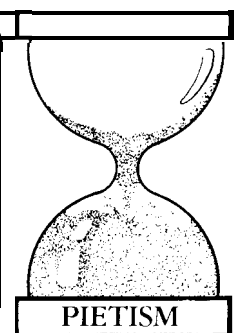


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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IES: ITCHING EARS SYNDROME

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A Medical History

Paul, the companion of the Beloved Physician Luke, warns against a spiritual malady called "itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). The Itching Ears Syndrome (IES, pronounced "ease") is a burning problem in regard to *prophetic* issues. Man seems to have a relentless itch to know the future.

Man first picked up IES by eating some fruit not suited to his palate (Gen. 3). The resultant itch seems to be aggravated by man's environmental conditions: he is a creature enmeshed in time. He is "set behind and before" by the eternal God (Psa. 139:5); he is quarantined in the present. This frustrates him in that he is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), Who is eternal (1 Tim. 6:16). In fact, God set eternity in his heart (Eccl. 3:11 NASB) by creating him with an immortal soul.

This explains the addiction of the Old Testament era nations to seeking future knowledge by illicit means, as even Israel's King Saul did with the Witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:7ff). Consider God's prohibition on such:

There shall not be found among you any one, that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD (Deut. 18:10-11).

A corollary complication of IES is this burning thirst for future knowledge, which explains the ridiculous widespread use of astrological elixirs in most American newspapers.

God has certified only His apostles and prophets to prescribe proper doses of the future for us, but *for an ethical end only*.¹ Oftentimes, even it is somewhat obscure and of no help to those with advanced IES. Never does the Great Physician grant such future knowledge as a potion to relieve IES.

The Pandemic Epidemic

One of the most remarkable features of modern evangelical Christendom is its own apparently insatiable thirst to know the details of the future, as a trivial pursuit. This indicates that IES is infectious, striking even good families (such as the family of God). IES is epidemic. Most Christian bookstores are overstocked with placebo prescriptions (prophecy books) detailing far-fetched, futuristic scenarios.

I was in a local bookstore here in Greenville, S. C., awhile back. Right beside my own book, *The Beast of Revelation* (which seeks to demonstrate Nero was the Beast), was a book with a picture of Mikhail Gorbachev on the cover. It "proved" that *he* is the beast (at least he has a

mark on his head! ²). Beside that book was one with a picture of a man with a Universal Pricing Code bar on his head looking up quizzically at the mark.

Best selling Christian books have been written that even draw up detailed battle maps for the supposed coming Great Tribulation, e.g., Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. And these are almost always from *dispensational* writers.³

The Bifurcated Glottis Symptom⁴

It is surprising, however, that dispensationalists would be publishing such works. This is because *theoretically* such is inimical (harmful) to dispensational theology. As John Walvoord put it:

The hope of the return of Christ to take the saints to heaven is presented in John 14 as an imminent hope. There is no teaching of any intervening event. The prospect of being taken to heaven at the coming of Christ is not qualified by description of any signs or prerequisite events.⁵

Consequently, dispensationalists should be the last to prophesy the approaching end based on signs. Such undermines their most distinctive doctrine: the ever imminent, signless, *secret* rapture.

But there are profits to be made in pharmaceuticals, even placebos! Although theoretically inimical to dispensationalism, on the *practical* level few average dispensationalist Christians realize this. This explains why there is a phenomenally large market for date-setting prescriptions by dispensationalists, despite its being inimical to dispensational theory! The most recent example of this tendency is Edgar C. Whisenant's chameleon titled embarrassment: 88 *Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, or 88 *Reasons Why the Rapture May Be in 1988*, or 88 *Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988* (apparently title differences depend on reprint dates).

Despite some protestations of concern from certain perceptive dispensationalists, the tendency to date-setting continues. The fat profits are too big for these false prophets to pass by. Let me illustrate this from both the unsophisticated and the sophisticated dispensationalist.

2. Comedian Robin Williams once commented that he hoped Clint Eastwood would be elected President of the United States after Reagan. He felt Eastwood would sit down with Gorbachev and tell him there was going to be absolutely no discussion of nuclear disarmament until Gorbachev got the map of Albania off his head.

3. For a classic study of this, see Dwight Wilson's *Armageddon Now!* (1977).

4. Which being interpreted means: the "forked tongue." This is a side-effect of the burning thirst elixirs prescribed by quack doctors.

5. John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), pp. 78-79.

1. For an excellent summary statement of this fact, see B. B. Warfield, "The Prophecies of St. Paul" in Samuel G. Craig, ed., *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), pp. 470ff.

Pediatric Sequela

I have before me a Crusade Newsletter dated April, 1975, from the popular dispensationalist evangelist, Jack Van Impe, known as "the Walking Bible." The headlines read: "Messiah 1975? The Tribulation 1976?" The *first sentence* of this article following the suggestive title reads: "We do not believe in setting dates concerning the return of Christ. . . Though we do not set dates, it is equally dangerous to stand on the opposite end of the teeter-totter and say: 'Because no one knows the day and the hour, it is wrong to preach that the return of Christ is near.'" He then continues just a few paragraphs later: "According to typology in the book of Leviticus, these Jews anticipate that the world's greatest event – the appearance of their Messiah – will happen in September of this year. WOW! I do not accept dates. . . but suppose they are right!"⁶

In another of his writings Van Impe 'noted: "Surely every thinking person will, upon contemplation of this message, confirm that we are indeed in the space age – that every Bible prophecy is already within the initial stages of fulfillment and that the event accompanying these signs – the return of the Lord **Jesus Christ** – **is at the door.**"⁷

In the popular book edited by Charles Lee Feinberg, entitled *Prophecy and the Seventies*, we find a statement by evangelist Alden A. Gannett:

While many of God's people through the centuries have looked for Christ's imminent return, it is **only in our generation that the events of Ezekiel 37 are beginning to come to pass: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When its branch is tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near; So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled"** (Mt 24:32-34).⁸

But it is not just the evangelists seeking numbers for the record books who do such things. Dispensationalist pop-theologian Hal Lindsey has written a book entitled *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (1980). He would protest with Van Impe that he himself refuses to set dates. But what else can we make of his statements? "The decade of the 1980's could very well be the last decade of history as we know it."⁹ "[A]fter nearly 2,000 years of wandering through exile, the Jews returned to Palestine and formed the nation of Israel on May 14, 1948. On that day, the prophetic countdown began! . . . For this reason I am convinced that we are now in the unique time so clearly and precisely forecast by the Hebrew prophets. "¹⁰ "As I wrote 10 years ago in *The Late Great Planet Earth*, I believe [the Antichrist] is alive today – alive and waiting to come forth."¹¹ Apparently he believes that avoiding the *precise* day and hour leaves the way open for suggesting the

6. Jack Van Impe, *The Jack VanImpe Crusade Newsletter*, Vol. III, #4 (Box J, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068), pp. 1, 2.

7. Jack Van Impe, *Your Startling Future!* (Royal Oak, MI: Jack Van Impe Crusades) pp. 55-56.

8. Alden A. Gannett, "Dry Bones Coming Alive" in Charles Lee Feinberg, *Prophecy and the Seventies* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), pp. 178-179.

9. Hal Lindsey, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam, 1980), p. 8.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

week or year or decade.

Then there is Dave Hunt, who takes a totally different approach but arrives at the same conclusion, i.e., that we are only now living in the very "last days": "The appearance of Antichrist is the climactic episode in the cosmic struggle between God and Satan for the souls of mankind. . . . The most convincing evidence that the awesome climax is near is the seduction of Christianity by the Lie dressed in Biblical language. This is something new. . . . This is strong evidence indeed that the Antichrist could appear very soon – which means that the rapture may be imminent."¹²

Adult Sequela

But then, Lindsey and Hunt are as easy to discredit as evangelists Van Impe and Gannett: none of these is a doctor. But what are we to make of the statements of two of the leading dispensational doctors of our day, Herman A. Hoyt and Charles C. Ryrie? Though inoculated with an appropriate Th.D. Serum, even they come down with "Rapture Fever," which is a serious symptom of IES.

Ryrie, an able, noteworthy proponent of dispensationalism, not only catches Lindsey's Rapture Fever but even hallucinates in the same way – a popular, folksy, trite writing style – in his worst-selling *The Living End*.

But even if the messages of the prophets do not alert you, before finally dismissing them, take a good look again at current events. Have you forgotten how recently the giant of the East has begun to shake himself, along with other emerging nations of the world? How do you account for these unusual events converging in our present day? Jesus said: "Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door" (Matthew 24:33 NIV).¹³

Then there is Herman Hoyt, past president of Grace Theological Seminary. In the popular book, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, Hoyt is the only contributor who date-sets: "The movement of events in our day suggests that the establishment of the kingdom is not far away."¹⁴

The Vaccine?

Fortunately, present epidemiological data suggest that IES will run its course by the year 2000, well beyond forty years past 1948. Due to recent Whisenant Vaccine overdoses, we might see its cure much sooner.¹⁵ In the meantime, perhaps a cold compress of I.C.E. might relieve some of the itching symptoms.

12. Dave Hunt, *Peace, Prosperity, and the Coming Holocaust* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1983), pp. 255-256. Why does he say "the rapture may be imminent," when elsewhere he teaches it is *a/ways* imminent? See *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1988), pp. 9, 31.

13. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Living End* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1976), pp. 128-129.

14. Herman A. Hoyt, "Dispensational Premillennialism," in Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 63.

15. There is even a Chattanooga, Tennessee, cardiologist that is supplementing Whisenant's vaccine with a surgical procedure: Richard Ruhling, M. O., in his *Sword Over America*. According to an October, 1989, Chattanooga News-Free Press article: Ruhling "expects the first trumpet of Revelation 8:7 to sound this fall with an economic collapse as explained in James 1:9-11." "Or. Ruhling says the 50th jubilee in 1994 correlates with Usher's Chronology that our world will be 6,000 years old in 1996. The seventh millennium" will begin shortly thereafter.