

4.3 — DISPENSATIONALISM AND ESCHATOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

As we have seen, there are two doctrines within the categories of Systematic Theology which are generally related to Dispensationalism: Eschatology and Ecclesiology.

Ecclesiology

- Ecclesiology's, the Doctrine of the Church, relationship to Dispensationalism can be summed up in the statement that the Church is not Israel and Israel is not the Church.
- While there certainly can be more nuance applied in this area, for the purposes of acquiring a basic understanding of Dispensationalism, this is sufficient.

Eschatology

Eschatology or the Doctrine of the End Times is most definitely the more complex, more nuanced doctrine related to Dispensationalism, even to the point that Dispensationalism is seen by many to be nothing more than a specific doctrine of the End Times.

However...

I would submit to your critical thought, that Dispensationalism at the very least effects/influences/impacts all aspects of theology/doctrine.

Here is why this is true:

- The Coherence & Congruence argument.
- The Consistency, Coherence, Comprehensiveness, Congruency argument for Theological systems.¹

So how is it that Dispensationalism affects or influences all aspects of theology?

- It does so for two reasons:
 - Dispensationalism is unique in its application of the grammatical-historical-contextual method of interpreting the Bible.
 - Dispensationalism presents unique and specific doctrinal points in the theological areas of ecclesiology and eschatology.

I. WHY DISPENSATIONALISM AND ESCHATOLOGY ARE IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND.

A. Dispensationalism Is Important Because:

1. It provides an interpretive method (hermeneutic principles and their application).
2. It provides a broad framework for understanding the history of man.
3. It provides answers to the end times; answer the question, "where am I going?"
4. It provides guidance in the area of ecclesiology.

B. Eschatology Important because:

1. Because our spiritual life is fundamentally eschatological.
2. It is part of the Bible.

II. THE STUDY OF ESCHATOLOGY DOES MATTER.

A. Arguments For Ignoring (not studying) Eschatology:

1. It is divisive — It divides believers.
2. It is too hard to understand — It is very complicated and complex.
3. It is not relevant — It has no relevance to me and my life right now.
4. It can be obsessive — It takes control of your understanding of the Bible.

B. Answers

1. It is divisive.
2. It is too hard to understand.
3. It is not relevant.
4. It can be obsessive.

C. Some Other Reasons Why Eschatology/Prophecy Should Be Studied:

1. Fulfilled prophecy is the greatest proof that the Bible is the Word of God.
 - a) Compare Isa 7:14 with Mt 1:20-23:
 - b) Compare Micah 5:2 with Matthew 2:5-6.
 - c) Compare Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:14-15.
 - d) Note Mt 2:17 and 2:23; in this same area of time.
 - e) John 19:24-38.
2. Prophecy is an incentive to Bible Study.
3. Prophecy leads to a deeper and more intimate fellowship with God.
4. Prophecy builds a basis for prayer.
5. Prophecy gives purpose and courage for living.

¹ David Wolfe, **Epistemology: The Justification of Belief** (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1982), 50-55, as Quoted by Dave Anderson in Free Grace Theology, pp. 221-2.

6. The knowledge of prophecy brings blessing.
7. Prophecy keeps the believers and church from wasted activity.
8. Prophecy of Christ's return is a warning to the unsaved.
9. Prophecy is a spur to witnessing.
10. Prophecy leads to holiness of life.

III. DEFINITION OF ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology is the division of systematic theology that most immediately concerns events predicted in the Bible that have not yet occurred. But most broadly, the term concerns the entire structure of biblical prophecy.

IV. MAJOR ISSUES WITHIN ESCHATOLOGY

A. The Second Coming (Advent) Of Christ.

1. Definition — The 2nd Advent of Christ is His bodily return to the earth from heaven.
2. Scripture. (Zech 14:1-4; Mt 24-25; Rev 19:11-21)
3. Description.
 - a) Christ will return bodily to the earth, to the Mount of Olives. Zech 14:4; Acts 1:11
 - b) The battle of Armageddon will be waged to defeat Christ. Rev 16:13-16; 19:19
 - c) The Antichrist and the false prophet will be cast alive into the lake of fire. Rev 19:20
 - d) Christ will judge the living Jews and Gentiles. Mt 25:1-46; Ezek 20:34-38; Joel 3:2-3
 - e) Saved Jews and Gentiles will enter the Millennium; the unsaved will be cast into the lake of fire.
 - f) Satan will be imprisoned in the bottomless pit until after the end of the Millennium.
 - g) The martyrs of the tribulation will be resurrected to live in the Millennial Kingdom.
 - h) OT believers will be resurrected to live in the Millennial Kingdom.
 - i) Jesus the Messiah will reign on and over the earth with his saints for 1,000 years.

B. The Millennium.

1. Definition — The reign of Christ over the earth lasting 1,000 years.²
2. Scripture. (Zech 14:9-11; Rev 20:4)
3. Description.
 - a) 1,000 years
 - b) Perfect political peace
 - c) Christ reigning bodily on and over the earth.
 - d) Satan imprisoned
 - e) Satan loosed at the end of the 1,000 years.
 - f) Satan and followers defeated by divine fire.
 - g) All the unsaved of all ages will be judged at the Great White Throne judgment, then cast into the Lake of Fire.
 - h) The Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants will be fulfilled in the Millennium.

C. The Order Of The 2nd Coming And The Millennium.

Throughout the history of the church, various views of when the Lord will return in relation to the Millennium have been proposed.

1. Premillennialism
 - a) *Historical Premillennialism*
 - (1) Premillennial
 - (2) Christ institutes the Millennium Himself
 - (3) Christ reigns during the Millennium on earth.
 - (4) No national restoration of Israel, because the church has replaced ethnic Israel as the true, spiritual Israel.
 - b) *Dispensational Premillennialism*
 - (1) Premillennial
 - (2) Christ institutes the Millennium Himself.
 - (3) Christ reigns during the Millennium on earth.
 - (4) Christ will restore the nation of Israel to the land of Palestine, in literal fulfillment of the land and nation promises to Israel in the OT biblical covenants.
2. Amillennialism
 - a) In the current inter-advent age.
 - b) Millennium is not a literal 1,000 years reign of Christ on the earth.
 - c) The reign of Christ through the church.
 - d) The land and national promised to the nation Israel in the OT are now being fulfilled in a spiritual way by the Church, the true Israel.
 - e) The Millennium/Church Age will end in the Tribulation and then Christ will bodily return to the earth for the final judgment and to usher in the eternal state.

² The Millennial reign of Christ is often called the "kingdom," because it is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant—that David would always have a son to sit on his throne.

3. Postmillennialism

- a) Christ will return to the earth bodily after the Millennium.
- b) Millennium is the reign of Christ from heaven over the world through the church.
- c) Millennium will be established by the Christianization of the World through evangelism and other means.
- d) Millennium is not necessarily 1,000 years.
- e) The OT land and Nation promises to Israel will be fulfilled spiritually by the Church.
- f) After the 2nd Coming, Christ will conduct the final judgment and establish the eternal state.

D. The Rapture.

1. Definition

- a) The term is derived from the Latin translation of the Greek verb in 1Thess 4:17, *harpazo* (Latin *rapimur*—from *rapio* [noun form, rapture]).
- b) It means “to snatch away” or “remove away from.”

2. Scripture. (1Thess 4:13-18; 1Cor 15:51-54; John 14:1-3; Rev 3:10)

3. Description

- a) The souls/spirits of the dead will be brought with Jesus at the rapture, in the air.
- b) The Lord will descend from heaven to the earth’s atmosphere with a shout.
- c) The bodies of the dead in Christ will be raised first to have their souls be joined to resurrected bodies.
- d) The living saints will rise to meet the Lord in the air.
- e) There will never again be a separation between these saints and the Lord.
- f) The Lord will set us in the dwelling place that he has prepared for us.

E. The Tribulation.

1. Definition — A time of God’s judgements on earth that involve unparalleled despotism, destruction, and death.

2. Scripture. (Rev 6-19; Dan 9:24-27; Mt 24; 1Thess 5:2; 2Thess 2:2)

3. Description

- a) God’s judgment of unredeemed humanity and is administered by Jesus Christ through the holy angels. (Rev 5-19)
 - (1) Seal Judgements – Rev 6
 - (2) Trumpet Judgments – Rev 8-9
 - (3) Bowl Judgements – Rev 16
 - b) Begins soon after the rapture. Dan 9:27; 2Thess 2:1-12
 - c) Will last 7 years
 - d) It the “70th” week of the Daniel 9 prophecy.
 - e) It is divided into two 3 ½ year periods.
 - f) Begins with a treaty between Israel and the Antichrist.
 - g) The prince will break the treaty at the end of the first 3 ½ years and oppress Israel.
 - h) The last half of the tribulation is call “The Great Tribulation” and “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble.” In the OT it is called the “Day of the Lord”, which is a special time of God’s intervention in judgment.
 - i) It will end with the Battle of Armageddon and the 2nd Coming.
4. Purpose
- a) To purify and prepare Israel for Messiah’s reign. Dt 4:30; Dan 9:24; 12:1-2; Rev 7:4-8; Mt 24:9-26
 - b) To judge the unbelieving “earth-dwellers” and their nations. Rev 3:10; 6:15; 13:8, 11-18; 14:8; 17:8

F. The Relationship between the Rapture and Tribulation—The Timing of the Rapture.

- 1. **Pretribulation View** — The Rapture will occur immediately before the 7-year tribulation period. The church will not go through any part of the tribulation period.
- 2. **Midtribulation View & Pre-wrath Rapture View** — The rapture will occur in the middle of the Tribulation period. The church will go through the first half of the tribulation period. [Marvin Rosenthal, in 1990, proposed a Pre-Wrath view which asserts that the rapture takes place in the middle of the last half of the tribulation; a ¾ rapture view.]
- 3. **Posttribulation View** — The rapture will occur at the end of the tribulation period, immediately preceding the 2nd advent. The church will go through all of the tribulation period.
- 4. **Partial Rapture View** — The rapture will occur in stages, according to the worth of individual saints. The most worthy will be raptured before the tribulation. Others will be raptured a various stages in the tribulation period.

G. Eternal State

- 1. **Definition** — Will be the unending time of purity and blessing on a renewed earth following the final judgment.
- 2. **Scripture.** (Rev 21:1-22:5; 1Cor 15:24-28)
- 3. **Description**
 - a) Will begin after the Great White Throne judgment, when Christ gives the kingdom to the Father.
 - b) Unbelievers will be tormented forever in the Lake of Fire.

- c) Believers will live forever on a new earth under a new heaven in perfect, immortal conditions, in the presence of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

H. Resurrections.

1. Definition

- a) Biblical resurrection is the transformation of a human body that has died to an immortal body that cannot decay or die.
- b) This is to be distinguished from “resuscitation,” which is the restoration of a dead human to his former state of mortal life. Such people could die again. A resurrected body will not physically die again.

2. The Resurrections

a) *The 1st Resurrection (Rev 20:5-6; Jn 5:29)*

- (1) Resurrection of the Righteous
- (2) Resurrection of Life
- (3) Christ the firstfruits (1Cor 15:23)
- (4) Resurrection of Church Saints (1Cor 15:23, 51-52; 1Thess 4:16)
- (5) Resurrection of OT Saints before the Kingdom (Job 19:26; Isa 26:19; Ezk 37:12-14; Dan 12:2, 13)
- (6) Resurrection of martyred Tribulation Saints at the Second Advent (Rev 20:3-6)

b) *The 2nd Resurrection*

- (1) Implied in Rev 20:5-6, first resurrection, second death
- (2) Resurrection of Judgment (Jn 5:29)
- (3) This resurrection will occur at the GWTJ, when all unbelievers will receive their final judgment and be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:5, 11-14).

I. Judgments.

1. Definition — God’s Judicial determination of the eternal condition of a human being.

2. Delineation

- a) Judgment of Church Saints: The Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 1Cor 3:10-15; 2Cor 5:10-11; 1Tim 6:17-19; 2Tim 4:7-8; 1Pt 4:13; 5:4; 2Cor 4:17-18)
 - (1) Not for condemnation, but for reward or loss of reward for works of the believer.
- b) Judgment of Living Israel and OT Saints. (Ezk 20:34-38; Zech 13:8-14:21; Mal 3:2-3; Mt 25:30)
- c) Judgment of Martyred Gentile Tribulation Saints at the second Advent. (Rev 20:4-6, inferred)
- d) Judgment of the Living Gentiles at the Second Advent. (Rev 7:1-17; Mt 13:47-50; 24:14; 25:31-46)
 - (1) Salvation of Gentiles will be evidence by how they treat Israel in the Tribulation period (Mt 25:31-46)
- e) Judgment of Satan and the Fallen Angels at the End of the Millennium.
 - (1) Satan will be case into the Lake of Fire forever. (Mt 25:41; Rev 20:10)
 - (2) Satan’s angels will be cast into the Lake of Fire with him (Mt 25:41; Jude 6-7)
 - (3) Believers will participate in this judgment of Satan and his angels. (1Cor 6:3)
- f) The Great White Throne Judgment at the End of the Millennium.
 - (1) All unsaved dead of all time will be raised and judged by Christ according to their works. (Rev 20:11-13)
 - (2) The unsaved dead do not have their names written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life, so they will be cast into the Lake of Fire forever. (Rev 20:14-15; 13:8; 17:8)

J. Covenants (previously discussed)

K. Eschatological Hermeneutics.

- 1. **Futurism** — Treats all or most of the vents in biblical predictions as not occurring until the end times.
- 2. **Preterism** — Treats all or most of the events in biblical predictions as occurring in the time of the writer. These are now historical events.
- 3. **Historicism** — Treats all or most of the events in biblical predictions as occurring future to the time of the writing, but taking place throughout Church history, and, therefore, possibly occurring in the time of the reader.
- 4. **Symbolism (Idealism)** — Treats predicted events as not referring to events of time and space, but rather symbolizing timeless truths.
- 5. **Literal (Normal, Plain) Eschatological Hermeneutic** — Does not exclude figures of speech, but maintains the normal meaning of terms unless there is clear demand in the context to interpret the terms with a figurative sense.
- 6. **Spiritualizing Eschatological Hermeneutic** — Maintains that eschatological promises concerning earthly, physical things will be fulfilled in a spiritual way—either in the spiritual life of the believer or in heaven (a non-physical domain).
- 7. **Allegorical Eschatological Hermeneutic** — Maintains that earthly, physical aspects of prophecy are real, but point to more important spiritual, non-physical realities as the true concern of the prophecy.