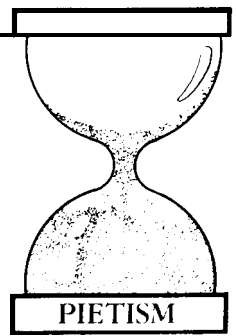


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Kale of Silence"



Vol. IX, No. 11

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November, 1995

DISPENSATIONALIST FRIEND, DO NOT DESPAIR!

by Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., Th. D.

In our last newsletter we noted the pessimistic mind set prevailing among dispensationalists. This pessimism undermines any hope of Christian cultural renewal, thereby derailing long-term labor for the confrontation and conquest of evil. In this newsletter I am writing a letter to dispensationalists to encourage them to remove the blinders of despair.

I want to provide a *brief*, bite-sized study of the five leading passages that seem to lay before us the prospect of cultural gloom and doom. The study will be very brief, but will, nevertheless, provide evidence that the texts so often associated with a pessimistic view of our future do *not* really teach such. Let us see how this is so.

Daniel 9:24-27

Daniel's prophecy has been called by many dispensationalists "the key to Prophecy." Walvoord comments that the "interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 is of major importance to premillennialism as well as pretribulationism."¹ Being such, it is "one of the most important prophecies of the Bible."² McClain suggests "no single prophetic utterance is more crucial"³ Pentecost agrees with McClain that Daniel 9 gives us "the indispensable chronological key to all New Testament prophecy."⁴ English calls it an "(extremely important prophecy)."⁵

I am sure you are quite familiar with this passage. But what does this all-important Daniel 9 passage prophesy? It is used by dispensational scholars to define a *future* seven year period of Great Tribulation. In this scheme, the first sixty-nine weeks were fulfilled up to the ministry of Christ, ending just prior to His crucifixion. But the last week was put on hold until a future date; the "prophetic time clock" was temporarily stopped. In that future seventieth week, God will turn once again to deal with Israel. It is at that time the Antichrist will make, then break, a covenant with Israel and cause a flood of desolation.

This is a horrible scenario of dominion by Antichrist. But you must ask yourself: Is this approach really credible? This whole approach to Daniel 9 is anti-contextual, reducing the scenario to an illusion with no foundation in prophetic reality.

Notice, dispensational friend, that the prophecy speaks of a specifically defined time-frame: seventy weeks (that is, 490 years, based on a seven day week standing for seven years). In fact, in the Hebrew we read: "Seventy weeks *is*" determined. The seventy weeks (plural) is considered as a unit: "is" (singular). The whole idea of the passage is to *measure* a God-ordained time-frame. But the dispensational approach expands the measuring device of 490 years to incorporate (thus *far!*) a period already surpassing 2000 years! The gap imported into the unified text goes directly against the stated notion of the

text, which is to measure a set period of time: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people" (Dan. 9:24).

Daniel 9 leads up to and includes the crucifixion of Christ in the first century; it does not leap over the all-important redemptive work of Christ. Nor does it stretch out over centuries beyond Christ's ministry. The goals sought in the prophecy are specifically stated as being six (Dan. 9:24). The abominations (mentioned later) are *not* included in the goals of the time-frame, however. Nowhere in the six goals do we have room for the abominations; these abominations *follow* the events of the seventieth week. Just as A.D. 70 follows a few decades after the events of Christ's crucifixion.

Matthew 24

Matthew 24 is a well-known text that speaks of great prophetic judgments. Who has not heard of "wars and rumours of wars" (v. 6)? "False prophets" (v. 11)? "Enduring to the end" (v. 13)? "The abomination of desolation" (v. 15)? "Great tribulation" (v. 21)? "The powers of the heavens shaken" (v. 29)? And given the widespread dispensational commitments, who has not dreaded the approach of these things? Many dispensational books point to the ominous "signs of the times" that are now crowding the newspapers. Can the Great Tribulation be far off?

Take your Bible in hand, though, and see what *Jesus* says about the time of the Great Tribulation. Rather than letting the newspapers alarm you, let the context of Jesus' words inform you.

It is important to notice the reason the Lord gave this prophetic discourse. In Matthew 23:38 He condemned the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, declaring it spiritually desolate. In response to this, His disciples showed Him the beautiful stones of the Temple (Matt. 24:1) - certainly an impressive place in which to worship God. But Jesus insists that "not one stone will be left upon another" (Matt. 24:2). This leads His disciples to ask Him: "When shall these things be?" (Matt. 24:2).

Note, first, that their question prompts the discourse to follow; and their question of "when" was generated out of His statement regarding the prophecy of the Temple's *total destruction*. We know today that the Temple to which they pointed (Matt. 24:1) was destroyed in A.D. 70- and has not stood since. Why should we look off to the future for the "when shall these things be"? The Temple has *already* been destroyed.

What is more, Jesus very clearly tells us when "these things" shall be: "(Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled" (Matt.

24:34), **Notice**, byway of example, that the Great Tribulation is mentioned in verse 21. So here in verse 34 He is telling them that "all these things" (including the Great Tribulation) will occur in "this generation." How can we legitimately re-interpret these words to mean something other than that Jesus expected these events to occur in the lifetime of His disciples? Especially since we know for a fact the Temple was indeed destroyed then?

We can no more credibly say that the Great Tribulation (and associated events) haunts our future than Daniel's 490 years actually cover a period of 2000 years. Let us move on,

2 Thessalonians 2

Dispensationalist scholar John Walvoord informs us that the Man of Lawlessness revealed in 2 Thessalonians 2 is "the key to the whole program of the Day of the Lord," By that he means this passage is a key passage for the dispensational system and that it speaks of a yet future time of great turmoil, that is, the Tribulation era,

According to the dispensationalist, then, the future development of society and culture is bleak due to the arising of this Man of Lawlessness with his evil and idolatrous intentions, And certainly if this prophecy lies still in our future, things do look bad, But once again we must look at the context to seek the original meaning of Paul,

There are several reasons we may best understand 2 Thessalonians 2 as finding fulfillment long ago, in Paul's generation and prior to the destruction of the Temple: (1) Paul related the actions of the Man of Lawlessness to the **Temple**, which was still standing as he wrote (2 Thess. 2:4). Since A.D. 70 this Temple no longer exists, (2) Paul mentioned a present restraint of the Man of Lawlessness (2:6), which indicated a contemporary relevance to Paul's original audience. (3) The knowledge of the Thessalonians regarding the 'restrainer' (2:6) indicates the issues were matters for their day, They seem to understand what is relatively obscure to us. (4) Paul spoke about the Man of Lawlessness's present operation in mystery form during his day (2:7). Surely this does not continue for two thousand years,

Once again the fulfillment of another dreadful prophecy of Scripture does not haunt our future. Its accomplishment lies in our distant past, It is a relevant warning of events looming during the lives of Paul's original audience,

Revelation 13 and 17

In Revelation chapters 13 and 17 we have two horrible characters that surely did not have relevance to the first century Christians: the Beast, whose number is 666, and the Great Harlot, who is somehow associated with the Beast, These are fearsome images: the Beast demands idolatrous worship, dominates economic activity, persecutes the saints, and demands a mark showing men's allegiance to him (Rev, 13), The Harlot aligns herself with the Beast and becomes "drunk" on the blood of the saints through her evil debauchery (Rev, 17), The times of the Beast and Harlot are bleak indeed, How can the days of these two wicked personages hold any hope?

But as with the other prophecies of despair, so it is here, These evil characters are confined to the first century in terms of their sphere of influence. And this is as easily demonstrable, my dispensationalist friend, as are the other prophecies above, Consider the Apostle John's own delimiting words, words not

given in mysterious symbol, but in clear, unambiguous statement.

The Book of Revelation opens with these words (note particularly the highlighted words): "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which must short/y take **place**. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for **the time is near**" (Rev. 1:1 -3). At his very introduction he informs his original readers that the events were approaching soon - they do not lie 2000 years in the future,

In case they missed this important time-limitation, he repeats it as he closes: "Then he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place' (Rev. 22:6). 'And he said to me, 'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand'" (Rev, 22:10).

Why should we look to **our** future for the arising of these evil characters? John certainly did not! Indeed, he also mentions the Temple as if it was still standing (Rev. 11:1 -2), which it was when he wrote prior to A.D. 70.

Conclusion

Though we have covered five major prophecies in a very brief space, I trust that the contextual indications of the passages have caused you to realize the precarious nature of the dispensational system, And the unnecessary pessimism resulting from it.

For more information you may order the following studies and tapes from me at 46 Main St., Conestee, SC 29636, Study papers: "The Man of Lawlessness" (\$4); "Daniel's 70 Weeks" (\$4); "The **Book of Revelation and Eschatology**" (\$4); '(The Great Tribulation" (\$5). Tape sets: "Revelation Seminar" (\$20); "Postmillennialism and Preterism" (\$20); "Dispensational Distortions" (\$10); "Major Bible Prophecies" (\$23).

1. John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 24.

2. John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 201, 216

3. Alva J. McClain, *Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 Weeks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940), 9.

4. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 240.

5. E. Schuyler English, "The Gentiles in Revelation," in Charles Lee Feinberg, ed., *Prophecy and the Seventies* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 242.

6. John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990), 493,

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