



Week 3

Dispensational Premillennialism

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READING THE BOOK OF REVELATION, SESSION THREE

Dispensational Premillennialism

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Dispensationalism or Dispensational Premillennialism is the newest and, in some ways, the most unique of the views we are considering. Its beginning as a form of premillennialism is usually traced to the 1830's. At that time, there was a great interest in the subject of prophecy first in England and later in the United States. Through a series of prophecy conferences, new ideas were spread, and the basic Dispensational understanding of Scripture slowly was developed.

By the time of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy that split the major denominations in the US (approximately 1910–1930), Dispensationalism was a major force among conservative Christians. The Scofield Reference Bible, first published in 1909, contained notes of the Dispensational system of interpretation, and was virtually the first “study Bible” ever published. Dallas Theological Seminary was started in 1921 as a school committed to teaching this view. Later many other universities and seminaries started on the same basis. The viewpoint has also been spread through influential pastors and teachers, like J. Vernon McGee, John MacArthur, and Chuck Swindoll. It's interesting to note that, though this view became widespread in conservative American churches, it has never had the same level of impact in other parts of the world, though it has been carried by American adherents into other parts of the world.

Sometimes, opponents claim that Dispensationalism is of too-recent origin to be true. They ask sarcastically, “How did the church get along for 1800 years without knowing these things?” Of course, that is not the right question – the same question was asked of the Reformers in the 1500's. Any explanation of Scripture must be tested by Scripture itself interpreted according to the grammatical-historical method.

Again, we note that the standard of orthodoxy was laid down by the Nicene Creed in 381:

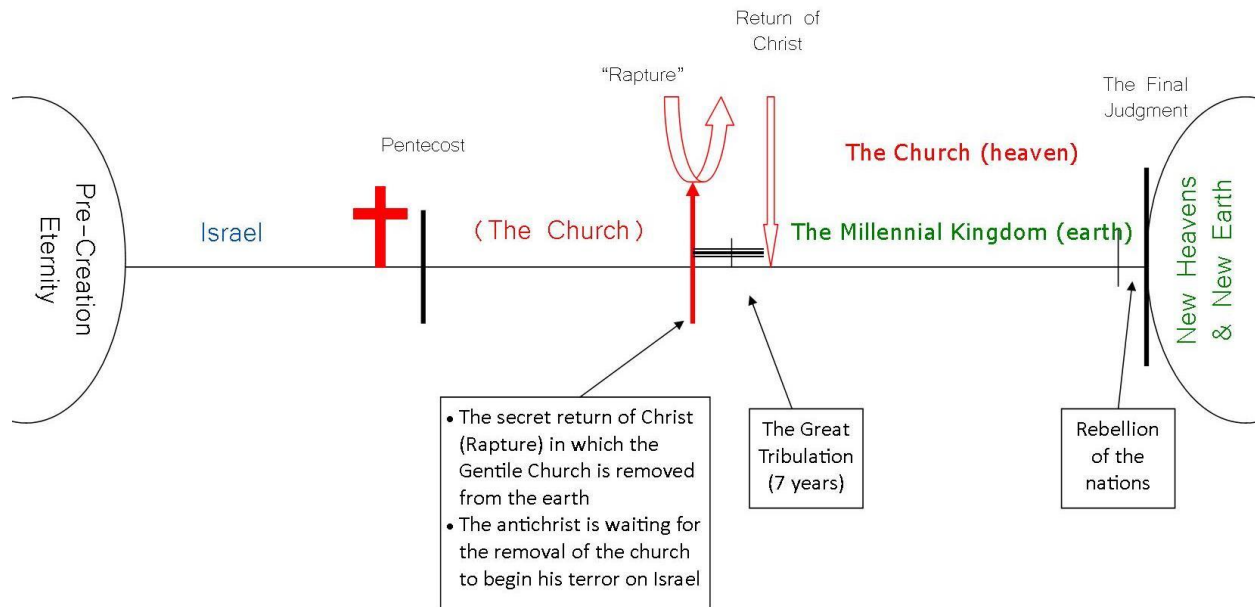
“He [Jesus Christ] will come again in glory to judge the living and dead and his kingdom will have no end.” (Nicene Creed)

All acceptable Christian teaching must fall in line with this statement: 1) Jesus Christ will return; 2) in his glorified, resurrected, immortal human body; 3) to bring final judgment on all people; and 4) to establish the eternal kingdom of God. Regardless of its details, Dispensationalism adheres to this standard, so it is an acceptable view.

Both Historic Premillennialism and Dispensationalism are forms of premillennialism – the belief that after Christ returns he will reign in a millennial kingdom on an unrenewed earth before the final judgment and consummation. Despite this, it is often noted that Historic Premillennialism is, in many respects, more similar to Amillennialism. Both are based on a more “covenantal” approach to the Bible; both agree that prophetic literature uses a great deal of symbolism to impart its message; and both believe that there is only one people of God throughout redemptive history. They may differ on the details or the applications of those points, but they do hold those basic ideas in common.

The unique aspects of the Dispensational Premillennial view really become clear in their understanding of the book of Revelation. As we look at the five topics, the way their unique understandings inform their reading of the book should become evident.

Again, the following diagram pictures the Dispensational Premillennial scheme:



Revelation 1.19 and the Structure of the Book

We have noted before that most interpreters regard Rev. 1.19 as having some significance for the way the book unfolds its message. Dispensational Premillennialism takes the most straightforward approach, understanding this verse to provide an outline for the book. Here is the verse with all punctuation removed:

“Therefore write the things that you have seen and the things which are and the things which will take place after these things.” (see NASB, KJV)

The “first reading meaning” is the interpretive “guess” the reader makes when reading this sentence. Even without punctuation, the reader sees the connective “and” two times and divides the sentence into three parts: 1: The things you have seen; 2) the things which are; 3) The things which will take place after these things. And, in fact, for an English reader, this would be the most straightforward understanding.

This is the meaning Dispensationalists apply to the verse. They believe that the three clauses present an outline of the book, as follows:

1. Past: The things that you have seen (1.1–18);
2. Present: And the things that are at the present time (1.19–3.22);
3. Future: And the things that will happen in the future (4.1–22.21)

As we noted in the lecture on Historic Premillennialism, this understanding is not necessarily correct, however, since there is another possibility. In this case, the “and...and” may be translated, “both...and” indicating that the second and third clauses explain the first.¹ That is the view of the Historical Premillennialist, who says John is being commanded to write down the contents of his vision, which will contain messages about the present and the future.

¹ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker. *A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (1958, University of Chicago Press), under “*kai*,” Section I.6, page 393.

In this case, it is possible that the “first reading” is correct; only context can determine. In other words, this verse alone is not going to decide how a person reads the book of Revelation. Only the actual contents of the book can indicate which one of these views is correct.

Because the Dispensationalist understands Rev. 1.19, to give an outline for the book, it leads to two important facts about how they read the book:

First, this requires them to understand that *most of the book of Revelation*, namely the unfolding of future events in chapters 4–21, *is dealing exclusively with the future* (at least from the standpoint of the writer and the readers throughout history). Only those left on earth after the rapture will be able to read this section of the Revelation with confidence that it is speaking directly to their own situation. They are willing to qualify this future-orientation by noting that the book does contain references to the past (12.1–6), comments to the readers (13.10; 14.12), and a message to John himself (10.1–11). But, they explain, the past or present are only brought in to make clear the information being given about the future.

A second outcome of using Revelation 1.19 as an outline for the book is the greater tendency for Dispensationalists to see the bulk of the future events that are presented as being chronological. We’ll see this when we look at the structure of the book.

Israel and the Church

Understanding the book of Revelation requires determining who the book was written *for* and *about*. For many generations, it was assumed that the letter is written *for* and *about* all believers in order to inform them of the things that will happen to Christians in the “end times” before and after the return of Christ. This traditional view is that all believers who are alive at the time described in the book of Revelation will go through the great tribulation.

The unique contribution of Dispensationalism is the idea that the bulk of the book – particularly from the vision of heaven’s throne room (beginning in 4.1) until the return of Christ (beginning in 19.11) – is written to describe what *Israel* will experience during the great tribulation. This seven-year period begins with the rapture and ends with the return of Christ. The Dispensationalist would say that the Revelation was written *for* all believers to tell us of end-time events, but it was written *about* Israel, not about all believers.

In many ways, Dispensationalists regard this issue as the key difference between their position and the others. They acknowledge that, if Israel and the Church are not as clearly distinguished as they claim, many of the inferences that they draw from it will not hold true. As can be imagined, this topic is huge since the “people of God” is a subject found throughout both of the Testaments. Here I can only give the chief arguments that are advanced.

First, they note, *God told Abraham that the promises were for him and his offspring and, thus, they can only be fulfilled by Abraham’s physical offspring*. For example, God spoke to Abraham concerning Isaac before his birth,

“I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.” (Gen. 17.18)

Abraham would certainly have gathered that the covenant and the promises were for *all* of his offspring. Thus, the promises were given to *all* of the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac. There is no distinction between the physical offspring who believed and those who did not believe the God of Abraham, as the Historic Premillennialist makes. All Israelites possessed the

land, all experienced the blessings of the Davidic kingdom, and all had the promise of the Messiah regardless of their faith.

Dispensationalists note that the Old Testament does not usually make a clear distinction between what the Historic Premillennialist calls *nominal Israel* and *true Israel*. Even when the Israelites were sent into exile, no distinction was made between those who believed and those who didn't; they were all called "his people" (2 Chron. 36.15). Also, though Abraham does have "spiritual offspring" in the church (Gal. 3.7), the New Testament never says that they also inherit the land promises, that belonged to Abraham's offspring. Thus, unlike the Historic Premillennialist, who says that the promises were only given to true believers within the nation, the Dispensationalist says they were given to all of the physical descendants of Abraham regardless of their faith.

Second, *Dispensationalism teaches that, in the Bible, "Israel" always refers to the physical descendants of Abraham, and never is used to refer to his spiritual offspring in the church.* Now, two passages in the New Testament are usually immediately put forward that seem to apply the name "Israel" to the New Testament people of God:

"...not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring." (Rom. 9.6–7)

"For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." (Gal. 6.15–16)

In the first, the writer appears to be saying that not all who are descended from *physical* Israel (meaning the Jewish people) belong to *true* Israel (meaning, the church). In the second, all who now walk by the "rule" of the new creation – which includes both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ according to Gal. 3.23–29 – are "the Israel of God." In both cases, it appears that the name "Israel" is applied to new covenant believers.

To this, the Dispensationalist responds that Paul is referring to believing Israelites within the church who retain their ethnic identity. After all, he says in 1 Corinthians 10.32, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God." In other words, he maintains three categories in the world, even in the gospel age: Jews, Gentiles, and the Church. The "Israel of God" is just a way of referring to "true Israel," that is, Jewish believers in the church.

Another objection made to the Dispensationalist view is that many titles that were given distinctively to Israel in the Old Testament are applied in the New Testament to the church. For example, the church is called, "the elect exiles of the dispersion" (1 Pet. 1.1), and "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Pet. 2.9–10). The words of Hosea to Israel are applied to the church: "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" (Rom. 9.25). In all these cases, Old Testament names for the people of God are applied to New Testament believers.

To this Dispensationalist asserts that there is a difference between *fulfillment* and *application*. In all of these New Testament passages, the writers are simply pointing out that the church, since it is the people of God *at the present time*, is *like* Israel in some respects. Though the word "like" is not used in any of these contexts, it is still being used metaphorically. It does not mean that the church in any way fulfills, completes, or replaces Israel. Israel still possesses their national promises.

Third, the *Dispensationalist* notes that the *Old Testament* makes it clear that the promises given to Abraham have not been fulfilled — especially the “land promises.” The promise to Abraham was,

“To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.” (Gen. 15.18).

And, later,

“And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession....” (Gen. 17.8).

Two points are made: First, it is asserted that the exact dimensions of the land were never possessed by Israel in the *Old Testament*. Second, even if they were, they were not “an everlasting possession” of the Israelites.

Now to the first point, the *Old Testament* seems to indicate that they *did* possess the full dimension of land promised to Abraham. First, we read in Joshua,

“Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.” (Josh. 21.45)

Then, in 1 Kings, we read:

“Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt.” (1 Kings 4.21)

Now some *Dispensationalists* dispute this, noting that “the river of Egypt” (Gen. 15.18) refers to the Nile which is in the middle, not the “border, of Egypt” as Solomon possessed. Others, however, accept that the promise was fulfilled, but they note that Israel did not hold it “for an everlasting possession,” as promised to Abraham (Gen. 17.8).

Now, this is actually a very large topic. It concerns the meaning of time and eternity, and the meaning of words like “forever.” Let me briefly note two things that might help to think about this.

First, the Bible seems to indicate the “forever” doesn’t always mean the same as “into the eternal future.” Consider this promise of God:

“Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar — the LORD of hosts is his name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.’” (Jer. 31.35–36)

God is promising that Israel’s ethnic, national identity will not end. History indicates that they have maintained it for over three thousand years. But before you say that this promise is “eternal” (meaning, could never end), consider these words from the book of Revelation:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.... And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Rev. 21.1, 23)

In the fulfillment, the very things by which God promises to keep Israel distinct “forever” are gone — the sea, the sun, and the moon. The “fixed order” of the first creation has ended. And with

it all promises have been forever and completely fulfilled. It appears that “forever” doesn’t necessarily mean eternally; it means as long as present conditions remain.

Secondly, consider this. The Historic Premillennialist and the Amillennialist believe that the land promises to Israel are expanded beyond Palestine to refer to first, the world (Ps 2.8; Matt. 5.5; Rom. 4.13), and, later, all of creation (Heb. 1.1–4; 2.5–9). This promise is fulfilled for all of the “offspring of Abraham” (both the physical/spiritual and the spiritual) in the new heavens and earth. Thus, they believe the land promises are ultimately and eternally fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth.

To this, the Dispensationalist responds that the land promises must be fulfilled in the present age – they agree that they are not longer in force in the new heavens and new earth. Since, they have not been fulfilled in the present age, the millennial kingdom is the completion of the land promises made to Israel.

Now, I hope this gives you some feeling for the complexity of this topic – the relationship between Israel and the Church. The important thing is to understand that Dispensational Premillennialism is based on the conviction that the two are distinct for three reasons:

1. The promises were originally given to Abraham’s physical offspring and must be fulfilled by Abraham’s physical offspring.
2. “Israel” always refers to ethnic Israel in the Bible; any Old Testament titles given to the church are simply applications.
3. The promises, particularly the “land” promise, has not yet been fulfilled and requires a future fulfillment by the nation, in the millennial kingdom of Rev. 20.

The Return of Christ and the “Rapture”

For the Dispensationalist, this subject follows on the previous one: *If there is a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, then the great tribulation must be for Israel not the church.* The purpose of the great tribulation is for God to fulfill his promises, warnings, and threats to Israel in order to bring them back to God in faithful submission to the Savior whom they produced and then denied. Conversely, if the Church is a parenthesis in God’s program with Israel, then it is not a part of Israel’s covenant or purposes and should not be present during the tribulation. We should expect the Church to be absent during the time of the great tribulation. That is the first and most basic reason for the removal of the Church before the tribulation.

In agreement with Historic Premillennialism, the Dispensationalist believes that the promised return of Christ to this earth to establish his millennial kingdom will occur at the conclusion of the tribulation (Rev. 19.11–16). That is not the same, they argue as the “rapture” of living saints described in 1 Thessalonians 4.13–18. This is the second reason for the removal of the Church before the tribulation.

The Dispensationalist believes that 1 Thessalonians 4 pictures the “removal” of those who are “in Christ” (a description of the Church, not of Israel) from earth to heaven. That “rapture” is described as follows:

“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. 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.” (1 Thess. 4.16–17)

It appears, says the Dispensationalist, that those in Christ who are caught up will “always be with the Lord.” They say that there is nothing in the passage about returning to the earth, establishing his kingdom, or judging the nations which is what will happen at the return of Christ. The church goes to be with Christ in heaven and is removed from the scene of what is to follow. Of course, the Historic Premillennialist notes, the point of the passage is simply to ensure that those believers who have died will not miss Christ’s return (see 1 Thess. 4.13); it is not necessary for Paul to note everything that is going to happen at that time since it is beyond his purpose.

Second, *the Dispensationalist adds that we do not find the Church in any of the tribulation passages in the Bible.* This is true of Old Testament passages about the tribulation (like Ezek. 20.34–38) but we would not expect them to speak of the Church. But even Matt. 25.31–46 speaks only of the judgment of the nations, implying that the church is absent. Notably, they say, the “church” is referred to several times in Revelation 1–3, but then from chapters 4–21 is not mentioned at all. They argue that the Church is not mentioned in the passages of the book of Revelation that describe the tribulation because that deals only with Israel. That is an interesting argument, but it is an argument from silence. The Church is not referred to by name in long sections of the New Testament but that doesn’t mean that it isn’t in view in those passages. Note also that some Dispensationalists believe the rapture is implied in the words of the angel to John, “Come up here” (5.1), though most note that normal rules of interpretation wouldn’t accept that.

Fourth, *the Dispensationalist notes that the idea of the “imminence” of Christ’s return requires a secret rapture.* The belief that Christ’s return is “imminent” is the belief that he can return “at any moment;” there are no signs that need to be fulfilled before he comes back. This is believed to be taught by Jesus and the apostles in several passages, including the following two:

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Luke 12.40)

“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5.2)

At the same time, Bible readers note that Jesus taught that certain signs must be fulfilled before he returns. These include the preaching of the gospel to all nations (Mark 13.10), false prophets working signs and wonders (Matt. 24.23–24), and the rise of the antichrist (2 Thess. 2.1–10). If this is the case, how can Christ’s return be unexpected and sudden?

The Dispensationalist believes that the “pre-tribulational rapture” solves this seeming conflict between Jesus’ teaching that he could return “at any moment” and that there are “signs of his return.” The solution, they say, is that the *rapture* is the removal of Christians (which could happen at any moment), while the *return* of Christ to the earth occurs after the tribulation and will be preceded by the signs as Jesus taught.²

This debate may have stretched past its importance. Jesus himself says the exact time of his return is only known to God the Father (Matt. 24.36) and is not to be searched out by believers (Acts 1.7). The signs that he gave are sufficiently vague that it would be difficult for anyone to put them together and pinpoint the time of Christ’s return. Also, the surprise of his return seems to fall more heavily on the unbelieving world, just as in Noah’s day (Matt. 24.37–39), while believers are constantly urged to “be ready” (Matt. 24.42). We should also note that the “any moment” view of the “imminence” passages is *not* the only view. Many interpreters would prefer

² The only other view that would allow for an “any moment” return of Christ is an Amillennial view that believes the signs are being fulfilled throughout the church age, which is the “great tribulation.”

to use the word “impending,” implying that the whole series of events that surround the return of Christ could begin at any time.

Finally, *some Dispensationalists believe the rapture is promised within the book of Revelation itself in the letter to the church in Philadelphia:*

“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.” (Rev. 3.10)

The idea is that God is promising to this faithful church a removal from the tribulation that is coming. This is a possible but certainly not a necessary understanding of the passage for three reasons: First, the need to endure tribulation is written to most of the churches (2.2–3, 9–10, 13, 19, 25). Second “the hour of trial” more likely refers to an impending Empire-wide persecution that we know eventually came to these churches. People at that time customarily called the Roman Empire “the whole world.” Lastly, to “keep [them] from the hour of trial” does not mean to remove them from but to protect them through the coming trial. It is doubtful that this verse refers to the rapture.

In summary, there are four reasons why the Dispensational view believes the church will be removed from the earth in the “rapture” before the beginning of the great tribulation.

1. The distinction between Israel and the Church requires the removal of the Church before God can again deal with Israel. This is an argument from logic.
2. First Thessalonians 4.13–18 pictures a secret removal the Christians to be with Christ in heaven.
3. The Church is not referred to in any of the tribulation passages in the Old Testament or New Testament.
4. The Pretribulation Rapture allows for an “any moment” return of Christ.

Daniel’s Seventieth Week and the “Great Tribulation”

We noted last time that the words ‘great tribulation’ are used only three times in the Bible (Matt. 24.21; Rev. 2.22; 7.14) though they seem to echo the words “time of trouble” in Dan. 12.1. More than any other view, the “great tribulation” is connected by Dispensationalists to Daniel’s “seventieth week” in Daniel 9.24–27.

As we noted in the presentation of Historic Premillennialism, how a person understands the great tribulation has much to do with how they understand Daniel 9.24–27.

²⁴“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. ²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It shall be built again³ with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy

³ I have reproduced the marginal reading in the ESV for verse 25. It is commonly thought that, after the beginning of the Christian movement, there was an intentional change made to the standard Masoretic (Hebrew) text at this point. This was done in order to counteract the common Christian interpretation of this text. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (2012, Crossway), page 538.

the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

Dispensationalism argues that this passage gives a comprehensive overview of future events that deal only with Israel. The information in this passage covers events that concern both the first and the second appearances of Christ; that is, both his earthly life, ministry, atoning death, and resurrection and his future return along with the events that concern Israel in the last days.

The angel speaks of ‘seventy weeks,’ but is apparent that each “week” is referring to a seven-year period; this much is in agreement with the other views. When breaking the weeks down, the angel speaks only of seven ‘weeks’ and sixty-two ‘weeks.’ How, then, does the Dispensationalist understand the passage?

The Dispensational Premillennialist understands this prophecy as a prediction of a literal time-period with an identifiable beginning and ending. The “seventy weeks” begin in verse 25 and ends in verse 27. So, they interpret Daniel 9.24–27 as follows:⁴

- Verse 24 refers to the establishment of the millennial kingdom spoken of in Rev. 20.1–6. Thus, the “goal” or end point of the prediction is the millennial kingdom; the prophecy is that seventy weeks of years will be required to bring in the millennial kingdom.
- Verses 25–26a: Dispensationalism asserts that the proper starting point is the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 BC. From this year, when Nehemiah was sent to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem, until the coming of Christ, there will be 483 years (“seven weeks and sixty-two weeks”). Using a 360-day year and subtracting one year (since there is no year “0” in our calendars), you arrive at 33 AD, the most likely date for Christ’s crucifixion.
- Verse 26: This verse records events after the sixty-nine weeks but before the seventieth week in verse 27. In other words, verse 26 is a “parenthesis” in history. The death of Christ (v 26a) and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD (v 26b) occur during this parenthesis, as does the entire church age which has lasted (at this point) for two-thousand years.
- Verse 27: Because of other prophetic passages (especially in the book of Revelation) that they believe point to a period of tribulation for Israel, they suggest that the words in verse 27 are referring to this still-future time. This is the seven-year “great tribulation” which takes place in the book of Revelation before the return of Christ. Jesus will remove the church from the earth by the rapture, and God will turn back again to dealing with Israel and completing the Old Testament program. This verse requires that the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem, because it says that the Levitical priesthood will be re-established and sacrifices will be offered in the temple. The antichrist will establish a covenant with Israel, but then break it at the halfway point of the seven years but will be defeated. This will complete the “seventieth week” of the prophecy after which the millennial kingdom will be established.

⁴ Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come* (1958, Zondervan), pages 239–50. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (1959, Zondervan), pages 256–62.

The idea of the “missing” seventieth week is not that the week is not mentioned – it is referred to in verse 27. It is that, from our perspective today, only sixty-nine weeks have been fulfilled. The seventieth awaits a future time of fulfillment.

On this basis, dispensationalism asserts a number of things:

- The church age is the time-period between the first and second comings of Christ. This entire period is a parenthesis in the prophetic program of God, since the Old Testament only tells us about God’s dealings with Israel. But during the long period of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of the prophecy (two-thousand years at this point), God creates the Church, the body of Christ.
- The purpose of the millennial kingdom is to fulfill God’s program for the Jewish people. It is especially designed to fulfill the land promises that were not fulfilled in the Old Testament.
- On this basis, it is asserted that, at some point, God must turn his attention back to Israel. This will happen when the Gentile Church is raptured and removed from the earth to heaven. After this, Daniel’s seventieth week will begin to happen. The seven-year “great tribulation” will be the time when God chastens Israel and prepares them to turn to their Messiah in preparation for his second coming.
- Because verse 27 refers to “sacrifice and offering,” this view requires that the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem and the priesthood re-established either before or during the millennial kingdom. They believe this corresponds to Rev. 11.2, though all other references to the temple in the book of Revelation are of God’s temple in heaven (3.12; 7.15; 11.19; 14.15, 17; 16.1, 17; 21.22).
- Because verse 27 refers to one who “shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering,” dispensationalists assert that the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for seven years but will violate the covenant after three-and-one-half years. This will make the last half of the seventieth week and period of intense tribulation.

Thus, according to the dispensational view, the prophecy of Daniel 9.24–27 is a key to unlocking the meaning of God’s prophetic program. It reveals the time (a seven-year period during the end times), the location (Jerusalem and the temple), and the actors (Israel and the antichrist) who will be significant during the great tribulation.

Revelation 20 and the “Thousand Years”

When we looked at Historic Premillennialism last time, we considered how they explain this passage. On this one point, there is little difference between Dispensational Premillennialism and Historic Premillennialism so I’m not going to go through the passage in detail again – the notes from last time will be sufficient.

Let me briefly summarize and note a few differences:

- vv 1–3: **The binding of Satan:** During the millennium, Satan is imprisoned so that he is unable to deceive people.
- v 3: **‘until the thousand years are ended’:** There is still sin in the human heart and in the world but it is lessened in power by the absence of Satan. Under the reign of Christ,

most will become believers. At the end of the kingdom, Satan will be released, incite a rebellion, but this time it will be ended by the direct action of God (see verses 7–10).

- v 4: **‘I saw those to whom the authority to judge was committed.... Also...the souls of the [martyrs]’**: Dispensationalists regard this verse as referring primarily to the Jewish martyrs who have come to believe in Christ during the great tribulation.
- v 4: **‘they came to life’**. Dispensationalists believe that this resurrection is only for Old Testament saints and Jewish believers from the tribulation. Believers from the church age have already been resurrected at the rapture.
- vv 5–6 **‘first resurrection’**: Dispensationalists believe that Christ’s resurrection was the first resurrection – anyone who is raised after that, whether before the tribulation (the Church) or after (Israel), is sharing in the first resurrection.
- v 4: **‘They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years’**: The only difference here is that Dispensationalists take this literally to refer to a one-thousand-year kingdom on an unrenewed earth. Historic Premillennialists often regard it as a symbolic statement of a long period of time, though they won’t argue about its literalness.

Conclusion

In summary, Dispensationalism is a view that is based on a strict separation of Israel (the Old Testament people of God) and the Church (the New Testament people of God). On this basis, Daniel 9.24–27 is interpreted to teach that there is a missing seventieth week of prophetic events that have yet to be fulfilled. Also, on this basis, 1 Thessalonians 4.13–18 is believed to teach that the Church will be removed from the earth in a secret rapture before the beginning of the tribulation in which God will again turn his attention to Israel.

When the book of Revelation is approached with these two understandings in mind, it is understood that the rapture described in 1 Thess. 4 must occur before Rev. 4 begins to recount the events of the tribulation. It is also understood that the events of Daniel 9 which the Dispensationalist regards as unfulfilled must be understood to occur during Revelation 4–19. At this time, God will deal exclusively with Israel.

Let’s conclude by noting some of the strengths and weaknesses of Dispensational Premillennialism.

Strengths

1. Dispensational Premillennialism provides an internally consistent way of reading the book, *based on its interpretation of other relevant passages and topics*, including the relationship of Israel and the Church, their unique understanding of Daniel 9 and the “great tribulation,” and the meaning of “catching up” (*rapture*) in 1 Thess. 4.
2. Dispensational Premillennialism is able to explain the possible conflict between Jesus’ teaching that his return will be unexpected and his teaching that certain signs will precede his return. Both Historic Premillennialism and Amillennialism require some events to transpire before Christ returns, including the tribulation and the Antichrist, and thus Christ cannot return at any moment. If the Church is to be “raptured” before the Great Tribulation, then no events stand before that “coming” of Christ. We must note, however, that the “any moment” return of Christ is not the only way of understanding the relevant passages.

Weaknesses

1. *The sharp distinction between Israel and the Church is questionable* – the evidence seems to point to a more carefully defined understanding of their relationship. The dogmatic assertion that “Israel always refers to ethnic Israel in the Bible” does not seem justified in the New Testament. Yet, based on the inference of a sharp distinction, the idea of a “secret rapture” is read into 1 Thess. 4.13–18. Without this sharp distinction between the Israel and the Church, 1 Thessalonians 4 can be read as a straightforward account of Christ’s promised bodily, public return. In other words, the sharp distinction between the Church and Israel creates a need to remove the Church before the tribulation, rather than any specific teaching that the Church is removed before the tribulation.
2. *Dispensational Premillennialism seems to be based on a number of doubtful inferences from a difficult passage* (Dan. 9.24–27). For example, the idea that there is a “gap” between Daniel 9.25 and 9.27 is extremely doubtful. Yet, from this questionable premise, a number of conclusions are asserted: that the Church is a parenthesis in God’s unfolding story; that the tribulation deals only with Israel; that antichrist makes and breaks a covenant with Israel; that the temple will be rebuilt and sacrifice will be offered in Jerusalem. All of those ideas depend on the dispensational interpretation of this passage. None of them are clearly taught elsewhere in the Bible.
3. Dispensationalism teaches that, during the great tribulation, the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, the Levitical priesthood will be reconstituted, and the Old Testament system of sacrifices and offerings will again be practiced (based on Dan. 9.27). *This seems to either question or require serious modifications to the New Testament teaching that Christ’s sacrifice has established the New Covenant and fulfilled and ended the Old Covenant* (Heb. 8–10). It also seems doubtful based on the fact that the lineage of the Aaronic priesthood was lost to the Jewish people with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, so there exists no priesthood to offer sacrifices. Re-establishment of the priesthood would presumably require special divine revelation which is not promised in scripture.

Resources

Books

Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come* (1958, Zondervan), 633 pages.

Ryrie, Charles C. *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (1953, Loizeaux), 160 pages.

Walvoord, John. *The Millennial Kingdom* (1959, Zondervan), 371 pages.

Commentaries

Lang, G. H. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (1945, Conley & Schoettle), 420 pages.

Walvoord, John. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (1966, Moody), 350 pages.

Walvoord, John. *Revelation*, in the one-volume *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (1983, Victor), 66 pages.

Analytical Outline of Revelation

(J. Dwight Pentecost, 1983)

I. “THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN” (1:1–20)

- A. The Preface (1:1–3)
 - 1. A revelation from God (1:1–2)
 - 2. A blessing promised (1:3)
- B. The Salutation (1:4–8)
 - 1. Grace to the churches (1:4–5a)
 - a. From the Father
 - b. From the Spirit
 - c. From the Son
 - 1) faithful witness (revealer)
 - 2) firstborn of the dead (resurrection)
 - 3) ruler of the earth
 - 2. Glory to the Son (1:5b–6)
 - a. loved us
 - b. loosed us
 - c. lifted us
 - 3. Promise of His coming (1:7)
 - 4. Sovereignty of the Father (1:8)
- C. The Vision (1:9–20)
 - 1. The instruction (1:9–11)
 - 2. The revelation (1:12–16)
 - 3. The interpretation (1:17–20)

II. “THE THINGS WHICH ARE” (2.1–3.22)

- A. The Message to Ephesus (“*Desired*”) (2:1–7)
- B. The Message to Smyrna (“*Myrrh*”) (2:8–11)
- C. The Message to Pergamum (“*Thoroughly married*”) (2:12–17)
- D. The Message to Thyatira (“*Continued sacrifice*”) (2:18–29)
- E. The Message to Sardis (“*Those escaping*”) (3:1–6)
- F. The Message to Philadelphia (“*Brotherly love*”) (3:7–13)
- G. The Message to Laodicea (“*People speaking*”) (3:1–22)

III. “THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER” (4:1–22:21)

- A. Introduction: The Divine Judge 4:1–5:14
 - 1. The throne of the Lord God, the Almighty (4:1–11)

- a. the invitation (4:1)
- b. the revelation (4:2–11)
 - 1) the throne (4:2a)
 - 2) the throne sitter (4:2b–3)
 - 3) the throne attendants (4:4)
 - 4) the Spirit (4:5)
 - 5) the living creatures (4:6–8)
 - 6) the worship before the throne (4:9–11)
2. The sealed scroll (5:1–14)
 - a. the scroll (5:1)
 - b. the scroll unopened (5:2–4)
 - c. the Lamb (5:5–7)
 - d. the Lamb worshipped 5:8–14

The Great Tribulation, Part One: The Pouring out of God’s Wrath on Israel for their Violation of the Covenant Standards. (First half of the tribulation)

- B. The Seven Seals (6:1–8)
 1. The first seal (the little horn) (6:1–2)
 2. The second seal (war) (6:3–4)
 3. The third seal (famine) (6:5–6)
 4. The fourth seal (death) (6:7–8)
 5. The fifth seal (persecution) (6:9–11)
 6. The sixth seal (earthquake) (6:12)
 7. ***Parenthesis: The servants of God (7:1–17)***
 - a. ***the 144,000 from Israel (7:1–8)***
 - b. ***the innumerable multitude from the Gentiles (7:9–17)***
 - 1) ***the multitude before the throne 7:9–10***
 - 2) ***the worship to the one on the throne 7:1 1–12***
 - 3) ***the ministry from the throne 7:13–17***
 8. The seventh seal (seven trumpets) (8:1)
- C. The Seven Trumpets (8:2–11:19)
 1. The introduction (8:2–6)
 2. The first trumpet (against vegetation) (8:7)
 3. The second trumpet (8:8–9)
 4. The third trumpet (8:10–11)
 5. The fourth trumpet (8:12–14)
 6. The fifth trumpet (9:1–12)
 7. The sixth trumpet (9:13–21)
 8. ***Parenthesis (10:1–11:14)***

- a. *The little book (10:1–11)*
 - 1) *The angel and the little book (10:1–3)*
 - 2) *The pronouncement (10:4–8)*
 - 3) *The prophet and the little book (10:9–11)*
 - b. *The two witnesses (11:1–13)*
 - 1) *The temple (11:1–2)*
 - 2) *The witnesses (11:3–6)*
 - 3) *The death of the witnesses (11:7–10)*
 - 4) *The translation of the witnesses (11:11–13)*
 - c. *The third woe (11:14)*
9. The seventh trumpet (11:15–19) – A proleptic vision of the commencement of the millennial kingdom.

The Great Tribulation, Part Two: The major persons and movements, empowered by Satan and the world system, that will afflict of Israel. (Second half of the tribulation)

- D. Explanatory Prophecies (12:1–14:20; cf. 10:11)
- 1. The woman, the man-child, and the dragon (12:1–6)
 - 2. The war (12:7–17)
 - a. The war against the dragon (12:7–12)
 - b. The war against Israel (12:13–17)
 - 3. The beast out of the sea 13:1–10
 - 4. The beast out of the earth 13:11–18
 - 5. The 144,000 (14: 1–5)
 - 6. The three angels (14:6–13)
 - a. the everlasting gospel (14:6–7)
 - b. the fall of Babylon (14:8)
 - c. the judgment on beast-worshippers (14:9–13)
 - 7. The judgment (14:14–20)
- E. The Seven Bowls (15: 1–18:24)
- 1. Introduction (15.1–16:1)
 - a. worship because of the consummation of judgment (15:14)
 - b. preparation for the last judgments (15:1–5)
 - 2. The first bowl (16:2)
 - 3. The second bowl (16:3)
 - 4. The third bowl (16:4–7)
 - 5. The fourth bowl (16:8–9)
 - 6. The fifth bowl (16:10–11)
 - 7. The sixth bowl (16:12–16)
 - 8. The seventh bowl 16:17–21
 - 9. The great harlot (17:1–18)

- a. the harlot described (17:14)
 - b. the harlot identified (17:5)
 - c. the persecution by the harlot (17:6)
 - d. the beast related to the harlot (17:7–15)
 - e. the destruction of the harlot (17:16–18)
10. The great city (18:1–24)
- a. the announcement of judgment (18:1–3)
 - b. the cause of judgment (18:4–14)
 - c. the lamentation because of judgment (18:15–20)
 - d. divine judgment 18:21–24)
- F. Final Visions of John (19.1–12)
1. Introduction: Rejoicing over Judgment Completed and Victory Won (19:1–10)
 2. The Second Advent of Christ (19:11–16)
 3. The great supper of God (19:17–21)
 4. The binding of Satan (20:1–3)
 5. The kingdom of the Son (20:4–6)
 6. The loosing of Satan (20:7–10)
 7. The great white throne 20:11–15
 8. The eternal state (21:1–22:5)
 - a. The new Jerusalem, the habitation of God 21:1–8
 - b. The new Jerusalem, the habitation of the bride, the wife of the lamb (21:9–22:5)
 - 1) the city (21:9–18)
 - 2) the foundation (21:19–20)
 - 3) the gates (21:21a)
 - 4) the streets (21.21b)
 - 5) the omissions (21:22–24)
 - 6) the occupants (21:25–27)
 - 7) the river of life (22:1)
 - 8) the tree of life (22:2)
 - 9) the occupants (22:3–5)
- G. The Conclusion (22:6–21)
1. The authentication (22:6–9)
 2. The affirmation (22:10–16)
 3. The invitation (22:17–20)
 4. The benediction (22:21)

The Book of Revelation

(Dispensational Premillennialism)

“Write therefore the things that you have seen, and the things that are, and the things that are to take place after this” 1.19)

PAST	PRESENT		FUTURE									
			4.1–22.21									
			The Great Tribulation (Israel only)			The Victory of God						
1.1–18	2.1–3.22	—	4.1–19.21			19a	19b	20a	20b	21–22		
Christ Among the Lampstands	Letters to the Seven Churches	(The Rapture of the Church)	First 3 ½ years		Second 3 ½ years		The Return of Christ	The Marriage Supper of the Lamb	The Millennium	The Great White Throne Judgment	The New Heavens and New Earth	
			<p style="text-align: center;">The Judgments of God (6.1–17; 8.1–9.21; 15.1–16.21)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Seals ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ↓ Trumpets ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ↓ Bowls 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 </p>									
			<p style="text-align: center;">The Interludes (7.1–17; 10.1–11.14)</p> <p># 1 – The Servants of God (7.1–17) (7.1–8) 144,000 Israelites sealed for God (7.9–17) Innumerable Tribulation Martyrs before the throne</p> <p># 2 – The Prophet and the Little Book (10.1–11) – The two Jewish Evangelists preach in Jerusalem, martyred, and taken to heaven (11.1–14)</p>									
			<p style="text-align: center;">Explanatory Prophecies (12.1–14.20)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12: War in heaven: Woman (Israel), child (Christ), Dragon (Satan) • 13: War on earth against Israel (Beasts) • 14: Protection of Israel 		<p style="text-align: center;">Fall of Babylon the Great (17.1–19.10)</p>							