

Eschatology: Or “The End Times”

Part 2: Dispensational Premillennialism

WHAT IS “DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM?”

- Brief definition
 1. Premillennialism => Christ will return before the millennial kingdom.
 2. Dispensationalism => God’s dealing with humanity throughout history occurs in “dispensations,” or periods of time, that are characterized by unique elements.
- Some historical background of dispensational theology
 1. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) – an Anglican priest; began the Plymouth Brethren
 - a. Darby identified seven dispensations:
 - (1) Eden to the Flood; (2) Noah; (3) Abraham; (4) Israel – i. Law ii. Priesthood iii. Kings; (5) Gentiles; (6) The Spirit; (7) The Millennium
 - b. Two foundations of Darby’s dispensational premillennialism
 - (1) Biblical prophetic literalism – every prophecy of Israel must be fulfilled literally
 - (2) Dichotomy of Israel and the Church – Israel and the church are radically different; they are mutually exclusive: “The church forms the centre of the heavenly glory—under Christ, of course, who is the centre of everything—and that the Jews are the centre of the earthly dominion, the earthly blessings” (Darby, *Lectures*, 55).
=> The Jews inherit earthly blessings; the church heavenly blessings.
 - c. Some characteristics of Darby’s dispensationalism
 - (1) The current dispensation is the church; previously it was the Jewish
 - (2) The Jewish dispensation was “cut off” because the Jews rejected and crucified their earthly king, Jesus.
 - (3) God then started plan “B” – the dispensation of the church. Eventually, this, too, will be cut off. The church dispensation is a “lapse of time,” “parenthesis in the ways of God.”
 - (4) The Jews are in a state of limbo until the Millennium begins.
 - (5) The current dispensation (the Church) will end when the state and the religious establishment reject Christ.
 - (6) The expiration of the church dispensation will not occur until after the secret rapture.
 - d. Darby’s secret rapture
 - (1) The church cannot take part in the earthly kingdom of the Jews—the church is God’s heavenly, not earthly, people.
 - (2) The Church, then, must be taken out of the way so that God can literally fulfill His promise of restoration to the Jews.
“So that what we have to see, in connection with the fulfillment of the prophecies of God, is . . . that the church is to be taken out of the scene altogether. . . . All the direct dealings with the world through the Jews are suspended until the church is taken up” (*Lectures*, 60).
 - (3) The church must also be secretly raptured to escape the judgment of the nations—the Great Tribulation.

“The thing she [i.e., the Church] had to expect for herself is not . . . Christ’s appearing, but her being taken up where He is” (“The Rapture of the Saints,” quoted in Bass, 39).

(4) Summary: “It is this conviction, that the Church is properly heavenly, in its calling and relationship with Christ, forming no part of the course of events of the earth, which makes the rapture so simple and clear: and on the other hand, it shows how the denial of its rapture brings down the church to an earthly position, and destroys its whole spiritual character and position.”

2. C. I. Scofield (1843-1921)

a. Scofield’s seven dispensations

- (1) Innocence of Man (creation to expulsion from Eden)
- (2) Conscience of Man (Eden to the Flood)
- (3) Man in Authority Over the Earth (Noah to Abraham)
- (4) Man Under Promise (Abraham to Moses)
- (5) Man Under Law (Moses to Christ)
- (6) Man Under Grace (Christ to Rapture)
- (7) Man Under Personal Reign of Christ (Millennium)

b. Dispensational Premillennialism popularized by him through his *Scofield Reference Bible*

3. Contemporary dispensational premillennialists

- a. Hal Lindsey – *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) – 28 million copies sold by 1990
- b. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins – *Left Behind* (1995-2007) – more than 95 million copies sold in the series.
- c. John Walvoord, Charles Fienberg, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, Lewis Sperry Chafer

OVERVIEW OF DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

See handout

EVALUATION OF DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

- Dispensationalism’s interpretation of passages dealing with the rapture are highly questionable.
 1. Matthew 24:36-41
 - a. The end times will be like the days of Noah.
 - b. Some are taken; some are left behind. But the ones left behind are the righteous!
 - c. See Matthew 13:24-43; 47-50
 2. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17
 - a. The idea of “precede” in v.15 is related to “resurrection.”
 - b. Believers who have already died will be resurrected first (v.16).
 - c. Believers who are still alive at the 2nd coming will be “caught up” with the believers who had already died and have now been resurrected.
 - d. “We shall always be with the Lord” (v.17).
- Are there really two second comings?
 1. The secret rapture theory is without biblical foundation (see previous point), and so

there is no “first” second coming.

2. But what about the “second” second coming?
 - a. There is reason to believe that there is only one second coming.
 - b. John 5:28-29

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”
 - c. 1 Thess. 4:16-17

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”
- Are there really three judgment days?
 1. It is best to understand the judgments described in John 5:28-29, 2 Cor. 5:10, Rom. 14:10, Matt. 25:31-46, and Rev. 20:11-15 as all referring to the same judgment day.
 - a. 2 Cor. 5:10

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”
 - b. Rom. 14:10

“But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”
 - c. Matt. 25:31-32

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”
 2. Emphasis should be placed on the word “all” in these texts.
- Will there be three separate resurrections?
 1. It is best to understand the resurrections described in 1 Thess. 4:13-17, Rev. 20:13, and John 5:28-29 (see also Matt. 25:31-46) as one event, not three separate ones.
 2. 1 Cor. 15:51-52.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”
- What about “the tribulation?”
 1. It is best to understand the events described in Dan. 7 & 11 as referring to Christ’s 1st coming.
 2. The tribulation described in Matt. 24 is best understood to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
- What about the “antichrist?”
 1. The only place where this term is used is in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7
 - a. This “antichrist” is about one who denies Christ as coming in the flesh and that he is God’s Messiah (1 Jn. 2:22; 4:2).

- b. There are *many* antichrists (1 Jn. 2:18).
- 2. To equate the “man of lawlessness” with antichrist is not entirely convincing.
 - a. It is difficult to ascertain who the “man of lawlessness” is in 2 Thess. 2 .
 - b. This “man” is described as “son of destruction,” “opposes and exalts himself” above God, sits in the temple, and performs miraculous signs. Antichrist in 1 & 2 John is not described in such terms.
- 3. To equate the “man of lawlessness” of 2 Thess. 2 with the “antichrist” of 1 & 2 John appears unjustified contextually.
- Dispensationalism’s dispensationalism is entirely arbitrary and meaningless.
 - 1. To divide biblical history into different “dispensations” is subjective.
 - 2. It is also meaningless, because the main reason for doing so is for God to continually “retest” man’s obedience to Him. But we already know that man will fail such a test, and he has from the beginning. So why have dispensations to begin with? (See Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 195-96.)
 - 3. The unity of Scripture and redemptive history (also revelation) is also destroyed (Hoekema, 196).
- The absolute distinction between physical Israel and the Church is not a biblical concept:
 - 1. See Rom. 11:17ff; Gal. 3:28-29; Eph. 2:11-19
 - 2. The *Church* is the new, or spiritual, *Israel of God*:
Gal. 6:15-16; Acts 13:32-34, 38-39; 1 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 12:18-24
- The “literal” hermeneutic of dispensationalism is, at best, faulty.
 - 1. Dispensationalists do not take every OT prophecy literally.
 - a. The only “literalness” they apply to OT prophecy is to physical Israel; every prophecy that speaks of Israel’s restoration and blessings is interpreted and applied to physical Israel.
 - b. To claim that they are the only ones who take Scripture “literally” is not true.
 - 2. All OT prophecy concerning Israel should not always be taken as speaking of physical Israel.
- The idea that the Church is a “stopgap” measure makes Christ either a failure or it makes the cross unnecessary.
 - 1. Christ didn’t see the Jews’ rejection coming.
 - 2. But if the Jews had accepted Christ, then the cross would not have been necessary.
 - 3. How do we know Christ will succeed at setting up the kingdom when he returns?
 - 4. The Church/Kingdom was prophesied in the OT: Ps. 22:7; Isa. 16:1-3; 45:22; 49:6; Mal. 1:11 (see also Eph. 3:8-11).
 - 5. OT prophecy of church fulfilled in NT:
 - Jeremiah 31:31-34 is fulfilled in Luke 22:20 and Hebrews 8:7-10.
 - Amos 9:11-15 is fulfilled in Acts 15:14-17.
 - 2 Samuel 7:11-16 is fulfilled in Acts 2:29-36.
 - Isaiah 2:2-4 is fulfilled in Luke 24:44-48.
 - Hosea 1:10-11; 2:23 is fulfilled in Rom. 9:23-26 and 1 Pet. 2:10.
- The Kingdom of God was set up at Christ’s first coming (more on this later).