we agree on that. But, none of his arguments go to the real point of contention between us. That contention is, **what is the real hope and destiny of the Church, "heaven" or the "Kingdom" of Christ on the earth?**

In 1 Cor. 6 and Gal. 5, Paul lists the type of people who will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God. Why do you suppose Paul did not list Christians, since we have a "heavenly destiny?" Paul's point is clearly to contrast those who WILL inherit the Kingdom of God, and those who WILL NOT inherit it. The contrast is NOT between Israel and the Church. It is between the saved and the lost! The implication is abundantly clear that the saved of the Church WILL *"inherit the Kingdom of God."* This is far more than just being a side show in the Millennial Kingdom. It is realizing OUR INHERITANCE within the Kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth!

Likewise, in 1 Cor. 15, when Paul argued for a literal bodily resurrection of Christians at Jesus' coming, he said that *"flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God"* as the main reason our corruptible bodies must put on incorruption. Implicit in this statement is also that our INHERITANCE is to be realized in the Kingdom, not heaven. (This passage also implicitly denies Couch his intermediary time for the Church in heaven in his pre-trib scheme, because Paul plainly linked the resurrection to the Kingdom).

Couch admits that *"the Church is in view"* here, and writes, *"in this context the 'flesh and blood' that will not inherit the kingdom has to do with those in this church age have not been redeemed."* Yet, what about that word "inherit" in this context, used of the Church and the Kingdom of God? Does Couch want to separate the Church's "destiny" from the Church's "inheritance?"

In 2 Thess. 1:4, the Thessalonians were "suffering" for the Kingdom of God.

In James 2:5, the "Kingdom" refers to what has been promised to those who love Him. Certainly this is the same "Kingdom of God" we find everywhere else! And Peter says we will have an "abundant entrance" into the Kingdom (1 Pet. 1:11). Both passages refer not to a present reality, but to the eschatological "Kingdom of God."

Couch writes, "Almost everyone admits, by the way, that the references to "the heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18), and the "eternal kingdom" (2 Pet. 1:11) has to do with heaven itself, and are not statements of "replacement" for the MESSIANIC KINGDOM. Again, it cannot be stressed enough when interpreting a passage that CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT, is the order of the day." Yet, look again at Couch's argument. It is not based at all on CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT, but on his appeal to "almost everyone" who happen to agree with him. And who is "almost everyone" that Couch refers to? Why, traditional dispensationalists and a-millennialists, both of whom share these "heavenly destiny" ideas for the Church!

I challenge Couch to show FROM THE CONTEXT how a heavenly destiny is implied by either statement! If we are to appeal to CONTEXT, shouldn't we start by looking at the biblical usage of such terms and concepts, rather than appealing to "almost everyone?"

Regarding "heavenly kingdom," in 2 Tim. 4:18, I challenge Couch to explain how this is different than all the statements in Matthew regarding the "kingdom of heaven" that he agrees is the Millennial Kingdom! It seems to me that Couch and the "almost everyone" that he cites are reading their presuppositions into the text.

Regarding the Kingdom being "eternal" in 2 Pet. 1:11, let me remind Couch that this is precisely what was prophesied for Christ's political earthly Kingdom, sitting on the throne of David.

Isa 9:7

*7 Of the increase of **His government and peace there will be no end**, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice **from that time forward, even forever**. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

(NKJ)

Dan 7:13-14,18,27

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

*14 And **there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom**, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: **his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed**. ...*

*18 But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and **possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever**. ...*

*27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of **the kingdom under the whole heaven**, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, **whose***

kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.
(KJV)

Luke 1:32-33

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And **he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.**

(KJV)

I for one would like to hear Couch explain the above passages using the literal method. And then, to explain from the context of 2 Pet. 1:11 why the "everlasting Kingdom" is anything other than the "everlasting Kingdom" in all these passages, that plainly refer to Christ's rule on the Throne of David.

The Kingdom of God in Revelation

Couch writes in his conclusion, "In a limited and relatively undefined sense, the church will be part of the kingdom. But there are no verses of Scripture that would call for a permanent and specific rule for the church." Yet, what does the Bible say? Here are two of the promises to the seven churches. Surely Couch will admit that these people are a part of the "Church."

Rev. 2:26

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, **to him will I give power over the nations:**

27 And **he shall rule them with a rod of iron;** as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

(KJV)

Rev. 3:21

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

(KJV)

In the first passage, we most definitely have a promise of ruling the nations with Christ. In the second one, we have a reference to the Throne of David. After describing the Millennium, the saints ruling on thrones, and the New Jerusalem, Revelation says this to all seven of the churches:

Rev 21:7

7 He that overcometh **shall inherit all things;** and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

(KJV)

Look carefully through Revelation. You will not find a "heavenly destiny" promised or implied. The activity in heaven is limited to the angelic beings, and the souls of the

martyrs. But nowhere do we have a resurrected Church in heaven. The only saints specifically mentioned in heaven are the martyrs from the tribulation, who are awaiting the resurrection (5:9-11) who are seen later in (15:2), and finally as resurrected saints ruling in Christ's Kingdom (20:4-5).

It seems amazing to me that Couch dismisses all the evidence from the New Testament regarding the "Kingdom of God," claiming that there is no evidence. Yet, when it comes to his "heavenly destiny" ideas, he is unable to provide a single clear statement interpreted literally!

Conclusion

In Couch's closing statement, he tries hard to disconnect the Church from any earthly inheritance. I agree with Couch that the Church as a whole does NOT directly inherit the specific land promises within the Abrahamic covenant that pertain to the land of Israel. But what Couch seems to be overlooking is that the Abrahamic covenant had two distinct parts. One part concerned God's making from Abraham's physical seed a great nation (singular), to whom he also promised a certain tract of land forever. This promise is yet to be fully realized by Abraham's natural seed, but definitely will be in the Millennium and beyond. Resurrected Jewish saints of both Testaments, as well as Jews who survive the tribulation in their natural bodies, will realize the complete fulfillment of this promise to Abraham. The other part of the Abrahamic covenant concerns a single "seed" from Abraham's loins through whom ALL NATIONS of the earth will be blessed. And that Abraham (through this one person out of his loins) would become the father of MANY NATIONS, a kind of adoption of the Gentile nations into Abraham along with the Jewish nation promised directly from his loins. Paul explains that this "seed" (singular) is Christ. So, what we have here is a two pronged promise to Abraham. One part concerning only the physical seed (who are also of the faith of Abraham), and the other part concerning the rest of the peoples of the earth (who also have the "faith of Abraham"). That is why Paul can say, if you are Christ's, you are "Abraham's seed" and heirs according to the promises. (But "Abraham's seed" is not identical to "Israel." Israel is only one portion of "Abraham's seed" (natural sons) while the remnants of the nations who believe are Abraham's seed by adoption.

However, it is wrong to conclude from this that one is earthly and the other is heavenly. The Scripture makes no such distinction! Rather, one is a SPECIFIC inheritance regarding WHICH parcel of land, and the other is non specific inheritance regarding WHICH parcels of land. But, BOTH are included in Christ's Kingdom yet to come.

That the promises to Abraham concern the earth and NOT heaven, even for the Gentiles blessed through Abraham's seed (Christ), we have the following statement in Romans.

Rom 4:13,16-17,

*13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be **heir of the world**, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ...*

*16 Therefore, **the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us***

all.

17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-- the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

(NIV)

In this passage, Paul has plainly linked our future inheritance with the Jews' future inheritance in the Kingdom of God. And it should come as no surprise that the Old Testament agrees, the inheritance of the righteous is NOT merely a small tract of land given to the 12 tribes of Israel, it is the WHOLE WORLD under the rule of Jesus Christ, sitting on the Throne of David, with Israel being the head of the nations.

Psalms 37:9-11,17-20,22,28-29,34

9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

10 For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. ...

17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.

18 The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.

19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

20 But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. ...

22 For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. ...

28 For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.

29 The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. ...

34 Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. ...

38 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off.

39 But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble.

40 And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.

(KJV)

Dan 7:27

*27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of **the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High**, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*

(KJV)

The best that Couch can muster in support of his "heavenly destiny" in his closing statement is as follows. "Paul adds, 'We through the Spirit (and His work of applying the New covenant to saving us) by faith, ARE WAITING FOR THE HOPE OF [FINAL] RIGHTEOUSNESS (OUR FINAL HEAVENLY REDEMPTION) (5:5)." Notice dear reader, that Couch's conclusion is not stated in the verse itself, but in Couch's added parenthetical statements. This is a good object lesson for you. Couch's dispensationalism, with its dichotomy between two radically separate "peoples of God," each with radically different destinies, is not based on any clear teaching of Scripture, but on forcing his presuppositions into the text of Scripture, as he has clearly demonstrated above. That is why Couch suggested that you get some books on dispensationalism as you study the Scriptures. He needs to force his presuppositions on your thinking so you will view the Scriptures through the same skewed lens that he is using.

If you are a Christian, your hope, your destiny, is precisely what the prophets of old proclaimed. Seize on that hope, friend, it is your "anchor of the soul" in the troubling time to come (Heb. 6:12-19).

1 Pet 1:9-13

9 receiving the end of your faith-- the salvation of your souls.

*10 Of this salvation **the prophets** have inquired and searched carefully, **who prophesied of the grace that would come to you,***

*11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and **the glories that would follow.***

*12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but **to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you** through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things which angels desire to look into.*

*13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and **rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;***
(NKJ)

Your Brother in Christ, Tim Warner