

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 27

KINGDOM PROPHECY, PART 8

I'm going to take a detour here for a moment because I discovered a book in which the author actually presents seven presuppositions he uses as his guide to interpreting Scripture. I found this while researching Matthew 24:31 which we will discuss in a few minutes. I've never seen these explicitly and blatantly written down and I thought it might be instructive to see this faulty hermeneutical process as they present it and not as how I may or may not interpret what they are doing. When we are evaluating books that make the claim they are teaching the Scriptures, it is helpful to know their starting point. These theologians do not view and interpret the Bible the way we do but they write a lot of books; therefore, we need to be educated concerning their views so we can discern true from false, biblical from unbiblical. Our starting point is literal hermeneutics; theological systems other than dispensational theology have starting points that are less than literal to varying degrees from system to system. What makes this interesting is he articulated these things in a systematic fashion. In and of themselves, none of these presuppositions are new but you have to dig through the writings of these men to figure them out. He lays them out for all to see.

These presuppositions are from a book entitled *Israel and the New Covenant* by Roderick Campbell on pp. 56-57. This book was published in 1954. Campbell was a Canadian businessman and not a pastor or a theologian. It is very apparent that he was steeped in Reformed Calvinistic theology. This is as clear and overt a presentation of theological hermeneutics as you will probably find anywhere. The driving force behind this is Replacement Theology. Here is how he introduced these presuppositions: "But there are some very significant New Testament presuppositions (or doctrines) which have not been adequately recognized as basic categories in New Covenant reality, or as basic factors in Biblical interpretation." He's wrong about this, of course. All of his theological brethren have laid these out in the past; they just haven't been this upfront about it.

1. The Messianic age which was predicted by the prophets has come. The final era, or dispensation, of history and time on earth—the "latter days" of the prophets—has arrived. In the objective sphere of religion, as in the personal life of the believer, "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).
2. The "heavens" and the "earth" of the Old (Sinai) Covenant have been dissolved; the "new heaven and the new earth" predicted by Isaiah are now here (Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

3. Old Covenant Israel—the theocracy—has found its historical culmination and successor in the living community of Hebrew men and women who recognized in Jesus of Nazareth their long promised Messiah. This community of pious Jews forms the nucleus of the new theocracy—the new and true “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).
4. The Messianic Kingdom spoken of in psalm and prophecy has found its fulfillment in Christ and has been progressively manifesting itself in history, both in judgment and in mercy, since the day of Pentecost.
5. The New Jerusalem which was seen in vision by John (Rev., Chaps. 21 and 22) is the Zion of the New Covenant age. The vision depicts temporal, spiritual and redemptive reality, and not eternal and ultimate glory. It depicts the glory of the grace of God in the redemption of man. It represents the true ideal for the community of the redeemed—the church on earth—rather than the condition of the company of the redeemed in glory.
6. God's dwelling-place or sanctuary (tabernacle or temple) on earth is now in the living community of the true worshipers of God, in which every true believer is a priest. The inmost sanctuary, or Holy of Holies, is in heaven where Christ now reigns as our great High Priest. All this takes the place of the material temple and the symbolic priesthood of the old economy.
7. The promise to Abraham of a Seed and posterity in whom all the families or nations, of the earth would be blessed, is having its fulfillment in Christ and His church, and will be completely fulfilled in this present age.

One of the problems with this presuppositional blueprint is he didn't include all the presuppositions he actually uses to affect his interpretation of the Word of God. That happens when the theologian is imposing his own thoughts on the hermeneutical, exegetical process. When you're just making stuff up out of your own head, it's hard to keep everything straight. Basing our theology on what the Bible actually has to say makes understanding the Bible and sound doctrine so much easier.

He failed to specifically mention his eighth presupposition and it is the presupposition reflected in the title of his book. He believes the church is the fulfillment of the New Covenant rather than Israel and Judah as Jeremiah 31:31 explicitly states. He wrote, “We are seeking a correct understanding of the manner in which the New Covenant has found, and is destined to find, fulfillment in the Christian faith and in the Christian

church" [pp. 6-7]. He also wrote, "Christianity is the fulfilment of the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah" [p. 53].

A ninth presupposition he does specifically mention elsewhere in his text [p. 172] is that God's purpose in and for history is redemption. Dispensationalists maintain that God's purpose in history is doxological, that is, for His glory. Redemption is only one part of God's overall plan for history and the people of His created order.

A tenth presupposition that is vital to his theological hermeneutic and which is implied throughout his text, is that the New Testament must be used to redefine and reinterpret the Old Testament.

An eleventh presupposition is that nonliteral hermeneutics must be used to reinterpret the Old Testament whenever it does not support the theological system. This may take the form of theological, figurative, allegorical, typological, or spiritual hermeneutics. Hoekema explicitly confirms this hermeneutical position. "Here, then, we find the New Testament prophecy about the restoration of Israel in a nonliteral way. It may well be that other such prophecies should also be figuratively interpreted. At least we cannot insist that all prophecies about the restoration of Israel must be literally interpreted." [Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 210-211]. Famed Reformed theologian Berkhof also said literal hermeneutics must not be used in connection with Israel. "The theory [premillennial theology] is based on a literal interpretation of the prophetic delineations of the future of Israel and of the Kingdom of God, which is entirely untenable." [Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 712].

One of the hallmarks, and from our perspective, one of the warning signs concerning less than literal hermeneutics is that they make dogmatic statements that one is supposed to accept because they said it but that never have any biblical explanation or support. Campbell did that throughout his book. "Leaving aside the ambiguity of the term 'nation' (or national), it will suffice here to say that the *true* fulfilment so transcends a so-called *literal* fulfilment that, when clearly understood, the absurdity of insisting on such a fulfilment becomes quite apparent." [Campbell, p. 128 n5]. The reasons he calls the word "nation" ambiguous is because he thinks "nation" refers to the church and not to Israel. Another warning sign that something is wrong is the use of pejorative adjectives to describe literal hermeneutics in an *ad hominem* attack designed to poison the well and turn his readers against literal hermeneutics without allowing them to think through the issues themselves. That is evident when he wrote "so-called literal fulfilment" and by calling the literal understanding of Israel an "absurdity."

This presuppositional blueprint for understanding the Bible is almost completely incorrect. We are not in the Messianic Age now. Being a new creation in Christ is a positional truth and should be the basis for a sanctified life. To be a new creation does not mean the Messianic Age is present at this time; the Messianic Age awaits the arrival of the Messiah. Campbell clearly claims the Kingdom is now. The new heaven and the

new earth predicted by Isaiah are still future. This system of theological interpretation is based on Replacement Theology; God is finished with Israel except as individual Jews come to faith in the Messiah and the church has inherited the promises and blessings—but not the curses—of Israel's covenant promises. Galatians 6:16 is about believing Jews in this age and not about making the church the "Israel of God." The New Jerusalem is still in future and it is not correct to turn it into an allegory. It is false to say Zion is the church and not Israel. He is incorrect in denying there will be a Temple and a priesthood in the Messianic Kingdom. It is true that in this dispensation believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit, but that does not preclude the existence of a Millennial Temple. His belief that biblical history is completely concluded in this age is incorrect; there is a literal Kingdom age yet to come. Redemption is not the purpose of God; God's glory is the purpose for earth and its history. Finally, the Old Testament stands on its own merits as part of the inspired, inerrant Word of God. To say otherwise is to not only diminish, disrespect, and devalue the Word of God, it diminishes, disrespects, and devalues the God of the Word as well. That is exactly what this theological system does to God and His Word when they change it to suit their theology. To top it all off, they are very critical of those who employ literal hermeneutics when they attempt to find out exactly what God wants us to know.

Campbell wrote, "It is humbling to realize that each of the many organized expressions of Christianity (except perhaps one) in any given Christian community is being maintained for the propagation or perpetuation of some error or deficiency in the understanding of that Bible which is the mutually accepted criterion of moral and religious truth.... For a recent and outstanding example of misleading ambiguities and presuppositions, see p. 989 ff. of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, and a scholarly criticism of this widely used work, by Oswald T. Allis, in his *Prophecy and the Church*, Philadelphia, 1945." [Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, p. 58, 58 n5]. Notice the phony claim to humility while at the same time he says that only one system of theology gets it right. That system would, of course, be his system of Reformed Calvinism. Then he uses dispensational theology as his example of what is wrong with other systems of theology and their understanding of the Bible. Dispensationalism is really what he is attacking. Any nonspecific mention of other systems of theology is simply a smokescreen to mask his singular dislike for dispensationalism. His reference to Scofield's "ambiguities and presuppositions" that begin on p. 989 of his *Reference Bible* is interesting simply because that is the beginning of the New Testament in Scofield's Bible. He is criticizing everything Scofield put in the New Testament as wrong! But what he's really disagreeing with is Scofield's understanding of Israel in the plan of God as expressed in the New Testament. The book Allis wrote is simply another hysterical screed against dispensational theology.

The Bible clearly says there will be a Kingdom and it will be the Kingdom predicted by the prophets for Israel. The Jewish people will be gathered back into the land when Christ returns at His Second Coming. This is based on the promises of the Land Covenant (Dt. 30:1-10).

Matthew 24:31 ³¹“And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT [μέγας] TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER [ἐπισυνάγω] TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Deuteronomy 30:1–5 ¹“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, ²and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, ³then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴“If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. ⁵“The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

Who are the elect in Matthew 24:31? We know the church is not part of the discussion in the Olivet Discourse and Israel is the subject of the prophecies; therefore, the elect must be the believing remnant of Israelites who have been scattered throughout the world during the persecution of the antichrist as the Tribulation unfolds during Daniel's seventieth week. Right now we are examining the King and His Kingdom so will deal with the events of the Tribulation later.

Anyone who replaces Israel with the church, and that is just about every theologian and every theological system except premillennial dispensationalists, cannot correctly understand the meaning of this Scripture. They inevitably place the church in it and/or they apply it to this age culminating in the Second Coming. They also deny the literal fulfillment of the Land Covenant or they claim it was fulfilled from Joshua to Solomon and therefore is no longer in effect.

Here is how Replacement theologian Campbell interprets Matthew 24:31. “This prediction has reference first of all to an event that is now past. The *event—the sending out* of the gospel heralds—took place nineteen hundred years ago. The ingathering is still in progress and will continue until the last trumpet sounds. If we erroneously assume that the trumpet spoken of here is the last trump, and that the gathering here referred to is at the end of history and time, then we must look for a fulfillment which lies wholly in the future, whereas a closer study will reveal that this sending of the messengers is already, as regards its inauguration, a fulfilled prediction.” [Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, p. 172].

This is a very uninformed commentary on Matthew 24:31 concerning the dispensational understanding of it. He does not believe there will be a literal, on earth Kingdom; therefore, he has to see this Scripture as partially fulfilled at Pentecost and as being fulfilled throughout this age. He begins his exegesis with the faulty presupposition there is

no literal Kingdom. He also incorrectly calls the trumpet the "last" trumpet. The problem is the Greek text does not say that. The Greek text says the trumpet is a μέγας trumpet meaning great. The word refers to the upper range of a scale of extent with the possible implication of importance in relevant contexts; it does not mean "last." Some translations (Revised Standard Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible, and the NET Bible) translate it as a "loud" trumpet. Despite Campbell's claim, no dispensationalist believes this to be the "last trumpet." No dispensationalist says this Scripture is referring to the end of history and time. Actually, we know this to be the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom; therefore, it cannot refer to the end of history and of time. This man's understanding of Matthew 24:31 is biblically erroneous, theologically erroneous, and in error concerning dispensational theology. He at least ought to take the time to research what we actually believe and say about these things before taking us to task over things we don't believe and have never written. This is called a straw man argument. In this case, it would be more accurate to simply call it dishonest because he does not quote any dispensationalist confirming what he claims we believe. We do say this Scripture refers to events wholly in the future but not for the reasons he claims we do.

Non-dispensationalists believe Matthew 24:31 is referring to gathering the Church. John Calvin displayed that understanding in his commentary on the gospels. "*And he shall send his angels. He describes the effect of his power, that he will send his angels to gather his elect from the most distant parts of the world; for by the extremity of heaven is meant the most distant region. But Christ speaks hyperbolically, in order to show that the elect, even though they were carried away from the earth and scattered in the air, will again be gathered, so to be united in the enjoyment of eternal life under Him as their head, and enjoy the expected inheritance; for Christ intended to console his disciples, that they might not be altogether discouraged by the lamentable dispersion of the Church. Whenever, therefore, we perceive the Church scattered by the wiles of Satan, or torn in pieces by the cruelty of the ungodly, or disturbed by false doctrines, or tossed about by storms, let us learn to turn our eyes to this gathering of the elect. And if it appear to us a thing difficult to be believed, let us call to remembrance the power of the angels, which Christ holds out to us for the express purpose of raising our views above human means. For, though the Church be now tormented by the malice of men, or even broken by the violence of the billows, and miserably torn in pieces, so as to have no stability in the world, yet we ought always to cherish confident hope, because it will not be by human means, but by heavenly power, which will be far superior to every obstacle, that the Lord will gather his Church.* [John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 3:148].

Make no mistake concerning this issue; one of the reasons people do not want to see Israel in these prophetic Scriptures is anti-Semitism. Allis, mentioned by Campbell as writing a "scholarly work," provides a sterling example of anti-Semitic prejudice disguised as Christian theology. "For the more literally these prophecies are construed, the more thoroughly and pervasively Jewish will be the millennium to which the

Millenarian will look forward with keen anticipation.... What this means is illustrated very clearly by such a verse as Isa. Lx. 21 [Is. 60:21], 'They people also shall be righteous.' Thousands of Christians of every age of the Church have claimed this promise. They have regarded these words as including themselves. They have held that 'thy people' means God's people, His elect of every age and race and condition. They have regarded it as a prophecy of the Church. But according to Dispensationalists 'thy people' means Israel; and in the millennium 'the kingdom will be restored to Israel.' The Jews will be again pre-eminent among the nations; they will again be God's people in a unique sense. The nations will be held in subjection by the rod-of-iron rule of Messiah. This conception of the future can be reconciled with the teachings of Paul that all distinctions between Jew and Gentile have been broken down by the Gospel, if indeed the word reconciled can be used at all in such a connection, only by recognizing that the millennial age will follow the Church age and be quite distinct from it. In a word, the earthly Davidic kingdom which entered the New Testament 'absolutely unchanged,' which was offered to the Jews and rejected by them, will at the second advent be given to them 'absolutely unchanged.' The millennium will be a Jewish age!" [Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy & the Church*, pp. 242, 244-245].

Isaiah 60:21 ²¹"Then all your people will be righteous; They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified.

A Messianic theologian once remarked that he didn't think Reformed theology was necessarily anti-Semitic on its face, but it wasn't uncomfortable with it either. Based on what some of them write and some of the Reformed denominations' attitudes towards Israel today, it seems they may be more than comfortable with anti-Semitism.

The context of Isaiah 60 is the glories of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. It is error for Christians to see themselves as God's people in v. 21. Context matters! Allis knows and admits the literal meaning of these Scriptures is just what the dispensational theologians says it is but he cannot allow that literal meaning to stand. He replaces Israel with the church and that's why he thinks he can reinterpret Isaiah 60:21 to be a reference to the church. The church, according to him, is God's people from all ages Adam to the end of history. Notice that Allis connects the pejorative word "pervasive" with a restored Israelite state. Pervasive means "an unwelcome influence or physical effect spreading widely throughout an area or a group of people." [*The Oxford American College Dictionary*, s.v. "pervasive"].

On the other hand, dispensationalists realize that Israel is the subject of the prophecy in Matthew 24:31. "This event will have special meaning for Israel. Jesus will return at that hour when Israel is about to be defeated by the Gentile armies. He will rescue His people, and they will see Him and recognize that He is their Messiah. There will be a national repentance, national cleansing, and national restoration under the gracious leadership of their Messiah." [Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 1:89].

The only conflict among dispensational theologians is whether or not the elect refers to only Jewish believers or to Gentile Tribulation believers as well. Wiersbe believes it refers to both groups. Barbieri believes the elect refers to both groups and he also believes the resurrection of the Old Testament saints occurs at this time. [Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 78]. Either way, this still does not refer to the church. Tribulation believers are not part of the church. Whatever category of believer they are, they are not the church.

The word ἐπισυνάγω meaning "gather" in Matthew 24:31 is used by the Septuagint to refer to the specific regathering of Israel at the end of Psalm 106 and it pertains to end times events. This may not be a solid connection between the Scriptures but it is there and it is interesting to contemplate anyway. In other words, we can't just simply say that because a word is used on one context that it means the same in other Scriptures, but the end times context in them is similar. They are used in an eschatological, end times gathering aspect.

Psalm 106:47 ⁴⁷Save us, O LORD our God, And gather [צָבַר, ἐπισυνάγω] us from among the nations, To give thanks to Your holy name And glory in Your praise.

The context of Psalm 106:40-48 is God's anger is kindled against His people (v. 40) and He gave them over to the nations who ruled over them and oppressed them (vv. 41-42). He would deliver them but they remained sinful and rebellious (v. 43). But God heard their cry and remembered His covenant with them, relented, and had compassion on them (vv. 44-46). They request to be saved and gathered out of the nations (v. 47). The word for "gathered" is the same word used in Matthew 24:31 for the command to "gather" the elect from all over the earth.

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