

KEY AREAS IN ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

Bruce A. Ware, Professor of Christian Theology, Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

SESSION THREE: CLASSIC AND PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONAL MILLENNIAL VIEWS

III. Views of the Millennium

D. Classic (CDP) and Progressive (PDP) Dispensational Premillennialism

1. General Description

- a. CDP and HP agree that Rev 20 speaks of a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth following His return. DP disagrees with amillennialism and HP, though, by holding to a deep and abiding distinction between Israel and the church, some making this distinction not only through the millennium but also into eternity. The millennium is seen predominately as Jewish in character, as the fulfillment of OT prophecies to the nation of Israel of time when Messiah will bring peace and justice to earth. During this time, Israel is restored to her land, Jesus will sit on his throne in Jerusalem, and the OT temple worship and sacrificial system will be reinstated. Ezekiel 40-48 especially is referred to on this, and DP understand the temple and sacrifices there to function in commemorative ways since now Christ's death has paid once for all for all sin.
- b. PDP is a middle position between CDP and HP. PDP sees both lines of discontinuity (as in CDP), and lines of continuity (as in HP), between Israel and the church. The Jewishness of the millennial kingdom is downplayed and the universal reign of Christ over all nations, including Israel is emphasized. Promises made to Israel are fulfilled literally and in their fullness but, this does not mean there are not partial pre-fulfillments of those promises being realized now, or that the kingdom is predominately for Israel. There is some sense now in which the church enters into promises made with Israel (e.g., the new covenant is the church's covenant – see 2 Cor 3 and Heb 8-10), though these promises were not made with Gentiles but only with the nation of Israel (see Eph 2:11ff). So, there is continuity between Israel and the church, as well as ongoing discontinuity.

2. Main Lines of Support

- a. Revelation 20:1-6 certainly supports also the DP position, though much also is added for support. All of the main lines of support from Rev 20 for the HP position are affirmed by the CDP and PDP positions.
- b. CDP places great emphasis on a literal hermeneutics, which leads them to look for literal fulfillments of OT promises given to Israel. The presence of the church in this age does not supplant God's dealing with Israel, especially since certain promises have not yet been fulfilled. The Key passages for the DP are the OT promises to Israel regarding land, Christ as king, and the kingdom on earth. DP stresses especially the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants (Gen 12, 2 Sam 7, Jer 31) as key OT promises to Israel that require a future literal fulfillment. Since these covenants are unconditional, we cannot understand them as being abandoned; and since a literal hermeneutic is the only right way to interpret Scripture, we cannot see them as fulfilled in the church. Thus, since God has promised certain things to Israel which have not yet been fulfilled (e.g. land, king, peace and righteousness), and since these things must be fulfilled literally, there must be some time after Christ's return that these promises are in fact fulfilled – hence, premillennialism.

d. PDP stresses the importance of seeing both lines of continuity between Israel and the Church, and lines of discontinuity. Why? Because the New Testament describes both elements in relation to the fulfillment of promises made to Israel.

- 1) Lines of Continuity – there are many indicators that the New Testament Church shares in promises given to Israel. Among the most important is the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34), inaugurated with Jesus’ death and resurrection (Luke 22:20), leading Paul to being a minister of the NC (2 Cor 3:6), and replacing the Mosaic Covenant (Heb 8-10).

Other indicators: the church as “inward Jews” who have the Spirit (Rom 2:28-29), as true sons of Abraham (Gal 3:29), as the “true circumcision” (Phil 3:3), and as the “Israel of God (Gal 6:16).

This does not mean, as many amillennialists and historic premillennialists would say, that the church now replaces ethnic Israel. Rather, the church is included in the promises made to Israel without Israel losing out on those same promises.

Eph 2:11-12 and Rom 11:17-26 both indicate that the church is added to the promises given to Israel. Israel is not abandoned, for the covenants of promise are made with her, and her natural branches will be grafted back onto the olive tree. But, we (Gentiles) share in those same promises.

- 2) Lines of Discontinuity – God has not abandoned Israel, though at this present time, a hardening has taken place (Rom 11:25). But God will return and restore Israel in the end (Rom 11:26), with her Messiah reigning over her in her land. And although she will be in her land, that land of Israel’s King now encompasses the whole earth. The Messianic King, who comes in the line of David, is given all of the world as his inheritance (Ps 2:6-9), so all will be under his rule.

In the end, promises made to Israel will be fulfilled – king, land, kingdom, renewal of heart – but all this will take place in a manner that includes also believing Gentiles who join in all of the promises given to Israel. When legitimate lines of continuity and discontinuity are both accounted for, we have a view more faithful to the whole of the Bible’s teaching, especially as seen in how the New Testament understands that fulfillment.