

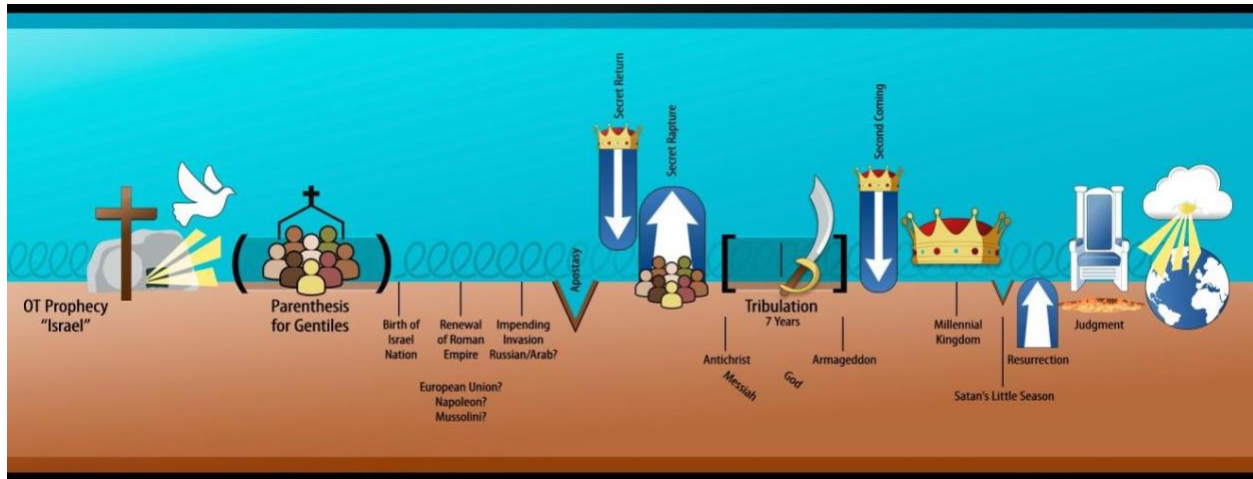
Our Blessed Hope: A Study of Biblical Eschatology

Lesson 5: Dispensational Premillennialism – Strengths and Weaknesses

I. A Definition

As a *premillennial* system, *dispensationalism* holds that Jesus will return and believers will be resurrected *before* the millennium. Jesus will reign physically on earth *during* the millennium. And unbelievers will be resurrected and judged *after* the millennium. Unlike historic premillennialism, dispensationalism teaches that resurrected and still-living believers will be raptured to heaven before the great tribulation begins, and that they'll remain there until the end of the millennium.

II. Eschatological Calendar:



III. Prominent Adherents

Mid-1800's John Darby and Brethrenism; C.I. Scofield Reference Bible; later Charles Ryrie Reference Bible; Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, Charles Swindoll, John Walvoord, David Jeremiah, Robert Jeffress, Jonathan Cahn, John MacArthur*, Darrell Bock**, Craig Blaising**
Dallas Theological Seminary, Liberty University, Masters Seminary

IV. Basic Tenets

A. "Dispensations" (or time periods)

First, while affirming that salvation has always been by _____ through _____ alone, Dispensationalism teaches that God has worked in different ways in different eras of history. Dispensationalism typically teaches that the various dispensations involved: a test for mankind, a failure, and then a judgment. This then would be followed by another dispensation.

These seven dispensations are* (1) innocence; (2) conscience; (3) human government; (4) promise; (5) law; (6) grace; and (7) kingdom.

Among these, the fourth is especially important, since it was during this troubled season of Israel's moral failure that God, through his OT prophets, ever promised that he would restore his people to

their homeland in Canaan, send them a Messianic King, and set up a global theocracy with Israel as the head and the Gentiles as the tail.

Dispensationalists interpret these Old Testament Kingdom promises *quite* _____, and therefore anticipate a future “dispensation of the Kingdom” in which God’s earthly people – ethnic Israel – will again be living in Canaan/Palestine, reigning triumphantly with their Messiah over the other nations of the world.

B. The Church and Israel

At the heart of Dispensationalism lies this controversial thesis: That God has always had two different plans for two different people groups: one for Israel and another for the Church.

Daniel P. Fuller states, “The basic premise of Dispensationalism is two purposes God expressed in the formation of two peoples who maintain their distinction throughout eternity.”

Therefore:

The Church is _____ the continuation of God's Old Testament people, but a distinct body born on the Day of Pentecost.

The Church is never equated with Israel in the New Testament, and Christians are not Jews, nor true Israel.

The _____ made to Israel in the Old Testament are not being fulfilled in the Church, nor will they ever be.

The Church does not participate in the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament; it is for ethnic Israel and will be established in a future millennial kingdom.

C. Salvation and the Old Testament

The Old Testament saints were saved by faith alone, on the basis of the Calvary-work of Christ alone; however, the _____ of their faith was not Christ, but rather the revelation peculiar to their dispensation.

The Old Testament saints did not know of the coming “Church Age,” of the resurrection of Christ, or basically, of what we today call the _____.

When Jesus came to earth, he offered the Jews a physical kingdom, but they rejected him.

When Jesus proclaimed “the gospel of the Kingdom,” it was the news about how ethnic Jews might enter and find rewards in this physical kingdom, and is to be distinguished from the gospel as defined in I Corinthians 15:3-4, which the apostles later proclaimed to the church.

After the Jews rejected Jesus' kingdom offer, he inaugurated a parenthetical “Church Age,” which will be concluded immediately before God again takes up his dealings with his national people, ethnic Israel.

D. The Church Age

God sends his Son into the world *for the express purpose of offering the promised theocratic Kingdom to Israel*. However, as the four gospels make painfully clear, Israel largely refuses to submit to Christ, thereby failing their test and forfeiting the theocratic Kingdom.

But this does not spell the death of God’s Kingdom promises. Instead, God graciously *postpones* the dispensation of the Kingdom until the Millennium (Matt. 11:20f).

Meanwhile, about mid-way through his earthly ministry, Christ unveils a *new* plan by which God will henceforth create a *new* (heavenly) people and introduce a *new* dispensation: the Dispensation of the Church, or the so-called Church Age (Matt. 13:1f).

Some dispensationalists speak of this dispensation as the “mystery form” of the Kingdom, since here Christ does indeed rule over his saints, but only inwardly, by his Spirit.

Very importantly, dispensationalists insist that this new plan was a *pure* _____. That is, the OT prophets *never* foresaw or spoke of it at all. Rather, Christ introduced it anew altogether when he realized that the Jewish nation would soon reject him.

So, on the Day of Pentecost the crucified, risen, ascended, and glorified Christ gave birth to a heavenly people, pouring out the Holy Spirit on his disciples and seating them – along with all who would afterwards believe their report – in heavenly places at the Father’s own right hand.

During the “Church Age,” Jesus is not reigning from the throne of David; he is engaged instead in his _____ work, and his _____ work will take place in the future millennial kingdom.

E. The Secret Rapture

Next comes a *consummation*:

First comes *the secret Rapture*. This is “phase one” of the Lord’s Parousia, the phase of his Coming in which Christ descends from heaven FOR his saints. When he does, he will resurrect the saints of old, transform the living believers, gather them all to himself in the sky, and then take them with him to heaven, where, for the next seven years, they will enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Again, the Rapture is a “secret” event: Here, no (unbelieving) person on earth sees Christ or the departure of his glorified Church. Also, it is an “_____” event: Since God has not given us any signs by which we might know that it is at hand, no one can know when the great catching up will occur. The saints must be prepared for an “any-moment Rapture.”

F. The Tribulation and the Second Coming

Next comes *the Tribulation*. Based on a literal interpretation of Daniel 9, dispensationalists teach that the Tribulation will last for _____ literal years. During this time 144,000 converted Jews will preach “the gospel of the Kingdom” to all nations. This is the good news of Christ’s coming millennial reign, and access to that reign through personal faith in him. As the 144,000 preach, many Jews and Gentiles will believe.

However, mid-way through the Tribulation the Antichrist will step onto the stage of history. When he does, the whole world will follow after him, believers will undergo fierce persecution, and God will pour out dreadful warning judgments upon the earth.

This season of three and a half years – referred to as *The Great Tribulation* – concludes with the Battle of Armageddon: a military conflict centered in Palestine that will scarcely get under way before Christ returns visibly, in power and glory, to rescue his beleaguered people and destroy their enemies.

This return is “phase two” of the Parousia (and is also called *the Revelation*). Here Christ will come _____ his saints (and all the holy angels). His feet will touch down on the Mount of Olives. More Jews will be converted. OT saints and believers who died during the Tribulation will be raised from the dead.

Then Christ will judge the living Gentile nations, punishing many, but permitting those who treated his “brethren” well to enter the Millennium. Likewise, he will also judge between believing and unbelieving Jews. Finally, he will cast Satan into the abyss for 1000 literal years.

Then all the glorified saints will return to heaven and the thousand-year Kingdom Age will begin.

G. The Millennial Kingdom

Throughout *the Millennium* Christ will reign ON earth and *over* the earth from the earthly Jerusalem.

A glorious rebuilt _____ will become the center of the global worship of God. In commemoration of Christ’s atoning death, priests will again offer animal _____ and observe Jewish feast days.

During this time, God will fulfill his Old Testament promises to the nation of Israel. For example, listen to what God said in Amos 9:11-15:

¹¹ “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, ¹² that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the Lord who does this.

¹³ “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the Lord your God.

Though sin and death will be marginally present, the Millennium will largely be a time of widespread peace, prosperity, longevity, righteousness, and joy. On those rare occasions when rebels rise up against their King, Christ will swiftly punish them with a rod of iron, possibly with help from certain glorified saints living on earth or sent from above.

H. Eternity

After these thousand years, Satan will be released and will gather an army from the offspring of the Jews who survived the tribulation. He will be finally defeated and cast into hell. At this time, the wicked dead will be resurrected and judged, whereas the righteous dead had already been resurrected one-thousand-seven years previously, at the rapture.

Christ will then usher in the New Heavens and New Earth, and the destinies of all mankind will be finalized.

Dispensationalists are divided as to whether or not there will remain a distinction between Christians and Jews in the New Earth.

V. “Progressive” Dispensationalism (1986-present)

“I’m a progressive dispensationalist because I think it takes in the best of both covenant theology, which maintains that focus upon the one people of God and the covenant promises in the Old Testament, but also, it takes the best of the classic dispensational view that sees a future program and plan for Israel as well. So, I kind of get the best of both worlds.”

— Dr. Danny Akin

Some differences:

Number of Dispensations:

David's Throne:

The Sermon on the Mount:

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven:

The People of God:

VI. Strengths

This view has been very _____ in the United States since World War I.

A stress on _____ (seeking to understand how God interacts with His people thru different ages and stages)

A love for and a desire to see _____ people turn to the Messiah.

Proponents typically have a _____ of Scripture (i.e. its inspiration and authority)

A strong emphasis on _____ at the return of Christ

A desire for _____ regarding the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about Israel

An _____ / _____ appeal to Christians who will not endure the Tribulation

An overall focus on the _____ throughout the ages

VII. Weaknesses

This is a _____ system of interpretation.

It is pretty _____.

It amounts to a return to _____ and _____ that have been realized already in Jesus.

It is almost an exclusively _____ system of eschatology.

It is built on a faulty _____.

The separation of "_____ peoples of God" is a fundamental error.

It makes the Old Testament PRIMARY in prophecy and not the _____.

The "_____" Rapture is not explicitly taught anywhere in scripture. It must be *deduced* from the system.

It has some *potential* negative "downstream" effects:

Next week: Postmillennialism – Strengths and Weaknesses