

Johannine Studies

Lecture 14 Study Notes – May 6, 2008

Israel in the Millennium

Premills see a special status for Israel during the millennium, though they disagree on the exact nature of that status. Dispensational Premills hold that there will be literal restoration of the Old Testament way of doing things. God will restore Israel (Romans 11:25-32). He has only temporarily turned from Israel to the church, during the tribulation He will once again pick up with Israel. During the millennium Jesus will sit upon the throne of David and rule the world from Jerusalem. According to Erickson, temple worship and priestly order will be restored, including the sacrificial system (page 103). Is that really the way we believe? Would Paul agree with this theology? Think about how he fought against those who wanted to pervert the Gospel by making it more Jewish than Christian.

Historical Premills place less emphasis upon the nation of Israel than the dispensationalists. They believe that in the spiritual Israel (the church) many of the prophecies and promises that have been related to Israel have been fulfilled. The early church did that every time Jesus was seen as a fulfillment to the Old Testament prophecies. The Old Testament sacrificial system has passed away forever because Christ is the sacrificial lamb forever more. Israel, however, will be saved (Romans 11:26). The future Israel will eventually turn to Christ and be saved.

1. Pros of Premill Thought

- a. The Bible places a lot of emphasis on eschatology, and Premills certainly do not neglect this important subject in the Bible.
- b. Premills have also taken exegesis seriously.
- c. It appears that the Premill interpretation of Revelation 20 is more adequate and raises fewer objections than any other system of interpretation.

2. Cons of Premill thought

- a. Many people feel too much emphasis is put on the millennium in Revelation 20. Surely, if it is as important a scripture as some interpreters say, there would be more evidence in the whole of scripture. Jesus has a lot to say in Matthew 24-25 about the end times, but He never says anything about a 1000 year reign, nor did He predict any events that require such a period to be fulfilled (Erickson, page 105).
- b. Many of the prophecies that Premills, especially Dispensational Premills say must be fulfilled literally by Israel, have been fulfilled by the church or at least some believe so. For example, the prediction that Elijah would precede the coming of the Messiah was fulfilled in the New Testament by who? John the Baptist. Peter argued that the promise to David that the resurrected Christ would sit upon the throne was fulfilled when Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2: 29-36). Premills, who are known for taking the Bible literally, say that prophecies like these have both a literal and spiritual fulfillment.
- c. Premills tendency to give the millennium a Jewish flavor have been criticized for centuries (Caius of Rome, 200 AD. and Origen). Premills must be careful that Israel doesn't displace the church in the millennium.
- d. Pretribs and Posttribs differ in relationship of the church to the tribulation. Pretribs believe that the church will be "raptured," prior to the great tribulation. The Posttribs believe the church will remain in the world during the tribulation, although it may be shielded from some of its more severe aspects.

- e. The Second Coming, according to the Posttribs, is a single unitary coming at the end of the tribulation. Pretribs see it as consisting of two parts or two second comings for “the church at the beginning of the tribulation, removing it from the world and “coming with” the saints at the end of the tribulation. Where is it that the Bible speaks of 1-½ or 2 second comings?

3. **Dispensationalism**

- a. “Dispensations” as used in this particular understanding of the Bible and the Book of Revelation were defined by Charles C. Ryrie as “a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose” (Erickson, page 199). It is a stewardship of God’s light, a step in the revelation of God’s truth.
- b. The dispensationalist movement is a fairly new movement. No trace of this theology can be found in the early history of the church. However, there have been writers that have divided Biblical history into periods or ages.
- c. The developer of the dispensationalist Hermeneutics and theology was John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). He was part of the “Brethren Movement” which distinguished itself by “breaking bread” on every Lord’s day; and the belief that ordination was first and foremost of God rather than man. Darby, a prolific writer, developed the Brethren thought into a system. Others that followed him were C.H. Mackintosh, Harry Ironside, A. C. Gaebelein and C. I Scofield, all widen dispensationalism into fundamentalist circles.
- d. Scofield Reference Bible was the most effective popularization of dispensationalism where Scofield (1843-1921) combined Bible text and commentary into one volume.

4. **Tents of dispensationalism**

- a. Bible must be interpreted literally. “When the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.”
 - b. Definite distinction between Israel and the church. The doctrine of the church is the touchstone of dispensationalism.” God made promises to Israel that are unconditional. Yes, but what about “if” you will be my people I will be your God type of promises. Did Israel always try to be God’s people? However to dispensationalists, regardless how unfaithful Israel has been, God will still be faithful to His promises.
 - c. Difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Kingdom of Heaven, according to Scofield, is Jewish, messianic, and Davidic. It was promised to David, was postponed, and will be realized in the millennium. The kingdom of God is universal, including “all moral intelligences willingly subject to the will of God, whether angels, the Church, or saints of past or future dispensations.” Revised dispensationalism, that of Walvoord and Ryrie, dispensed with this distinction offering other kingdom distinctions.
 - d. The millennium is more than just the reign of Christ it has a clear and definite place in the plan of God: the restoration of national Israel to it favored place in God’s program, and the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel.
5. Since the middle of the 20th century dispensationalists have been undergoing some modifications called “progressive dispensationalists” (see Erickson, page 120).

6. **Pro’s of Dispensationalism**

- a. It is an elaborate system.
- b. Dispensationalism has attempted to take seriously the idea of progressive revelation and has developed a theology based on it.
- c. It has attempted to be genuinely and thoroughly Biblical.

7. **Con's of Dispensationalism**

- a. According to Erickson (page 123), its attempt to take progressive revelation seriously has failed. Is it important that the Old Testament becomes the old and the New Testament supersedes it? If so, then there is no superseding of it in their system.
- b. The distinction between Israel and the church, so basic and crucial to this system, is difficult to maintain.
- c. There is a tendency to neglect historical Premillennialism.