

Grand Canyon College  
Dispensationalism and Eschatology  
 General Epistles and Revelation  
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### Introduction

Before looking at the dispensational and nondispensational interpretations of the book of Revelation a proper understanding of dispensational theology is necessary. Dispensationalism holds that God, in order to bring about his ultimate purpose for man has and will work in a number of dispensations or economies. "A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose."<sup>1</sup> The Greek word for dispensation is *oikonomia* which is the management of a household, administration or office; a stewardship.<sup>2</sup> Paul David Nevin elaborates on this definition as it is used in dispensational thought; "A dispensation is God's distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure, and judgement."<sup>3</sup> There are three characteristics which distinguish the different dispensations: 1. a change in God's governmental relationship with man, 2. a change in man's responsibility, 3. proper revelation given to effect the change.<sup>4</sup> The Bible does teach at least three dispensations. Ephesians 1:10 speaks of a future dispensation. Scofield believes this to be the Millennial reign of Christ.<sup>5</sup> In Ephesians 3:2 "the dispensation of the grace of God" is mentioned. Colossians 1:25-26 speaks of the dispensation in which Paul took part and infers a previous dispensation to that one. Scofield taught seven dispensations: innocence- before the fall of Adam; conscience- the time between Adam and Noah; human government- the time between Noah and Abraham; promise- the time between Abraham and Moses; law- the time between Moses and the Church age; grace- the Church age up to the Millennium; and kingdom- the thousand year earthly reign of Christ.<sup>6</sup> It must be remembered however, that the number of dispensations and the names of these dispensations are not crucial to dispensational theology.

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<sup>1</sup>. Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>. Wilbur Gingrich, Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament (Chicago: university of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>. "Some Major Problems in Dispensational Interpretation", p. 97, as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>5</sup>. C.I. Scofield ed., The Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 1250.

<sup>6</sup>. Ryrie, p. 84.

The sine qua non of dispensationalism of which no variation can be made if one is to call himself a dispensationalist consists of three beliefs: 1. God has two distinct purposes: one for Israel and one for the Church. 2. The use of a literal (normal) interpretation of the Bible must always be used. 3. The underlying purpose of God in this world is not salvation, it is to glorify God Himself.<sup>7</sup>

The leading opponent of dispensational theology is covenant theology.

It [covenant theology] is that system of theology which places primary emphasis on the theological covenants- redemption, works, grace- viewing the biblical covenants as stages in the development of the covenant of grace for its understanding of Scripture and the accomplishment of God's major purpose, which is redemptive.<sup>8</sup>

The covenant theologian would reject the first two of the dispensationalists premises. The covenant theologian believes that God has only one people and the Church is spiritual Israel. The covenant theologian is more open to a broader hermeneutic and would question the wooden literalism of much of dispensationalism, especially concerning eschatology. Finally, the covenant theologian views God's ultimate purpose for man as being redemptive rather than to bring glory to Himself. Dispensationalism consists entirely of conservative and fundamentalist adherents whereas covenant theology runs the gamut, holding both conservative and liberal followers. The main reason for this is the method of hermeneutics used by the two systems of theology.

### **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics (methods used for interpretation of the Bible) are a key element for the argument of dispensationalism. All of the eschatological beliefs of the dispensationalist stem from the literal method of interpretation. Walvoord gives a good definition of this position; "The premillennial position is that the Bible should be interpreted in its ordinary grammatical and historical meaning in all areas of theology unless contextual or theological reasons make it clear that this was not intended by the writer."<sup>9</sup> W.E. Blackstone, one of the first influential advocates of dispensationalism says, "There are symbols, figures or tropes, metaphors, etc., used in Scripture and there are, also, allegories. But, unless they are so stated in the text, or plainly indicated in the context, we should hold only to the literal sense."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>. Ibid., pp. 44-47.

<sup>8</sup>. Robert Lightner, "Theological Perspectives on Theonomy 1. Theonomy and dispensationalism," Bibliotheca Sacra, January-March, p.33.

<sup>9</sup>. John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p. 128.

<sup>10</sup>. W.E. Blackstone, Jesus is Coming (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1898), p. 21.

Another form of hermeneutics used by covenantalists (though not all covenantalists) is spiritual interpretation. William Cox believes the difference between spiritual and dispensational interpretation is that the spiritual interpretation interprets some passages in the Bible literally and others spiritually (symbolically);<sup>11</sup> this is an unfair characterization. The only difference between Dispensationalists and Covenantalists concerning spiritualization is that the dispensationalist is stricter in what he or she allows to be spiritualized. F.E. Hamilton, representing the spiritual method gives three points for when the spiritual interpretation should be used: 1. when the passage contains obvious figurative language; 2. when the New Testament gives authority to spiritualize; 3. when the literal method would bring about contradictions with nonsymbolic New Testament passages.<sup>12</sup> The dispensationalist would agree to the first two points but reject the third point. As Walvoord says, "The so-called rules of amillennialism turns out to be no help at all because their basis is the extremely subjective judgment of what is a contradiction."<sup>13</sup>

Both of these methods of hermeneutics have their problems. As Bernard Ramm shows, "Nobody is a strict literalist or a complete spiritualist."<sup>14</sup> However, guidelines must be set. The liberal has used the spiritual method to do away with important doctrines such as the resurrection, the deity of Christ, and the bodily return of Jesus. This cannot be allowed and yet at times, especially when considering eschatological material, the spiritual method must be used. When the passage contains obvious figurative language or when the New Testament authorizes it the spiritual method should be used. When there is no contextual evidence for spiritualizing other than one's own preconceived notions of eschatology then spiritualizing should seriously be questioned. Some explanation needs to be made. For instance, what does "obvious figurative language" mean? This does bring in some ambiguity but the very nature of prophetic language with its constant use of word pictures will always have some ambiguity in it. For example in Ezekiel chapter 39, the weapons in the world's last war are described as "shields, the bows and arrows, the war clubs and spears."<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel had no way of describing accurately modern warfare so he used the language of his own day. When it is obvious from our point of view that the passage is a picture of some other reality then it must be interpreted as such. Extreme caution must be taken and if there is any doubt then the literal interpretation should be respected.

### **Israel and the Church**

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<sup>11</sup>. William Cox, An Examination of dispensationalism (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1963), p. 26.

<sup>12</sup>. The Basis of Millennial Faith, pp.53-54 as quoted in Walvoord, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup>. Walvoord, p.66.

<sup>14</sup>. Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 244.

<sup>15</sup>. Ezekiel 39:9.

Probably the most distinct difference that sets apart dispensationalism from covenantalism is its holding to an eternal distinction of Israel and the Church. The dispensationalist believes that God has two purposes, two plans, two people and He will never abolish this distinction. This belief stems from the dispensationalists literal view of interpretation. Many of the Old Testament prophecies associated with Israel have not been fulfilled and so the dispensationalist believes that these prophecies will be literally fulfilled during the millennial period spoken about in Revelation chapter 20. This millennial reign of Christ on earth is known as the kingdom. Although the dispensationalist would not deny the present reality of a spiritual kingdom, his emphasis is clearly on a future physical kingdom with Christ as the king.

Another view of Israel and the Church is the covenant theologians' view. This view holds that Israel is the Church in the Old Testament. God has always had one plan for one people- the Church. Israel is merely a type of the Church; the Old Testament expression of God's people.<sup>16</sup> Most covenant theologians are amillennialists. They believe that the kingdom is entirely spiritual and is taking place right now in the hearts of believers. There will be no literal thousand year reign of Christ on the earth.

Both of these views have merits and faults. The kingdom of God is both a present reality spiritually and a future reality physically. Ladd says, "The kingdom of God in the New Testament is the redemptive work of God active in history for the defeat of His enemies, bringing to men the blessings of the divine reign."<sup>17</sup> This occurs now in the hearts of believers (see Col. 1:13; Rm. 14:17; Lk. 16:16, 17:20-21, 13:18-21, 11:52; Mt. 12:28, 21:31; Heb. 12:22) and it will occur in the future physically (see Mt. 25:34; II Peter 1:10-11; Jn. 18:36; I Cor. 15:50; Rev. 11:15; Mk. 9:47; Heb. 13:14; Acts 14:22). The kingdom is first and foremost the reign of God and secondarily it is the realm which Christians now enter in this life and the future realm which Christians will enter.<sup>18</sup> The dispensationalist is at fault for de-emphasizing the present reality of the kingdom and the covenant theologian is equally at fault for neglecting the future physical reign of Christ (this will be discussed further in the chapter on the Millennium).

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<sup>16</sup>. Cox, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup>. George Eldon Ladd, The Gospel of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 107.

<sup>18</sup>. Ladd, Kingdom, pp. 19-22.

Next, the issue of the separation of Israel and the Church must be discussed. Again, both covenant theology and dispensational theology have merits and faults. God only has one people and one plan but this does not mean that he is finished with Israel. First, the proof showing that God has one people is overwhelming. One of the reasons dispensationalists hold on to a two-plan view of God so tenaciously is their view of a pretribulation rapture. They believe that when God is finished with his parenthesis plan of the Church,<sup>19</sup> He will rapture them to heaven and then begin again on his plan for Israel. Even Ryrie admits that the early prophetic conferences were mainly concerned with the imminent return of Christ and a literal interpretation of Scripture, not dispensationalism.<sup>20</sup> Dispensationalism only strengthened the pretribulation view. Pretribulationism is false (see chapter five) and so is the two plan view of God. In the Old Testament a progressive emphasis on the individual can be seen (Ez. 18; Jer. 31:29-30) and prophecies including gentiles in God's plan became prevalent. In the Old Testament gentiles could only be included by joining national Israel (e.g. Ruth, Rahab), but in the New Testament this qualification was abolished. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>21</sup> God's plan is not regressive revelation where he will go back to a distinction of Jews and Gentiles like the dispensationalists say. Ephesians 2:14 says God has tore down the middle wall of partition between the Jews and gentiles and he has no intention of putting it back up. Hebrews 11:39-40 shows how the Old Testament saints will only be made perfect when united with the New Testament saints. God's one plan is for one people of God. Revelation 5:9-10 shows how God's people will be from "every kindred and tongue and people and nation" and they will reign with God as kings and priests. I Peter 2:9-10 reflects this same idea of the Church as a royal priesthood, holy nation and peculiar people of God. Ezekiel 19:6, which this passage in I Peter is obviously taken from, clearly refers it to Israel. God has always had one plan and that is to bless all nations through the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:3, 22:18; Gal. 3:7-9), and now the gentiles have become the same body as the Jews (Eph. 3:4-6) and are children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). In fact in one sense the Church is "the Israel of God."<sup>22</sup> Dispensationalists try to say that this verse in Galatians is only talking about Jewish Christians;<sup>23</sup> this is a clear use of eisegetical hermeneutics because the entire context of Galatians is a repudiation of any separation of Jew and Gentile (see verse 15). Bernard Ramm says, "It is inescapable that the Israel of God means the true people of God (in contrast to the Judeaizers) who glory in the cross and count the new birth as that saving act of God and not circumcision."<sup>24</sup> In Hebrews chapter 8 the author quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 speaking of a "new covenant with the

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<sup>19</sup>. William Newell, Romans Verse by Verse ( Chicago: Moody Pres, 1938), p. 335.

<sup>20</sup>. Ryrie, pp. 81-82.

<sup>21</sup>. Galatians 3:28.

<sup>22</sup>. Galatians 6:10-16.

<sup>23</sup>. Ryrie, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup>. Ramm, pp. 263-64.

house of Israel and with the house of Judah."<sup>25</sup> Verse 10 says, "...and they shall be to me a people." Even Scofield recognizes this passage as pertaining to all who believe in Jesus<sup>26</sup> and yet Jeremiah only relegates it to Jews. All of these verses show how the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints are the one people of God. This does not mean that the Old Testament people are the Church. The Church is a mystery only now revealed in the present dispensation.<sup>27</sup>

One last analogy is necessary to show that God has one plan for one people:

In the Old Testament era, the olive tree- the people of God- consisted of the children of Israel. Gentiles entered into the blessings of God's people only as they shared the terms of the covenant with Israel. In the New Testament dispensation, the natural branches, Israel, have been largely broken off the tree because of unbelief and wild branches from the gentiles have been grafted in, through faith. But there is but one tree, one people of God, which consisted first of Israelites and then of believing Gentiles and Jews. It is impossible to think of two peoples of God through whom God is carrying out two different redemptive purposes without doing violence to Romans 11.<sup>28</sup>

The analogy of the olive tree shows God's one plan for one people, but it also shows that God is not through with Israel yet. Robert Saucy points out that the branches are still separate branches.<sup>29</sup> They are one people in the one vine but they are made up of many branches. In Romans 11:26, Paul says that eventually all Israel will be saved. This proves that God still has a future for Israel. To say that this verse is referring to Christians as the true Israel is to reject the context of this verse which is clearly separating Jews from Gentiles (see all of chapter 11).

The Old Testament is full of prophecies concerning Israel, many of which have already been literally fulfilled. Unless the New Testament gives warrant for spiritualizing, the rest of the unfulfilled prophecies of Israel should be taken literally (see chapter two on proper hermeneutics). The miraculous preservation of Israel throughout the centuries is a testimony to the fact that God is not through with them yet. Israel has been heavily persecuted throughout its history and until 1948 they wandered aimlessly without a home land. Now they are back in their land after almost 2000 years of exile. Surely this is not just coincidence. God is not finished with Israel yet but he will only deal with them as they enter the one people of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "For I say unto you [Israel], ye shall not see me

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<sup>25</sup>. Hebrews 8:8.

<sup>26</sup>. Scofield, p.1298.

<sup>27</sup>. Ephesians 3:1-9.

<sup>28</sup>. Ladd, The Gospel of the Kingdom, p.118.

<sup>29</sup>. Robert Saucy, "Contemporary Dispensational Thought," TSF Bulletin, March-April 1984, pp. 10-11.

henceforth, till ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."<sup>30</sup> Ladd concludes:

The people of God through whom the kingdom of God is working in this Age is the Church which consists largely of Gentiles; but the people of God in whom the kingdom will come to its consummation will include Israel (Rom. 11:12). But there is one kingdom and there is one people.<sup>31</sup>

### **False accusations made about dispensationalists**

Dispensationalism has been charged with teaching two ways of salvation<sup>32</sup> and also that the Sermon on the Mount is not applicable today. Both of these accusations have some merit but are blown out of proportion. Some dispensationalists have taught two ways of salvation but most reject this view.<sup>33</sup> This is certainly a serious matter that a few dispensationalists have taught two ways of salvation. C.I. Scofield wrote that there are four Gospels,<sup>34</sup> meaning four means of salvation and he also taught that in the dispensation of the law people were saved by works; "As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ. The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation."<sup>35</sup> William Evans also taught salvation by works; "Salvation is no longer by legal obedience."<sup>36</sup> This is heresy and must be rejected, but dispensationalism cannot be rejected on this point because it is not a universally held belief among dispensationalists.

It is also not true that dispensationalists teach that the Sermon on the Mount is not applicable for today. However, they do relegate it as primarily meant for the Millennial kingdom and only secondarily for the Church.<sup>37</sup> Today, only "lessons and principles can be drawn from it."<sup>38</sup> Scofield even wrote; "For these reasons the Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the Church."<sup>39</sup> But where in the sermon does it

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<sup>30</sup>. Matthew 23:39.

<sup>31</sup>. Ladd, The Gospel of the kingdom, p. 121.

<sup>32</sup>. John Wick Bowman, "The Bible and Modern Religions: II, Dispensationalism," Interpretation, april 1956, p. 178.

<sup>33</sup>. e.g. Chafer's view quoted in Ryrie, p. 113; also Ryrie p. 123-24.

<sup>34</sup>. Scofield, p. 1343.

<sup>35</sup>. Ibid., p. 1115.

<sup>36</sup>. Outline Studies of the Bible, p. 34, cited from Cox, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup>. Ryrie, p. 107.

<sup>38</sup>. Ibid.

mention or even infer that it was primarily for another dispensation? In view of a proper method of literal hermeneutics, the dispensational view must be rejected because they have added to the Scriptures in order to fit their presuppositions.

The accusations against dispensationalism do have some merit when viewing individual dispensationalist's but dispensationalism as a system of theology cannot be attacked as heresy just because a few adherents have stepped off the deep end. Dispensationalism and covenant theology are not as polemic as some have imagined. In fact they do share much in common.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Rapture**

Now that dispensationalism has been properly defined, a look at dispensational eschatology is in order. The two major eschatological events to be discussed will be the rapture and the Millennium. When viewing eschatology there are many differing views on the question of the rapture. Dispensationalists almost universally hold to the pretribulation rapture theory which states that the Church will be removed prior to the Great Tribulation which lasts seven years. John Walvoord gives six reasons for holding this view: 1. There is no evidence that the Church will be in the tribulation period. 2. The Church is promised deliverance from the "time" of tribulation. 3. The rapture is presented as imminent. 4. The Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way according to II Thessalonians 2:7, so by necessity the Church will also be taken out of the way. 5. Events such as the judgment seat of Christ and the marriage of Christ and the Church cannot be explained. 6. There would be no saints in natural bodies during the Millennium without a pretribulation rapture.<sup>41</sup> Paul Feinberg would add a seventh, saying the rapture passages are different than the Second Coming passages.<sup>42</sup> A careful look at these reasons reveals that they are superficial and in fact some of them actually support a posttribulation rapture view.

First, Walvoord claims there is no evidence of the Church being in the tribulation. But Revelation 13:7 says that the Antichrist will "make war with the saints" and overcome them. The pretribulationist would say that these saints were those saved after the rapture, but this is circular reasoning. There is no contextual evidence to support this view. They say there is no mention of the Church but when there is a mention they pass it off as referring to post-rapture saints because of their presupposition of a pretribulation rapture. Another argument in line with this one is that there is no mention of the word "church" in Revelation 4-18. But there is also no mention of the Church being in heaven so this is an argument of silence which is really no

<sup>39</sup>. Scofield, p. 1000.

<sup>40</sup>. This is held by both covenant theologians and dispensationalists; e.g. Harold O.J. Brown, "Theological Reflections: Covenant and Dispensation," Trinity Journal, November 1981, pp. 69-70; also Saucy.

<sup>41</sup>. Walvoord, pp. 252-53.

<sup>42</sup>. Gleason Archer, Jr., Paul Feinberg, Douglas Moo, Richard Reiter, The Rapture, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 80-86.

argument at all. In fact, John never uses the word "church" in a universal sense and in view of the intense persecution (the Antichrist will actually overcome the saints) it is no wonder that there are no organized bodies of believers mentioned during this time period.

The second proof given states that the Church is promised deliverance from the wrath of God.<sup>43</sup> According to Romans 5:9 the only condition necessary to receive this promise is to be justified by Christ's blood. Harold Lindsell points out that this promise is to all believers, before and during the tribulation (see Rev. 7:3).<sup>44</sup> The only way the dispensational view could be correct in light of this promise being for "all" saints, is to have each person that is saved during the tribulation raptured as soon as they are saved. This is not a promise of protection from the Antichrist. Throughout history, the Church has suffered persecution and is told to expect persecution.<sup>45</sup> The Church will be protected from God's wrath just like the Israelites were protected in Egypt from the plagues.<sup>46</sup> God's people were not taken out of the way; they were protected in the midst of it all. Another Old Testament example is Noah being protected by the ark while God's wrath came down all around him; "but as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the son of man be."<sup>47</sup> The wrath of God is clearly upon the unbeliever who accepts the mark of the beast,<sup>48</sup> and only on them.<sup>49</sup> Christians will have the seal of God on them<sup>50</sup> just like the people of God in Ezekiel chapter nine who were protected from God's wrath. This seal is probably the Holy Spirit; "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise."<sup>51</sup>

Revelation 3:10 proposes a particular problem. It reads, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Feinberg points out that this is a promise to be "kept from" (tereo ek) the hour of testing.<sup>52</sup> Douglas Moo answers this problem by pointing out that the only other example of the use oftereo ek in biblical Greek is found in John 17:15 which

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<sup>43</sup>. I Thessalonians 5:9, 1:9-10; Revelation 3:10; Romans 5:9.

<sup>44</sup>. Harold Lindsell, World Events and the Return of Christ (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1970), p. 152.

<sup>45</sup>. II timothy 3:12.

<sup>46</sup>. Exodus 8:22, 9:4, 9:26.

<sup>47</sup>. Matthew 24:37.

<sup>48</sup>. Revelation 14:9-10.

<sup>49</sup>. Revelation 7:3.

<sup>50</sup>. Revelation 7:3.

<sup>51</sup>. Ephesians 1:13.

<sup>52</sup>. The Rapture, pp. 63-72.

states, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from [tereo ek] the evil." This passage clearly shows that a removal of the Church from the earth is not necessary for God to keep the Church from the hour of testing.<sup>53</sup>

The third line of evidence for a pretribulation rapture is the promise of Christ's return being imminent; by imminent the dispensationalist means an any moment, secret, and unexpected return of Christ. This idea is based on passages like Luke 12:40; "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not."<sup>54</sup> These versus do not teach that Christ could come at any moment. In fact, at the time of these writings the apostles also wrote of events that would occur before Christ's return. The gospel would be preached to the whole world;<sup>55</sup> Peter would die as an old man, a martyrs death;<sup>56</sup> and Paul would preach the gospel in Rome.<sup>57</sup> A key passage which disproves an any moment rapture view is II Thessalonians 2:1-10. Verse one begins with, "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him"(NIV). This passage talks as if the two occurrences of the Lord's coming and the rapture take place at the same time and will not take place until after the Antichrist comes(vs. 3). This passage was written to brothers (vs. 1). Christians are warned in the Bible about the Antichrist for good reason- to prepare them for the persecution because they will not be delivered until the Antichrist is revealed and then destroyed by the Lord's coming.<sup>58</sup> The Thessalonians were going through a lot of persecution<sup>59</sup> and II Thessalonians was written to encourage them. They were promised relief but not until the second coming of Christ in glory.<sup>60</sup> If there was a rapture seven years prior to the second coming, then the rapture, not the second coming, would be their time of relief.

I Thessalonians 5:4 is an extension of the rapture passage in chapter four; it states, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." Douglas Moo says, "What Paul rather clearly suggests is that day overtakes both believers and unbelievers- but only for the latter does it come 'as a thief'- unexpected and harmful."<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, this passage is clearly talking about the "sudden destruction: which will come on all the world. Paul has not

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<sup>53</sup>. The Rapture, pp. 94-95.

<sup>54</sup>. see also Matthew 24:44.

<sup>55</sup>. Matthew 24:14.

<sup>56</sup>. John 21:18-19.

<sup>57</sup>. Acts 23:11, 27:24.

<sup>58</sup>. II Thessalonians 2:8.

<sup>59</sup>. II Thessalonians 1:4-6.

<sup>60</sup>. II Thessalonians 1:7-10.

<sup>61</sup>. The Rapture, p. 185.

switched thoughts from chapter four, so this link can show that the rapture of chapter four is the same as "the day of the Lord" in chapter five.

Revelation 16:15 says, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walketh naked, and they see his shame." Harold Lindsell says about this verse, "Obviously these must be saints of God who do not have the mark of the beast on them and who have not been martyred."<sup>62</sup> These are tribulation saints because in verse 14 just prior to this, the preparation for the battle of Armageddon is talked about. Even during the tribulation the idea of Christ coming as a thief is referred to, so if this means a totally unexpected imminent return, it shouldn't be here at the end of the tribulation.<sup>63</sup>

The fourth reason for a pretribulation rapture is that the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way according to II Thessalonians 2:7 so by necessity the Church will also be taken out of the way. This is probably the poorest reason given. It is clear that many will be saved during the tribulation.<sup>64</sup> Does this mean they will be saved without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?<sup>65</sup> And will they be converted and disciplined without one single mature believer to help them?<sup>66</sup> No; this "taking out of the way" is referring to the removal of the restraining power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

The fifth proof states that there is a necessary interval of time for events to take place such as the marriage of the Lamb, the believers meeting Christ and coming with Christ, and the judgment seat of Christ. First, the judgment seat of Christ in Matthew 25:31-46 is at least at the end of the tribulation and is probably at the end of the Millennium.<sup>68</sup> Second, the marriage of the Lamb is figurative of the uniting of believers with Christ and this occurs at the very end of the tribulation. Matthew 25:1-13 gives the parable of the ten virgins. At the bridegroom's return, five of the virgins went out to meet him. Once he came the five virgins went with him to the marriage and the doors were shut. The other five came and the bridegroom said, "I know you not." There is no second chance during the tribulation period to get to know the bridegroom because the wedding takes place at the end of the tribulation at Christ's second coming, and once he comes it will be too late to repent. The rapture does occur just prior to the battle of Armageddon as can be seen in Revelation 14:14-20. It is interesting that in the most complete

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<sup>62</sup>. Lindsell, p. 153.

<sup>63</sup>. George Eldon Ladd, The Blessed Hope (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 110-11.

<sup>64</sup>. Revelation 7:14, 14:4.

<sup>65</sup>. see Romans 8:9.

<sup>66</sup>. see Romans 10:14.

<sup>67</sup>. Archer, The Rapture, pp. 126-28.

<sup>68</sup>. See Revelation 20:11-15.

book of end time events (the book of Revelation), the first mention of a rapture refers to the end of the tribulation and is not even hinted at in the beginning of the book. The last example in this argument, the idea of Christ coming for his saints and his coming with the saints, is easily answered. Even in the rapture passage of I Thessalonians 4:13-18 Jesus brings saints with him (vs. 14). The posttribulation view states that when Christ comes the believers will be raptured to him receiving new bodies, meeting him in the air to return with him to reign on the earth. It is like the virgins in Matthew 25:6 who went to meet the bridegroom. It is also like the people who went out to meet Jesus as he made his triumphal entry. A third example is the brethren who went out to meet Paul outside the city and accompanied him as he entered Rome in Acts 28:15-16.<sup>69</sup>

The sixth proof states that there must be saints with natural bodies for the Millennium and a posttribulation rapture would make this impossible. Verses cited for this proof are: Isaiah 19:18-25, 60:1-3, 65:20-25; Zechariah 14:16-21. None of these verses stated that the saints cannot have glorified bodies. The pretribulationist bases his idea on the fact that there will be sin and sickness during the Millennium; this is true, but there will also be unsaved people during the Millennium.<sup>70</sup> The Bible does not say that everyone in the world will be destroyed except for the Christians at Christ's second coming. Only those participating in the battle of Armageddon will be destroyed at his coming, thus making it possible for unglorified bodies to enter the Millennium. Also, those with glorified bodies will not look any different than those without glorified bodies if Jesus' glorified body can be used as an example.

The last reason for believing a pretribulation rapture is the idea that the rapture passages and the second coming passages are different in content. In reality the rapture passages (I Thessalonians 4:13-18 and I Corinthians 15:51-52) are very similar to the second coming passages and is actually a strong proof for a posttribulation rapture. Matthew 24:27-31 gives an account of "the coming of the son of man." This passage is definitely referring to Christ's final return because it will be "as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west" (vs. 27); certainly not a secret occurrence. Verse 29 makes this very clear saying that his coming will occur "immediately after the tribulation of those days," referred to in chapter 24. If it can be shown that the coming of Christ in Matthew is the same as the coming of Christ in the rapture passages, then the pretribulation rapture theory will have no biblical evidence and thus it will have to be discarded. Matthew 24:30-31 says:

And then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

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<sup>69</sup>. Ladd, The Blessed Hope, p. 91.

<sup>70</sup>. Revelation 20:7-9.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17 says:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God [it doesn't seem to be silent and secret]: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

I Corinthians 15:51-52 says:

Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

In all three passages the sounding of the trumpet is mentioned. In I Corinthians it says it will be the last trumpet. Logic would conclude that there will be no more trumpets after the last trumpet and it is probably referring to the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 which signals Christ's final return. In all of these passages we have the gathering of the elect which Romans 8:33 says are Christians. The Matthew passage and the Thessalonians passage both refer to clouds and angels taking part in this event. It is clear that all three passages are referring to the same event.

It has been shown that all of the so called "proofs" for a pretribulation rapture do not prove a pretribulation rapture. In fact, most of them prove just the opposite. Now a look at some further evidence for a posttribulation rapture is in order. Three will be cited: the history of the Christian Church, Daniel 12:1-2, and the blessed hope.

In the history of the Church, all the early Church Fathers, the Catholic Church, the Reformation leaders and the Church up to the 1800's taught either the amillennial view or a posttribulation rapture, and they believed they would see the Antichrist.<sup>71</sup> There is no evidence of anyone teaching a pretribulation rapture before 1812.<sup>72</sup> The pretribulation theory was first proclaimed by a 15 year old girl who claimed to receive a new revelation from God.<sup>73</sup> Darby and Scofield popularized and systematized this theory and now it may even be the most widely held belief of eschatology among Christians; but history does not support this view.

Daniel 12:1-2 speaks of the rapture where those "that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." This clearly occurs

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<sup>71</sup>. Ladd, The Blessed Hope, pp. 19-34.

<sup>72</sup>. John L. Bray, The Origin of the Pretribulation Rapture Teaching (Lakeland, Florida: John L. Bray Ministry inc., 1982), p. 1.

<sup>73</sup>. Jim McKeever, Christians Will Go Through the Tribulation (Medford, Oregon: Omega Publications, 1978), pp. 54-55.

after the "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." Walter Martin believes this to be the best evidence for a posttribulation rapture.<sup>74</sup>

Titus 2:13 says, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." This appearing (epiphaneia) is also mentioned in the second coming passages of Matthew 24:3,27,37,39 and II Thessalonians 2:8. This same Greek word is used in I Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13; James 5:7-8; and I John 2:28. All of these passages talk about the Christian looking forward to seeing this. This is the Christian's blessed hope. The rapture passage in I Thessalonians 4:15 also uses this same Greek word. Christ is only coming back again one more time. "He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."<sup>75</sup>

Those who believe in a posttribulation rapture can be divided into two camps: premillennialists and amillennialists. The premillennial view of the tribulation teaches a seven year period of Great Tribulation prior to the final return of Jesus. The amillennial view teaches that there is no seven year tribulation.<sup>76</sup> The differing views stem from different interpretations of Daniel 9:25-27:

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

This gives a timetable of seventy weeks of years.<sup>77</sup> The differing views come concerning when the last week of years occur. The 69 weeks take place between the time of the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 b.c. to restore the worship of the temple, to furnish it, and to set up the government in the land<sup>78</sup> and the coming of the Messiah. The amillennialists believe the last week consists of the three and one half years ministry of Jesus and then three and one half years

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<sup>74</sup>. Walter Martin, The Posttribulation Rapture, cassette.

<sup>75</sup>. Hebrews 9:28.

<sup>76</sup>. John L. Bray, The Second Coming of Christ and Other Related Events (Lakeland, Florida: John L. Bray Ministry inc., 1985), p. 6.

<sup>77</sup>. see Genesis 29:27.

<sup>78</sup>. Ezra 7:1, 11-26.

afterwards.<sup>79</sup> They believe this to be true because they say he is cut off in the midst of the last week even though the text states he is cut off at the end of the 62 weeks plus the seven weeks.<sup>80</sup> The amillennialist also believes the "he" mentioned in verse 27 is the Messiah and the covenant he confirms is the New Covenant.<sup>81</sup> The Messiah stops the necessity of the sacrifices by his death. The premillennialist rejects this view for several reasons. The Messiah is cut off at the end of the 69 weeks not 69 and one half weeks. The "he" spoken of in verse 27 is the prince that comes to destroy the city and sanctuary mentioned in verse 26. The prince is the last person mentioned before verse 27 so it is grammatically necessary that he is the one spoken of in verse 27. Besides this, it is logically necessary because the "he" spoken of is the one who causes the abomination which makes desolation (vs. 27). The Messiah is certainly not the one who causes this sinful act. The amillennialist believes this abomination to be the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.<sup>82</sup> but there is good reason to believe it has not occurred yet. Matthew 24:15 quotes Daniel and says that during this abomination of desolation there will be "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be."<sup>83</sup> During the destruction of Jerusalem over one million Jews perished but under Hitler's reign six million perished which was far worse. The Great Tribulation will even be worse than this. The premillennial view believes that this prince spoken of is the Antichrist or son of perdition referred to in II Thessalonians 2:3-4<sup>84</sup> and the abomination is his standing in the holy place declaring himself to be God. He will not die the death Titus, the emperor who destroyed Jerusalem, died. He will die at the second coming of Christ.<sup>85</sup> There will be a Great Tribulation (which is the subject of the book of Revelation) where the beast (Antichrist; Prince) will overcome the saints.<sup>86</sup> The worst of the tribulation will take place after he breaks the covenant with Israel,<sup>87</sup> which is when he receives his power,<sup>88</sup> and it will last another three and one half years completing the last week spoken of in Daniel. The salvation spoken of in Daniel 9:24 certainly comes to believers now because of Christ's death and resurrection but it cannot be conceived of as completed until the final return of Christ. Therefore, the pretribulation rapture

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<sup>79</sup>. John L. Gray, The Great Tribulation (Lakeland, Florida: John L. Bray Ministry inc., 1982), p. 12.

<sup>80</sup>. see verse 25; the seven weeks are implied in verse 26.

<sup>81</sup>. John L. Bray, The Great Tribulation, p. 12.

<sup>82</sup>. John L. Bray, The Second Coming of Christ and Other Related Events, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup>. Matthew 24:21.

<sup>84</sup>. Cross reference with Matthew 24:15.

<sup>85</sup>. II Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:20.

<sup>86</sup>. Revelation 13:7.

<sup>87</sup>. Daniel 9:27.

<sup>88</sup>. Revelation 13:5.

view and the amillennial view of the tribulation must be rejected in favor of the posttribulation, premillennial theory. The amillennial view is a well constructed view and consists of more than just a denial of a future seven years of great tribulation. The next chapter will cover the amillennial and premillennial view of the millennium.

### **The Millennium**

George Eldon Ladd gives a good definition of the premillennial view of the Millennium:

Premillennialism is the doctrine stating that after the second coming of Christ, he will reign for a thousand years over the earth before the final consummation of God's redemptive purpose in the new heavens and the new earth of the Age to come. This is the natural reading of Revelation 20:1-6.<sup>89</sup>

The Millennium shall be a time of peace as Isaiah 11:6 says; "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." There will be no more war<sup>90</sup> because Christ shall rule with a rod of iron.<sup>91</sup> There are two main branches in the premillennial view: the dispensational view and the historical view. The main difference of these two views is their specific understanding of events during the Millennium. The preeminence of Israel among the nations is the first disputed claim. The dispensationalist believes that Israel will have a place of supremacy in the governmental functions of the world, but the dispensationalist would also admit that all three companies of resurrected saints (the Old Testament saints, the Church, and the tribulation martyrs) will take part in the governmental responsibilities.<sup>92</sup>

The most disputed occurrence among premillennialists is the question of whether the Old Testament sacrificial system will be reinstated. In Ezekiel 40-48, Ezekiel prophesied that the temple would be rebuilt and the sacrificial system restored. There are both pros and cons to holding a literal fulfillment of this prophecy. Walvoord holds to a literal fulfillment and says that the sacrifices will be for a memorial of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>93</sup> In this age the Church has the Lord's Supper as a memorial "until he comes." The Millennium will also have a memorial. The sacrifices in the Old Testament looked forward to Christ's sacrifice. The sacrifices during the Millennium will look back to the once for all sacrifice of Jesus. If these passages in Ezekiel are to be spiritualized, then what is the spiritual meaning? All too often people use the word

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<sup>89</sup>. Robert Clouse, ed., The Meaning of the Millennium (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1977), p. 17.

<sup>90</sup>. Isaiah 2:4.

<sup>91</sup>. Psalm 2:9.

<sup>92</sup>. Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>93</sup>. John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, p. 312.

"spiritual" to mean "to do away with." To spiritualize only means that the passage is a picture of a greater reality. But what is this reality? The Bible does not give any support for a spiritual alternative, so if proper hermeneutics are used, then a literal fulfillment is the only explanation. This will take place during the Millennium where the kingdom of God is manifested literally in history. Walvoord states:

How needful, when dwelling in the blaze of a triumphant Messiah's glory, to have ever before them some memorial of the cross, some palpable record of the humbled Jesus, some visible exposition of his sin-bearing work, in virtue of which they have been forgiven, and saved, and loved.<sup>94</sup>

However, there are problems with this dispensational view. Ladd states that this view is in direct opposition to Hebrews 8:13.<sup>95</sup> Hebrews 8:13 says, "In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." This states that the old covenant is obsolete and has vanished. Besides this, in Ezekiel there is no inclination that the sacrifices are for a memorial. This in itself is a spiritualization of the reason for the sacrifices. The dispensationalist, it seems, has spiritualized in order to fit his own presuppositions without sounding heretical. The New Testament does give us warrant to spiritualize the temple as God's people under the New Covenant offering spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:1-10).

The amillennialist questions the purpose of the Millennium. Alan Johnson gives four reasons why the Millennium is necessary:

1. During the Millennium, Christ will openly manifest his kingdom in world history; the Millennium will provide an actual demonstration of the truthfulness of the divine witness borne by Christ and his followers during their life on earth. It will be a time of the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises to his people.
2. The Millennium will reveal that man's rebellion against God lies deep in man's own heart, not in the Devil's deception. Even when Satan is bound and righteousness prevails in the world, some people will still rebel against God. The final release of Satan will openly draw out this hidden evil.
3. The release of Satan after the Millennium shows the invulnerability of the city of God and the extent of the authority of Christ, since the Devil is immediately defeated and cast into the lake of fire forever.
4. The Millennium will serve as a long period required to do the general "house-cleaning" needed after the preceding ages of sin, during which sin was prevalent.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, p. 314.

<sup>95</sup>. Robert Clouse, ed., The Meaning of the Millennium, p. 26.

<sup>96</sup>. Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 12: "Revelation," by Alan Johnson; 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 581.

I would add a fifth reason in that Christ will show us that we could have taken care of all the poor if we would not have been so selfish.

There will be sinners during the Millennium<sup>97</sup> and so the Millennium will give evidence of the true nature of sin. Sin is not due to an evil society or a bad environment; it comes from the sinful hearts of people. Even during the peaceful reign of Christ on earth, men and women, due to their wicked self-seeking hearts, will turn from God and follow Satan in rebellion.<sup>98</sup> At the culmination of the Millennium Christ will have completed his victory over the three enemies in the book of Revelation: the Antichrist, Satan, and death.<sup>99</sup>

The amillennial position is notably different from the premillennial view of the Millennium. The amillennialist believes that the Millennium is taking place right now and has been going on since the beginning of the Church age. The thousand years spoken of in Revelation chapter 20 is spiritual for a long period of time. Anthony Hoekema teaches that the number ten signifies completeness and so ten to the third power (1000) stands for a complete period of time.<sup>100</sup> The first resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20:4-5 is spiritual, speaking of the Christian's present resurrection with Christ (Eph. 2:4-6).<sup>101</sup> Much emphasis is placed on the Scriptures which seem to teach the resurrection of both believers and nonbelievers at the same time (Jn. 5:28-29; Mt. 13:24-43; Daniel 12:2). The amillennialist believes the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:2 is the binding of Satan from the hearts of believers and he is no longer able to deceive nations in a wholesale fashion as he did in the Old Testament (see Mt. 12:29).

The amillennialist can be commended for his emphasis of the present spiritual kingdom where Christ is reigning in the hearts of believers. Satan can be bound and need not be a threat to the Christian who fixes his eyes on Jesus. However, the amillennial view must be rejected for a number of reasons: First, this idea of the binding of Satan does not deal adequately with the context of Revelation 20:2-3. These verses teach that he will not deceive the nations at all until the 1000 years are up. This binding does not refer to Christians, it refers to the nations. Johnson quotes Mounce saying, "The elaborate measures taken to insure his [Satan] custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities)."<sup>102</sup> These verses also state that Satan is cast into the bottomless pit

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<sup>97</sup>. Isaiah 65:20.

<sup>98</sup>. Revelation 20:7-9.

<sup>99</sup>. George Ladd, The Meaning of the Millennium, p. 18.

<sup>100</sup>. Anthony Hoekema, The Meaning of the Millennium, p. 161.

<sup>101</sup>. R.G. Currell and E.P. Hurlbut, The Ruler of the Kings on the Earth (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1982), p. 95.

<sup>102</sup>. Alan Johnson, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, p. 582, from Revelation, p.353.

and he is certainly not there right now. The amillennial position is also faulty in its interpretation of the first resurrection. Revelation 20:4-5 says, "and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection." The word for "lived" in verse four and in verse five is *ezezan*. The amillennialist spiritualizes the first use of the word *ezezan* but not the second. This is improper hermeneutics because there is no inclination in the context to interpret them differently. Either, both words should be spiritualized or both should be taken to mean a physical resurrection. If they are both spiritualized then both the saved and unsaved will experience a spiritual resurrection but this is universalism which is refuted in verses 11-15. The only other possibility is that they both refer to a physical resurrection. This makes sense in view of the context because those taking part in the first resurrection were already killed as verse four shows (they were beheaded for the witness of Christ).

The Scriptures which seem to teach that the resurrections of the believers and nonbelievers are simultaneous are easily answered when progressive revelation is properly understood. The first and second coming of Christ was indistinguishable in the Old Testament and this is also true with the resurrection of the dead. The verses cited by the amillennialist do not rule out an unforeseen period of time that will occur between the first and second resurrection. John, in the book of Revelation, completes the incomplete eschatology of the earlier writings in the Bible.

Walvoord points out that there were no amillennialists before the third century. Premillennialism was held by such men as Papias who was closely associated with the apostle John.<sup>103</sup> John L. Bray in his attempt to prove the ancient history of amillennialism points out that Papias did say that many Christians did not hold to his views but neglects to mention that Papias never said what views they did hold. Bray cites a number of early fathers who held to premillennialism and concludes that they were wrong.<sup>104</sup> Amillennialism was first believed during the third century when Platonism was rising. The rejection of a physical reign of Christ fits well with the Platonic aversion to matter. Historically, premillennialism has the edge on amillennialism.

In conclusion it must be said that dispensationalism under-emphasizes the present reality of the kingdom of God but amillennialism does away with the future kingdom of Christ. Therefore, only historical premillennialism provides the balance, considering all of Scripture and progressive revelation. In view of all that has been discussed above, the natural reading of Revelation 20:1-15 should be held and taken literally.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>103</sup>. John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 37-44.

<sup>104</sup>. John L. Bray, *The Millennium* (Lakeland, Florida: John L. Bray Ministry inc., 1985), pp. 50-57.

Dispensationalism is a recent system of theology but must not be rejected on this account alone. Much good has come from the emphases of dispensationalism. Ladd, a nondispensationalist, highly praises the dispensationalist saying:

It is doubtful if there has been any other circle of men who have done more by their influence in preaching, teaching and writing to promote a love for Bible study, a hunger for the deeper Christian life, a passion for evangelism and zeal for missions in the history of American Christianity.<sup>105</sup>

The dispensationalist's advocating of a literal interpretation of Scripture should be praised, but nuanced. The dispensationalist's strong stance against the forces of liberalism has been crucial in curbing the detrimental effects of liberalism in the Church. There has been a resurgence in prophetic studies due to the dispensationalists, which has been neglected in the past. This is good because "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."<sup>106</sup> The dispensationalists' emphasis that God is not done with Israel yet is also to be commended. Much of dispensationalism must be rejected (e.g. two purposes and people of God; pretribulation rapture theory), but the Christian cannot throw out the baby with the bath water. The heretical beliefs of some dispensationalists must be rebuked but the Christian cannot generalize an accusation on all dispensationalists because of a few radicals on the fringes of the dispensational camp.

Jesus Christ is coming and it very well may be soon. The enemy will only get worse: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."<sup>107</sup> The Antichrist will unite his followers against the true Church and so the Church, if it hopes to have an impact on this world, must also unite in purpose and in love. Christ prayed that his followers would be one (Jn. 17:11) and this is the only hope for the true "people of God." Eschatology is peripheral theology and must not tear the Church apart. If it does, then it is not of God. But if the study of eschatology causes an excitement about Christ's second coming and if it reminds Christians that people need to be saved from the deceptions of Satan, then it is good and is from God. The study of eschatology can strengthen the faith of Christians when they see that God knows exactly what will come about and is in total control. In view of all that has been written, the Christian must act now because he is in the last days (Acts 2:17-21), and he must pray "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>. George Eldon Ladd, Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 49.

<sup>106</sup>. II Timothy 3:16-17.

<sup>107</sup>. II Timothy 3:13.

<sup>108</sup>. Revelation 22:20.

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