

Views of the End Times¹: PREMILLENIALISM

DISPENSATIONALISM

Distinctive Features and Emphases:

Principle of interpretation: "Literal" Interpretation. Dispensationalists argue for the necessity of the literal interpretation of all of the prophetic portions of Scripture.

Distinction between Israel and the Church: Dispensationalists insist that God has two redemptive plans, one for national Israel, and one for Gentiles during the "church age."

The Rapture: There is a "rapture" of believers when Jesus Christ secretly returns to earth before the seven year tribulation period begins (the seventieth week of Daniel, cf. Daniel 9:24-27).

- Believers do not experience the persecution of the Anti-Christ who rises to prominence during this "tribulation period."
- The Biblical data dealing with the time of tribulation is referring to unbelieving Israel, not the church.
- Therefore, church age, or the "age of grace," is to be seen as that period of time in which God is dealing with Gentiles prior to the coming of the kingdom of God during the millennium.

The 2nd Coming: The visible and physical second coming of Christ occurs after the great tribulation.

- Those who are converted to Christ during the tribulation, including Jews (the 144,000) who turn to Christ, go on into the millennium to re-populate the earth.
- Glorified believers rule with Christ during his future reign.

Jesus' initial mission on earth: Jesus came to earth bringing with him an "offer" of the kingdom to the Jews, who rejected him.

- God then turned to dealing with the Gentiles -- thus, the church age is a parenthesis of sorts.
- The rapture is the next event to occur in Biblical prophecy.
- The signs of the end of the age all point to the immediacy of the secret return of Christ for his church.
- Antichrist is awaiting his revelation once the believing church is removed.

A Literal 1,000 year millennium: The millennium is marked by a return to Old Testament temple worship and sacrifice to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ.

- At the end of the millennium, the "great white throne" judgement occurs, and Satan and all unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire. There is the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Leading Proponents:

- Dispensationalism was largely popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible, and is now represented, for example, by the notes in the Ryrie Study Bible.
 - Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* served to keep the movement in the mainstream of Evangelicalism in the late 60's and early 70's.
 - The vast majority of the early Charismatic movement was dispensational in its orientation.
 - As the Charismatic movement has matured and become more consistent in its own theology, dispensationalism has largely been jettisoned.
- Leading dispensational theologians: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Norman Geisler and Charles Feinberg.
- Popular dispensational pastors and writers include: Charles Swindoll, Dave Hunt, Jack Van Impe, John Hagee and Charles Stan Chuck Smith and the Calvary Chapel movement represent the Charismatic side of dispensationalism.

¹ Kim Riddlebarger books and lectures. Most of this information can be accessed at http://www.fivesolas.com/esc_chrt.htm#chart2 and *A Case for Amillennialism*.

- Dallas Theological Seminary is the leading dispensational institution. Other institutions include: Talbot Theological Seminary, the Master's College and Grace Theological Seminary.

PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

- Came about in the late 1980s from within traditional dispensational circles.
- Rejects the heavenly/earthly dualism resulting from the hard distinction made between Israel and the church.
- However they do hold there is a distinction between Israel and the church: It is not different arrangements between God and the human race, but as successive arrangements in the progressive revelation and accomplishment of redemption.
- They see God's covenant promises to Abraham fulfilled in the church and the Davidic Covenant fulfilled in Christ, not in a future millennial Davidic Kingship.
- This position mediates between classical dispensationalism and covenant theology and while it is still not considered within the bounds of Reformed Orthodoxy it is considered a step in the right direction.

HISTORIC PREMILLENIALISM

- It draws its name from the fact that many of the early Church Fathers apparently believed and taught that there would be a visible kingdom of God upon the earth, after the return of Christ.
- It is often confused with dispensationalism but is a completely different eschatological system, largely rejecting the whole dispensational understanding of redemptive history.

The basic structure:

1. When Jesus began his public ministry the kingdom of God was manifest through His ministry.
 - The coming of Jesus marks the beginning of a new age and is the fulfillment of OT prophetic expectations
 - Upon His ascension into heaven and the "Gift of the Spirit" at Pentecost, the kingdom is present through the Spirit, until the end of the age, which is marked by the return of Christ to the earth in judgement.
 - During the period immediately preceding the return of Christ, there is great apostasy and tribulation.
2. After the return of Christ, there will be a period of 1000 years (the millennium separating the "first" resurrection from the "second" resurrection.
 - Satan will be bound, and the kingdom will consummated, that is, made visible during this period.
 - At the end of the millennial period, Satan will be loosed and there will be a massive rebellion (of "Gog and Magog"), immediately preceding the "second" resurrection or final judgement.
3. After this, there will be the creation of a new Heaven and Earth.

Leading Proponents:

- Without question, the best and most influential historic premillennialist was the late George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary.
 - Through the work of Ladd, historic premillennialism gained scholarly respect and popularity among Evangelical and Reformed theologians.
 - Other major historic premillennialists include the late Walter Martin, John Warwick Montgomery, J. Barton Payne, Henry Alford (the noted Greek scholar), and Theodore Zahn (the German NT specialist).
 - The best examples of current historical premillennial work would be the many scholars of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Evangelical Free).
- Several major Evangelical seminaries have some historic premillennial representation such as Fuller, Trinity and for a time some of the faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis.