

February 8 Revelation 20: Brands of Premillennialism

February 15 Revelation 20: Postmillennialism & Amillennialism

February 22 What about the Jews? & Summary

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- I. What is Premillennialism?
  - A. Premillennialists agree on the following: The millenium refers to a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth, in which Satan is bound, initiated at his visible coming and concluding with the final judgment, which judgment is preceded by a partial resurrection of the dead. This period follows seven years of tribulation, or distress.
  - B. Premillennialists may disagree on the following:
    1. Whether the millennial state of Israel and the Church are distinct
    2. Where the Church will be during the millenium
    3. Whether the eternal state of Israel and the Church are distinct (heavenly versus earthly salvation)
    4. Whether the eternal state follows a *spiritual vision* model or a *new creation* model
    5. Whether Christ will return once and so the rapture and his coming will be concurrent events (posttribulationism) or twice, seeing the rapture and the second coming as temporally distinct events (pretribulationism and midtribulationism)
- II. Historic (Non-Dispensational) Premillennial Distinctives
  - A. The Church is spiritual Israel
    1. The New Testament applies Old Testament prophecies made to literal Israel to the New Testament Church.
      - a. **Hosea 1:9-10; 2:23 in Romans 9:24-26:** even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? <sup>25</sup> As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" <sup>26</sup> "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"
      - b. **Jer. 31:31-34 in Heb. 8:5-13:** They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." <sup>6</sup> But as it is, Christ<sup>1</sup> has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. <sup>7</sup> For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. <sup>8</sup> For he finds fault with them when he says:<sup>1</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>9</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. <sup>10</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>11</sup> And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. <sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." <sup>13</sup> In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.
    2. Other passages indicating that the Church is spiritual Israel
      - a. **Romans 4:11:** He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,

- b. **Galatians 3:19**: Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.
- c. **Romans 2:28-29**: For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

B. Hermeneutic Approach

- 1. "Dispensationalism forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and then fits the New Testament into it. A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament." G.E. Ladd in *The Meaning of the Millenium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1977), 27.

C. New Testament support for the millenium

- 1. **Revelation 20:1-6**: Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit<sup>1</sup> and a great chain. <sup>2</sup> And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, <sup>3</sup> and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. <sup>4</sup> Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
- 2. Perhaps **1 Cor. 15:23-6** (describing three distinct stages): But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

D. A Posttribulation Rapture

- 1. No one believed in a secret rapture of the Church (or first second coming of Christ) until John Nelson Darby began promoting the idea, as a result of either a charismatic service in 1832 or the prophetic vision of Mary MacDonald in 1830. See R.G. Clouse, "Rapture of the Church" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 908-9, W.A. Hoffecker, "Darby, John Nelson" in the same volume, 292-3, and G.E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 19-34.
- 2. A posttribulation rapture maintains the biblical expectation of one second coming of Christ, visible and in power, and properly orients the 'blessed hope' of the Church to that event. The imminence of Christ's coming is inconsistent with a secret rapture of the Church because, rather obviously, his coming in power would not be like a thief in the night if it followed seven years (or 3 ½) after an observable event. Pretribulation advocates of a secret rapture must therefore align the imminence language with the secret event, removing the NT emphasis from the second coming in power (the important one). More on this below.

III. (Classical) Dispensational Distinctives

- A. "The basic premise of dispensationalism is two purposes of God expressed in the formation of two peoples who maintain their distinction throughout eternity." Daniel Fuller, as cited by Ladd in *The Meaning of the Millenium*, 19.
- B. God deals differently with his people (or peoples) in different epochs, or dispensations. From God's perspective, the economy is different, from man's perspective, the rules are different. According to C. Ryrie ("*Dispensationalism*" in *EDoT*, 322), the content of faith changes from one dispensation to the next, but not the way of salvation. Critics point especially to early dispensationalists actually teaching a different way of salvation in each epoch. Covenant theologians would point to one covenant of grace across varied administrations, all essentially functioning in the same way.

- C. In the millenium, the Jewish temple will be rebuilt and the sacrificial system will be reinstated (Eze. 40-48). The sacrifices will be memorial in nature.
- D. New Testament support for the millenium (II.C. texts above, plus:)
1. **Matt. 25:31-46:** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,<sup>1</sup> you did it to me.' <sup>41</sup> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
- E. The Rapture
1. The belief in an eternal distinction between Israel and the Church provides impetus for this doctrine.
  2. **1 Thess. 4:14-5:4:** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,<sup>1</sup> that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words. <sup>1</sup> Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers,<sup>1</sup> you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.
    - a. This is the key secret rapture passage (4:17). There is no indication whatsoever that there is a period of time between the predictions in chapter 4 and those in chapter 5. The natural reading is that the descent of the Lord (4:16) is what will come like a thief in the night (5:2), not a separate, secret coming for the Church.
    - b. Meeting the Lord in the air (4:17). According to this view, the *location* is the key, and the movement continues upward. But the word used for meeting (apantesis) is used elsewhere to refer to the first century practice of going out to meet someone to usher him in (Mt. 25:6, Acts 28:15-16).
  3. **Matthew 24:37-44** <sup>37</sup> As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. <sup>42</sup> Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed

awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (cf. Luke 17:26-35)

- a. Is it better to be taken, or left? This view sees taken as an implied rapture reference, the one left behind being left to suffer tribulation. But the context of unexpected judgment seems to make being taken a bad thing (being taken by the flood waters; being taken by the thief).
  - b. If being taken is good (as in Mt. 1:20, 17:1), it would still only mean salvation from the coming destruction, which is associated with the Son's coming, not a tribulation period prior to that. When DC Talk uses these images in their video 'I Wish We'd All Been Ready,' they read a secret rapture into this text, showing people disappearing. But contextually, those taken are either decisively judged or decisively saved from the judgment.
4. **Revelation 3:10** <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.
- a. This is the primary verse cited to prove that the Church will not be present for the tribulation.
  - b. When we compare Rev. 3:10 to other passages using the same language ('I will keep you out of, *ek*), we see that it does not require physical removal. In the examples below, believers are kept *out of* evil but not removed from it physically. They are protected, not projected.
    - i. **John 17:15** <sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.
    - ii. **Galatians 1:3-4** <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father
5. Many pretribulation dispensationalists consider this a cardinal doctrine, of greater significance than *any* eschatological doctrine promoted by nondispensationalists, save Christ's victorious return. To me, this is wacky. One of the most disputed, least historically supported elements in the scheme is the one most vigorously preached. This degree of imbalance is notable in systems all evangelicals would reject, such as JW's and LDS. (I am *not* saying that dispensationalism is a cult.)

#### IV. Progressive Dispensationalism

- A. This view sees the millennial kingdom revealed to John as consistent with eschatological expectation, but nonetheless new. As revelation *progressed*, greater detail regarding last things was revealed.
- B. This view denies the *eternal* distinction between Israel and the Church made by classical dispensationalism. The millennial distinction between the two remains.
- C. This view denies the claim made by classical dispensationalism that the church age is a "parenthesis" not envisioned or anticipated by Old Testament prophecy.
- D. This view reduces the number of dispensations from seven (classical dispensationalism; Darby & Scofield) or even twelve (ultradispensationals) to five or three.
- E. It takes a fair degree of nuance to distinguish some progressive dispensationals from nondispensational premillennialists. (I prefer to think of this group as *progressing* away from Darby, which is a good thing.)