

2-1-1946

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Recommended Citation

Mayer, F. E. (1946) "Dispensationalism Examined and Found Wanting," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 17 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol17/iss1/9>

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Dispensationalism Examined and Found Wanting*

Premillennialism is currently very popular with the Fundamentalists. The doctrinal statements of all Fundamentalist associations profess belief in the premillennial coming of Christ and of His visible rule on earth during the millennium. Likewise, the Holiness and Pentecostal bodies teach the premillennial coming of Christ. "Christ, the coming king," is one of the four main points of the Foursquare Gospel.

The most radical type of premillennialism is dispensationalism. Dispensationalism was first advocated by J. M. Darby of the Plymouth Brethren about a century ago. The Plymouth Brethren have remained a small sect, but their theory of dispensationalism has been popularized by James H. Brookes of St. Louis (Maranatha, 1870); the Prophetic Conferences since 1878; the Scofield Reference Bible (printed in two million copies, revised edition of 1917), and by W. E. Blackstone's "Jesus Is Coming" (sent gratis to practically all Protestant pastors some thirty-five years ago). Modern dispensationalism is based on the theory that all time is divided into cycles of seven, among them the creation week and Israel's religious calendar (the Sabbath at the end of seven days, Pentecost seven weeks after the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles seven months after the Passover, the Sabbatical Year at the end of seven years, and the Year of Jubilee at the end of seven times seven years). The latter proves, so argue the dispensationalists, that the history of mankind must also be divided into seven aeons, or dispensations, and that, corresponding to the creation week, God appointed six dispensations of labor to be followed by one of rest (the millennium). Scofield defines a dispensation as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." On the basis of 2 Pet. 3:8 some divide the history of the world into seven eras of exactly 1,000 years (sun years), while most dispensationalists make the following division: the dispensation of innocence, ending with the Fall; of conscience, terminated

* A new publication on this subject is *Prophecy and the Church* by Oswald T. Allis, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia, 339 pp., 8¼×5¼. \$2.50.

by the Flood; of human government, ending with the destruction of Sodom; of patriarchal promise, lasting until the destruction of Pharaoh; of the Sinaitic Law, which ended at the crucifixion; of the Gospel, to be ended by Christ's first judgment and to be followed by the dispensation of rest, ushered in by the glorious manifestation of Christ as king of this world and finished by the second Judgment.

Dispensationalism goes beyond premillennialism on another point. The premillennialists view the millennium chiefly as a Christian era in which the resurrected and transfigured saints will rule with Christ. Dispensationalism, however, believes that the millennium is exclusively Judaistic. The dispensationalist holds that the "mystery" of the Church was entirely unknown to the Old Testament and revealed first to the Apostle Paul; that the Church is only a "parenthesis" between the Old Testament kingdom and the renewed and restored kingdom of the millennium, a sort of interruption in the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. The dispensationalists are united in the view that God's purposes as revealed in the Bible are twofold: one is related to the earth, with earthly people and earthly objectives, namely, the history and ultimate glorification of the Jewish race; the other purpose is related to heaven, with heavenly people and heavenly objectives, namely, the Christian Church of the sixth, or New Testament, dispensation. (L. S. Chafer, of Dallas Theological Seminary, in "Dispensationalism," p. 448.) The theory, then, is that the Old Testament promises concerning the establishment of the Davidic throne were temporarily halted, but that ultimately all the Old Testament prophecies, especially those of the Psalms, dealing with Israel, must be carried out to the letter. Much is made of the argument that the promise to Abraham that he would possess the Land of Canaan was an unconditional promise, not contingent upon man's obedience or disobedience, and that all unconditional promises must be literally fulfilled. Another prominent view is, that the Church will be "raptured," that is, taken out of this world when Jesus will fulfill the promises made in His covenant with Israel.

Dr. Oswald T. Allis, professor of Old Testament at Princeton Seminary and later at Westminster Seminary, in the publication referred to, *Prophecy and the Church*, exam-

ines dispensationalism primarily as it is presented in the writings of Darby and in the Scofield Bible. In ten chapters, he thoroughly refutes the principles of dispensationalism, shows the hopeless confusion and the ridiculous deductions of dispensational Bible interpretation. The purpose is to show that the Old Testament prophecies are not to a physical Israel, but are spiritual and refer to the Church. Prof. Allis submits the results of his ripe scholarship in the field of the Old Testament and of his wide reading in dispensational literature. This is by far the most comprehensive study on dispensationalism.

In order that our readers who have to deal with dispensationalism may gain an overview of the chief arguments against dispensationalism, we have taken the liberty of submitting a digest of Dr. Allis' book under four headings:

1. *Theory of Interpretation.* The dispensationalists, being Fundamentalists, accept the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. However, they are literalistic. This seems reverent, because it demands acceptance of every word just as it reads. This method leaves no room for the spiritual meaning which God obviously used in the Old Testament prophecies, nor for the fact that the Old Testament is preparatory for the New. The dispensationalists say that the word "Israel" can only mean a physical Israel. Commenting on Is. 9:7, Scofield says that David's throne is as definitely a historical throne as the throne of the Caesars (pp.16-25). Such literalism involves the dispensationalists in inconsistencies, hairsplitting, and arbitrary interpretations. The "lost week of Daniel" offers considerable difficulty to the premillennialists. The dispensationalists, however, say that this prophecy is clear when one keeps in mind that God has a "Jewish time," that is, only that time in prophecy is to be reckoned when Israel is directly under God's rule, while those periods of history when Israel is not a nation are reckoned as "time out," similarly as the time of a football game is determined by a stop watch (118). In their literalism they hold that leaven is always the principle of corruption and that therefore the Christian Church, built by Christ Himself, is doomed to destruction (87 f.).

2. *The Wrong Philosophy of History.* Christians believe that the Church is the center of the history of the world. Dispensationalism, however, holds that the purpose of history

is twofold: a) To bring about the restoration of Israel under a king of David's line (Jesus) and the elevation of the Jews to the pre-eminent position among the nations; and b) to fulfill the promises to the Church during the present Gospel age, especially that the "mystery" of the Church is to be revealed (98). While St. Paul in Eph. 3 says that the mystery which he was called upon to preach is the glorious truth that Jew and Gentile have become members of Christ's body, the dispensationalists say that the Church itself is the mystery, a *parenthesis* between the Old Testament and the millennial kingdom of Israel. This mystery Church, which "interrupted" temporarily the Messiah's kingdom, will be done away with or "raptured" (90 f.). Dr. Allis shows the inevitable conflicts in which dispensationalists become involved with this theory that the Church is only a parenthesis between the Old Testament and the millennium. It brings the Apostles Peter and Paul into sharp conflict. The dispensationalists distinguish between the professing Church of Peter and the mystery Church of Paul: the former, the "Satanic counterfeit," to be spewed out; the other, the mystery Church, to be "raptured," removed from this world, and to reign with Christ in heaven (102). The Church is thus given a position of secondary importance in the history of this world, and it must make room for Judaism, which will be restored to its world-wide importance (251). Since Paul's mission was to reveal the "mystery," or "parenthesis," Church, he had no business to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4), and he was subsequently punished for going and failing to observe the distinction between the "professing" and the "mystery" Church (104 ff.).

3. *Denial of the Means of Grace.* During the "mystery period" the commission to preach the Gospel was given to the Church. The Church, however, has not been very successful in carrying out its commission, in fact, is virtually bankrupt (236 f.). The Jewish people, however, will become the ambassadors of the Lord (352 f.). Scofield goes so far in the denial of the efficacy of the means of grace as to say that we are now living in the end of the times of the Gentiles and that there is no hope for humanity except in the *personal* return of the Lord in glory (253). In the millennium the Kingdom of God will be established by power (232). This is

the Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible grace. The Calvinistic idea of the sovereignty of God also becomes evident when dispensationalists claim that in the millennium all men will recognize the supremacy of the Davidic kingdom and will submit themselves to its rule. But the sovereignty of God is not sovereign after all, for Scofield and others say that the word *submit* means only "to pretend," "to make a show of obedience." In other words, there will be many under Christ's visible rule who will submit themselves to a rule which they actually hate (241). Strange theology indeed!

4. *Dispensationalism Disparages the Gospel.* While dispensationalists preach the fundamental doctrines, particularly the vicarious atonement, nevertheless they rob the Church of the comfort of the many promises of the Bible. The Old Testament, especially the Psalms, and the Gospel of Matthew are, according to dispensationalism, not intended for the New Testament Church, but for the kingdom of Israel, whose establishment is temporarily postponed. Dispensationalism, however, also robs Israel by taking from it all the Messianic prophecies (277). Dispensationalism claims that during the Church era the preaching of the Cross is necessary, but that in the millennial kingdom there will be no preaching of the Cross. "There is not a ray of grace in it (the millennium), nor a drop of blood," says Scofield (233). The Sermon on the Mount, which was offered as the standard to the Jewish people and rejected by them two thousand years ago, will become the constitution for the future kingdom. The Gospel is only an "*interim* revelation." Dispensationalism is a theological enigma. Dispensationalists are adherents of the Gospel, and yet because of their eschatological dreaming they actually elevate the Law above the Gospel and thus become thoroughgoing anti-Gospelists.

What will be the message of the great missionaries during the Jewish kingdom? Some dispensationalists claim that the Christians of the present dispensation must do as much mission work among the Jews as possible and gain many of them for the Gospel so that they will preach some elements of the Gospel when they take over as a nation in the millennium. (This undoubtedly accounts for the great interest in Jewish missions by most dispensationalists.) According to Scofield, the Old Testament cultus will be re-established in

the millennium. He says that the sacrificial offerings will be a memorial looking back to the Cross, as the offerings of the Old Covenant were anticipatory (247). Dispensationalists ought to study the Letter to the Galatians. Even the work of the Holy Spirit will be suspended entirely during the kingdom age or, as Gaebelein holds, will take on a different character (322). Dispensationalism says in effect: "A more acceptable time, a far greater day of salvation is at hand, and may be ushered in at any moment" (262). F. E. MAYER

The Limitations of Christian Preaching

By JOHN H. C. FRITZ

The objective which one seeks to accomplish and his means for that purpose determine the limitations of his doing. The practice of medicine is limited to a correct diagnosis of the case under consideration and the drugs or other remedial agents that will, if possible, effect a cure. A physician may relate some interesting news events to his patient, speak of his own experience in the recent war, and crack a few good jokes that will produce a hearty laugh, but that will not cure the patient of his tuberculosis or pneumonia or tonsillitis. For the production of a good painting an artist is limited to his colors, brushes, and canvass. The lawyer pleading a case before a jury is limited to the facts in the case and the laws covering it. The mason is limited in his work to stone, brick, trowel, mortar, and plumb line. The cook is limited to food-stuff, cooking utensils, and fire.

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Even so Christian preaching has its limitations. That is in the very nature of the case. The limitations of Christian preaching are that it be *Christian* preaching and therefore take its material from the Word of God and use exposition, example, illustration, and, of course, language itself, to impress the Bible message upon the hearer. Only such preaching will serve the purpose of Christian preaching, to wit, "to make man wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). The important thing in a sermon is the