***The Age of the Kingdom, No. 9

DS13-B***

This is the first segment of the Christian Service and Human Government series, as well as the last segment of the Dispensations series. It's going to be in the form of tying up several ideas, issues, and problems that are often raised by those who do not believe that the Bible teaches this doctrine. Make no mistake about it. The doctrines of the dispensations is a very important doctrine. It is crucial to our understanding of the Word of God.

The dispensation that we've been looking at is this last one, the one on the Kingdom Age. It is the final division of God's view of human history. It is a thousand-year period with Jesus Christ ruling all of the world from the headquarters city of Jerusalem. We have pointed out to you that the position which is known as covenant theology rejects this whole idea that we have described to you. It just completely rejects that Jesus Christ is ever going to rule on this earth in such an earthly kingdom for a thousand-year period. The amillennialists do not distinguish between the church and Israel. They say that Israel misbehaved itself when it rejected its king, and consequently God gave all of its blessings to the church, and that the church is the outgrowth of Israel. However, this can only be arrived at if you do not take the Word of God in its literal meaning and in the literal meaning of its words. The Old Testament Scripture is just too full of promises to the Jews of a Davidic millennial kingdom here on Earth. You cannot get by that unless you just start taking words in a symbolic sense.

So, the amillennialists attack the doctrine of the dispensations in many ways. One of the ways we looked at last time was that they say that dispensationalists teach more than one way of salvation. We pointed out that that is not true. We believe as dispensationalists that salvation in every age is based on the death of Christ for the sins of the world. We hold that salvation is always by faith. It is always by Grace.

There is another accusation that you may sooner or later run into as a dispensationalist and that is that we who believe in dividing the Bible up into these distinctive eras of God's dealing with humanity are robbing people of the Bible. For one thing, we are denying the unity in the Bible with these distinctions. Dispensationalism is said to destroy the Bible as a unified book. Instead of a book that God wrote as a book from start to finish, it's just a jumble of writings, because we say, "This part of the Bible applies to you in this age; this part applies to you in this age;" and, we chop it all up. So, because some parts of the Bible cannot be applied directly to Christians in this age, the amillennialists say that we are robbing them of the Word of God. However, dispensationalism does hold that certain features continue through every dispensation. There are certain things that dispensationalists very clearly stress which indicate that they do believe in the unity of the Bible. They are not denying the unity of the Bible. For example:

**The Unity of the Bible**

1. **One God Only**

We stress very clearly that the Bible bears witness to one God only. The unity of the Bible is, in part, demonstrated by the fact that there is one God.

1. **A Connected Story**

Also, we point out that the Bible forms a connected story from Genesis to Revelation. Genesis has to be the first book; Revelation has to be the last book; and, everything in between has to come in that order because it is a continuous progressive story. So, we do recognize that the Bible has this unity.

1. **Prophecy**

The Bible also makes predictions concerning distant future events. Many of these predictions are made in one book, and we discover their fulfillment centuries later in books which were written during those centuries following the predictions. That indicates the unity of the Bible.

1. **Progressive Revelation**

The Bible also has progressive revelation. As we move along through the ages, a certain doctrine is made clear and is unfolded more and more.

1. **Only One Way of Redemption**

Then the Bible has only one way of redemption. This is what we just got through demonstrating in the previous session. The Bible has one way for people to be saved. It has a unified salvation program.

1. **Jesus Christ**

The Bible also centers primarily on the theme of the person and the work of Jesus Christ. In one way or another, everything the Bible reveals is related to the person and the work of Christ.

1. **Perfect Harmony Through Multiple Writers**

All of the writers of the Bible finally have produced a perfect harmony of doctrine. Many of the 44 men who penned the Bible over centuries never saw each other. Some of them didn't see each other's writing. Yet, they produced a harmonious system of doctrine which we have revealed in the Word of God.

So, dispensationalists must recognize these seven points right here, and we make a great deal of them, all of which demonstrate that we do recognize that the Bible has a unity. However, it is not a contradiction to say that unity exists with distinctions. Just look at your own body. You are a unified physical being. Yet, all over your body are different kinds of parts that perform different functions. You could not exist as a unified being without those parts functioning. You just let one vital part of your body quit operating, and you are going to be at an end as a unified being. It takes the different parts to keep you functioning. There's a variety of materials in the construction of a building, yet it is a unified building. When we put that building together, we did find that we had to put certain materials in a certain order, and certain things had to come at a certain place. However, the different materials resulted in one unified building. Yet there is a variety of materials. Obviously, if you sit in a stadium and watch an athletic event, you're watching a variety of players who are performing different functions, and yet they come to a unified goal of winning the game.

The doctrine of the Trinity is such an example. We don't, in any way, mitigate against the unity of the Godhead--the great revelation of the Old Testament of the Jews that Jehovah God is one God. We are not in any way questioning or doubting or casting aspersions on that because we teach the doctrine of the Trinity as the Scriptures do teach. We recognize that that Trinity is made up of individual members of the Godhead. Even the amillennialists, incidentally, hold that. The Lord Jesus Christ, as a person, had two natures. He was one person. He acted as a unified human being. Yet, there were two totally different natures in him, completely independent. He had a human nature; he had a divine nature; and, they were in no way intermingled with one another. They did not overlap. They were separate entities within themselves. As one person pointed out, the idea of unity can be carried to the ludicrous extreme. You can compare it to a jigsaw puzzle where all the parts are made up of circles. You've got one kind of part, but you try to get a unified puzzle picture out of nothing but circles. So, sameness does not always produce unity. That is the point. Sameness does not always produce unity.

**What is God's Main Purpose?**

So the amillennialist does not have a ground when he says, "Well, you chop up the Bible into distinct portions, and therefore you destroy its unity. A unity can contain distinctive parts. The unity of the Bible that we are accused of destroying is a unity of a special kind. When the amillennialist says, "Well, you dispensationalists destroy the unity of the Word of God," what they mean is that we are destroying what they consider to be God's main purpose in His works. Now what would you say is God's main purpose? As you read through the Bible, just what in the world is God trying to do? If you were going to shake it down to one word, what is it that God is trying to do? Well, the non-dispensational amillennialist comes up with this word: "redemption." He says the main thing that God is trying to do is to provide salvation for fallen humanity. The idea is that all that God does, in one way or another, is simply an aspect of His main purpose of providing salvation for mankind. However, the dispensationalist says, "No, this is wrong. This is not God's main purpose. God has a main purpose that is bigger than redemption. Redemption happens to be just a piece of God's main purpose. The purpose of God is to reveal His glory. That is the main purpose of God."

That is a larger purpose that takes in many different pieces and details of God's workings. But all the different pieces fit together to produce a reflection of the glory of God. In other words, God is trying to reveal His essence to you. God is trying to show you what He is like; how you may deal with Him; how you may depend upon Him; and, all that constitutes His glory. *The main purpose of God is the glory of God*. Salvation is but one element. It is an element which reflects his glory. Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14 all tell us that. All of creation that you see is a manifestation of the glory of God. The reason that God made creation is to reflect His glory; to demonstrate His power; and, to demonstrate who He is. So, in each dispensation God does different things, in different ways, but all for the primary purpose of revealing Himself and to demonstrate His glory. In this way we learn the essence of God. We learned that He is grace. We learn that He is also wrath.

God also has a plan for the angels, but it does not include salvation. If all that God was doing was redemption, then we'd have a problem as to what to do with this program for the angels. But there is no plan of redemption for the angels that we have revealed to us in Scripture. The revelation concerning the millennial kingdom that we have been studying shows us that God is doing something that has a distinct purpose beyond salvation. The millennial kingdom is not for salvation only. The amillennialist recognizes that, and that's why he doesn't like the idea, in part, of a millennial kingdom because he can't quite see, "Why do we need a millennial kingdom to meet God's main purpose of redemption?" Redemption is all over, and that's why the non-dispensationalist always thinks in terms of a judgment day. He thinks that a time is coming when, all of a sudden, all of human history is going to be over; Christ is going to return; that's going to be the end; and, eternity is going to begin. The millennium kingdom is a real problem for the non-dispensationalist who is trying to say that God's purpose is redemption. His purpose is much bigger than that.

However, this is not to say that the amillennialist does not believe that God's purpose is to reveal His glory. He does believe that. The problem is that he thinks that God accomplishes this, revealing his glory, only through redemption. That's the difference. We say that God reveals his glory through many different works, not the least of which is all that constitutes the millennial kingdom. But, the amillennialist says, "Yes, that's true. God is mainly revealing His glory but He does it only through redemption," and that's how He shows what a glorious wonderful person He is.

Because the amillennialist uses a spiritualizing interpretation of the Scriptures in the Old Testament, he doesn't come up with any other purpose for God. If he read the Old Testament in a literal sense he would find many things that God is doing which he could not relate simply to the goal of redemption. God's glory is clearly seen through Israel; through the Angels; through the church; and, through Christians, but they are all separate entities, and they are not all related to redemption.

So, the dispensations are really stages in the progress of the revelation of the various ways in which God is bringing glory to Himself. This revelation is progressive. Gradually there's a buildup of our realization and our understanding of His glory. The culmination of His plan to reveal His glory is the millennial kingdom. That's where it all comes to its peak--not in eternity, but in history. God's goal is ultimately realized in the historical moment of the millennium.

**The Sermon on the Mount**

Therefore, only dispensationalism can show you that the Bible has a unity, a variety, and a progressiveness toward a specific goal. This goal covers all of the details, and that is God revealing His glory. This is the unifying factor--not bringing redemption. That is not the unifying factor. When the amillennialist says, "Well, your dispensational views rob us of Scripture," one of the examples he will use is the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. This is said to be the most extensive revelation piece of teaching we have from the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is a very impressive piece of instruction and a very impressive piece of revelation. But Matthew 5 and 7 are said to be lost to the Christians under the dispensational program. The dispensationalists that say you take a knife and you cut away a beautiful portion of Scripture because we as dispensationalists hold that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to people living in this age. They say we are robbing them of one of the most significant areas of the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now if you were to go to an amillennialist and say, "I don't believe we should apply the dietary laws of the Mosaic code." This includes all of these rules for what you could eat and not eat. I don't believe we should apply that to Christians today. What do you think the amillennialist would do? Would he look at you and say, "You are taking your knife and cutting out a part of the Word of God and robbing me of it? I'm going to go to the Old Testament, and a piece of pork chop will never pass my lips. I'll never bite into a piece of bacon, and you'll never find me going to Southern Kitchen and gorging on shrimp and all that stuff." No, he won't object. He says, "You don't want to live under the dietary laws the Old Testament? Fine. Forget them. They don't apply to Christians." He doesn't mind you robbing him of that. Why? Because it is true that they do not apply. But now he comes to the Sermon on the Mount, and he says, "Oh, you're robbing me of that because it applies."

Well, why is it that we get so emotional about the Sermon on the Mount. One of the reasons is because it contains the Golden Rule. Now every dumbbell politician knows the Golden Rule, and if you told him it didn't apply today, it would really wreck his campaign. That's usually about all the morality he's got, to do unto others as they do unto you. The only improvement he has is the one I heard Jimmy Hoffa of the Teamsters Union say before they sent him to prison. When somebody asked him what his philosophy of life was, he said, "My philosophy of life is to do unto others before they do it unto you, and do it better." So we get emotional because the Golden Rule is there.

Not only that, but the Lord's Prayer is in the Sermon on the Mount also. Please remember that the Lord's Prayer is right there and tied up in the Sermon on the Mount. How many television programs and how many movies could be made without some joker at some crisis folding his hands and beginning to repeat the Lord's Prayer. There is a major segment of the script writers' technique that would be lost. The amillennialist hates to lose these. He gets very emotional, but he won't get emotional about the dietary laws of the Mosaic code. Now nobody suggests a literal application of the Sermon on the Mount. I want you to understand that. I don't care whether you are an unbeliever. There is no unbeliever that believes you should apply the Sermon on the Mount literally. There is no liberal theologian or no liberal preacher who would say, "I think you should apply the Sermon on the Mount literally." Furthermore the amillennialist does not believe that either. He believes it is only righteousness, which is acceptable in any age, that's reflected by the Sermon on the Mount. However, he says that this is not to be treated literally, but that there is an underlying basis of truth, and that is what we get from the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, who is to decide what the underlying basis of truth is? In some respects he's not entirely wrong. The non-dispensationalist does admit that you cannot apply the Sermon on the Mount literally in some of its aspects, just as we as dispensationalists do. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:42, it tells you to lend to people. Anytime they come and ask to borrow from you, you should lend without hesitation. It gives you directions which the business world could not survive if that were kept. Just think of these good Christian businessmen who want to live by the Sermon on the Mount. You think they go to their business and every time somebody comes and wants to borrow money from them, they say, "Well I read it in the Sermon on the Mount, and if you ask me, I have to give it to you." They would soon be out of business.

Well, the dispensational view of the Sermon on the Mount is this: We believe that the Sermon on the Mount was declared by the Lord Jesus Christ in connection with explaining to the people how the Messianic Davidic kingdom was going to operate, the kingdom that the Old Testament prophets had predicted and promised to them. He and his disciples went out and what did they preach? The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Everybody understood that they were referring to the Davidic kingdom. He was explaining to them in the Sermon on the Mount how this kingdom was going to work. *He was not talking about the church age.* The Lord Jesus Christ did not reveal many crucial things concerning the church age, which He did say later. He did not state these in the most extensive piece of teaching that we have recorded from Him. He was talking to the Jewish people in terms of their earthly kingdom.

So, the Sermon on the Mount has literal application to the millennial kingdom here on Earth, which is yet future. It was the kingdom which he was offering to set up at that time. If they would have accepted Him and turned to national repentance, He would have set this kingdom up at that time. Now the Sermon on the Mount does have spiritual application for us today as Christians because all of the Word of God is for our learning. The principles of divine viewpoint that we draw from that are not the primary purpose of this piece of revelation. It is the constitution of the kingdom of heaven which is yet coming.

Now the amillennialists do not have any literal application for the Sermon on the Mount today, nor do they have it in the future. The premillennialists recognized the importance of the ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, and their use today, and yet we respect the ultimate literal purpose of this sermon for the coming millennial kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount has no gospel in it. Wouldn't it be strange that Jesus Christ gives us the most extensive piece of information that we have recorded by Him, and he doesn't give us the gospel at all. There is no gospel basis explained for securing righteousness. Instead it is explaining how a theocracy is going to function.

The Sermon on the Mount has no church age truth in it. Such things as you find revealed in John 13 through 17 are not to be found in the slightest whisper in the Sermon on the Mount. And, John 13 through 17 is vital church truth area. There is no mention, for example, of God the Holy Spirit. Now, can you imagine the church age functioning without believers being well versed concerning God the Holy Spirit? Is it any wonder there are such distortions concerning the workings of God the Holy Spirit on the part of Satan? Not at all. The Holy Spirit is the key to the age in which we live. There's no mention concerning the church as the body of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. There is no mention about praying in Jesus' name. That's why it's so ludicrous, so gross, to stand up and recite the Lord's Prayer in a church service, not even in the Lord's name. Why? Because it was a different dispensational setup. It doesn't apply to what you and I should be doing. It is hideous in the eyes of God for people to stand up and recite the Lord's Prayer together. It is a travesty.

Dispensationalism does not rob Christians of the Bible. What it does is make the full riches of the Word of God clear and available. So when we have this attack that dispensationalism robs people of the Bible because it's dividing years of history and applying Scriptures to these specific eras, we are not robbing. We are enlightening. It is a deception that is brought about by the amillennialist who is really worried about one thing. That is that we are telling him that God's main purpose is not redemption, but God's main purpose is the glory of God, which then gives much variety available in what God is doing.

**Israel and the Church**

There is another thing that we should look at in tying this up, and that is the distinction between the church and Israel. This is what the argument is all about. The amillennialist says that Israel and the church are the same thing. Well let's look at the unique character, first of all, of the church. The key feature of dispensationalism is the doctrine of the church--that the church is different from the kingdom. We have a unique relationship to Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit that 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks of. The baptism of the Holy Spirit never occurred in the Old Testament. It can only occur at one time in this dispensation. That is when you believe in Christ as Savior. That's the point at which you are joined to Christ through the baptism of the Spirit. The body of Christ is made up of Jews and Gentiles, all of whom are permanently indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Now it may not seem anything unusual to you to find a Jew and Gentile in one body, but this was a traumatic thought to the New Testament Jews. It took a church council meeting in Acts 15 to finally settle the issue that Gentiles and Jews were in God's program, part of one body. The church has a distinct unique character about it. This union of Jews and Gentiles was not revealed in the Old Testament, so we say it was a mystery (Ephesians 3:5-6).

Secondly, the distinction to be recognized is that the church existed in the present age only. The Church did not exist in the Old Testament. It was a mystery because it was non-existent. The church body could not exist in the Old Testament because it is based, the Bible tells us, upon the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ. Until Jesus Christ went to heaven following his crucifixion and resurrection, He said that the Holy Spirit cannot come down: "Until I go out, He cannot come down." Until the Holy Spirit arrives, there can be no Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and there can be no church body. Therefore, in the Old Testament this could not have existed. There was no church in the Old Testament. It is distinct in this age only, and that shows us that Israel and the church are different in God's program.

The church is distinct from Israel in the fact that God separates his dealings between Jews, Gentiles, and Christians. 1 Corinthians 10:32 tells us not to offend three main groups of people. As believers, it says, "Don't offend Jews. Don't offend gentiles. Don't offend Christians." Israel is a nation, but the church is a living body. Unsaved Jews are called Israel in the New Testament. An unsaved Jew is still called Israel. It applies only to Jews, not to saved Christians and to Jews together. Saved Christians and Jews are never called Israel. Maybe I should put it that way. That's what the amillennialist is trying to say, that saved Christians and saved Jews form one body and they're called spiritual Israel. This is not true. Saved Jews are distinguished from saved Christians in the New Testament, and they're still called Israel as saved Jews. However, Christians are never called Israel whether they're saved or unsaved in the New Testament. The distinction is constantly maintained. The New Testament writers do not equate Israel and the church.

**The Kingdom and the Church**

Next, there's the distinction of the relation of the church to the kingdom. The church will share in the rule of Christ's earthly kingdom, but they will not share as part of national Israel. The church will not be part of the nation Israel in that rule. Israel's kingdom today is in a mystery form because they rejected the king. The Old Testament never told them that the Messiah was going to come; He would offer the kingdom; that you people were going to reject it; and, then God was going to put your kingdom in a special form (a deep freeze form or a postponement form) for a certain number of centuries, and then it will be revived. He never told them about the postponement. That's why we speak of that as a mystery, a hidden form of the kingdom, and the kingdom of the Jews today is in a hidden form. It is in a mystery form, and it is present in that form today. However, it is separated from the work of the church.

Then Christians and saints of other dispensations have a relationship. I want to point out to you a question that is often asked. You have heard us as dispensationalists say that God has an earthly program with His earthly people, the Jews. He has a heavenly program with His heavenly people, the Christians. We say that Abraham's posterity as the stars of the heavens reflect his heavenly posterity, and the sands of the seashore reflect the earthly posterity. The impression is given that Jews don't go to heaven, but that is not the case. Hebrews 12:22-23 make it very clear to us that all saints of all ages--all believers--go to heaven. Now, it is true that God has an earthly people who are fulfilling an earthly program. However, that earthly people that we are referring to is the earthly people who are living during the millennium. They are the living earthly Jews who will be fulfilling God's earthly program at that time. If you were a Jew in the Old Testament and you died, you did go to paradise in Hades. Following the resurrection, you were taken to heaven. Those who are believers today when they die, Jew or Gentile, they go to heaven. All of the Old Testament saints who were Gentiles are now in heaven.

Hebrews 12:22 says, "But you are coming to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to end innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and to the Church of the Firstborn who are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all (and then notice), and to the spirits of just men made perfect." "The spirits of just men made perfect" refers to believers of other ages--Old Testament saints. They have come to heaven, called here, the heavenly Jerusalem. They are separated, even there in heaven, distinguished from the church body, but nevertheless that's their destiny. So, God's purpose is an earthly people who have a distinct program on this earth in spite of the fact that they go to heaven. God's purpose has a distinctly earthly people to be realized fully in the millennium, but they go to heaven.

**The Seeds of Abraham**

Now, one of the favorite attacks of the amillennialists (the non-dispensationalists) is the fact that Abraham has a seed. Amillennialists say that the church and Israel are the seed of Abraham, so they are the same thing. However, the point is that the Bible does not say that they are the same seed. What the Bible says is that the church is "a" seed of Abraham, but a distinct seed from that of Israel. Abraham had three seeds. Get these straight, and that'll clear up this confusion that the amillennialists interject here by saying that Abraham had a seed; Christians are a part of that seed; Jews are a part of that seed; and the Church and Israel are the same thing. They are three distinct seeds. Abraham's first seed was natural physical descendants (Isaiah 41:8). You know a lot of that kind of seed today. They are the Jews that you have experience with today. Isaiah 41 connotes Abraham's natural physical descendants, the Jews. Then in Galatians 3:16, Jesus Christ is called the seed of Abraham. Then, in Galatians 3:29, Christians are called "a" seed of Abraham. It says "a" seed, not just "the" seed. Consequently, there is the Jew; there is the Christian; and, there is Christ--all described as seeds of Abraham.

The New Testament does not call Abraham's spiritual seed Israel. It only calls it church. Every time it refers to Abraham's spiritual seed, it is the church. If you are a Jew and born again, you are referred to as spiritual Israel, but you have to be born a Jew to be called spiritual Israel. If you are a born again Jew in the Old Testament, you are referred to as spiritual Israel, but a born again Gentile is never referred to as spiritual Israel. That the difference, and it's an important difference. So Abraham was a pattern of salvation, but he was a pattern of salvation before he became a Jew. He was a pattern in that salvation is individual, it's personal, and it's not a matter of race. So when you are born again, you're born again on an individual basis. If you are a Jew, you are born again into a certain relationship with God in the Old Testament. If you are a Jew today, you are born into a different relationship relative to the church. Christians as a group are never called spiritual Israel in the Bible. Therefore, we reject this on the part of non-dispensational amillennialists to cross the two together.

**What is Dispensationalism?**

There are certain features that characterize dispensationalism. It has certain features. Let's tie this up now. What is dispensationalism all about? What is distinctive about being a dispensationalist?

1. **Literal Interpretation**

One is the literal interpretation of Scripture. The literal interpretation principle is used consistently. I remind you again that some covenant theologians are premillennialists. They believe in mixing Israel and the church, but they also believe there's going to be a millennium down at the end. They have a hard time explaining why in the world there should be one and what to do with it, but they try to mix the two. You've got a halfway house. You have non-dispensational amillennialists on one side; you have dispensational premillennialists on the other side; and, in the middle you've got a crossing of covenant theologians (covenant theology) who are dispensational. They believe in dispensations, so they believe in a millennium, but they also believe that Israel has become the church.

You've got the utmost in the mixture of confusion there. The literal interpretation is abandoned by the covenants premillennialists (because they are premillennialists as covenant theologians) and by the amillennialists. They reject the consistent use of the literal method. They use it in areas outside of prophecy and outside of areas of the gospel. They say that when Jesus talked about the kingdom in the Gospels, he never referred to an earthly kingdom. Consistent literalism will make you a dispensational premillennialist. If you follow interpretation of Scripture literally, you cannot come out any place else but dispensational premillennialism. And this is the method that the Bible commends.

1. **Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecies**

Secondly, the literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, therefore, is characteristic of dispensationalism. Promises made to Abraham or David are not literally being fulfilled in the church today. Old Testament prophecies require either future literal fulfillment or else they're going to have to have a spiritualized fulfillment in some non-literal way today.

1. **Israel and the Church**

Consequently, a third feature of dispensationalism is a clear separation between Israel and the church. The amillennialists make the church spiritual Israel to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant. The Church is said to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies made to the Jews. Covenant premillennialists see the church as fulfilling Israel's promises as the people of God, but they also see them doing that in the millennium. They keep half-way involving the features.

1. **Pre-Tribulation Rapture**

Another feature of dispensationalism is the pre-tribulation rapture. If you are a dispensationalist, you believe that the church goes up before the tribulation which is related to the Jewish nation. The church is taken away before God's wrath is poured out upon the Jewish people. Since Israel and the church are separate, their departures are separate. The amillennialists actually believe in a post-tribulation rapture. They believe that it goes after the tribulation because they just believe in the judgment day coming.

1. **A Millennial Kingdom**

Finally, the fifth feature of dispensationalism is the belief in a millennial kingdom. This is in fulfillment of the Old Testament. It's a normal part of dispensationalism. It's integrated into the whole system of interpretation. Covenant theology, however, just tacks on a millennium and they are hard pressed to have a reason for it.

**Minimizing the Cross**

Now there is one other factor and that is the place of the Cross. The amillennialists accuse us of belittling the cross; that is, minimizing it. They base this on our dispensational view that Jesus Christ came and offered the kingdom to Israel during the time of his ministry. We say that he offered the Old Testament Davidic kingdom. They say, "How could that be a genuine offer?" Jesus Christ knew he was going to die on the cross. He made that very clear many times. How could He genuinely offer the kingdom to the Jewish people when He knew He was going to die on the cross? If the Jews had accepted the kingdom offer, there would have been no need for the cross, and therefore you dispensationalists minimize the cross. You make a small thing of it. It's like if they had believed, okay, we don't need the cross. However, because you didn't believe, okay we need the cross." But that is not what we hold as dispensationalism. Dispensationalism says that the Jews rejected a genuine offer of the Davidic Messianic Kingdom. When they rejected that kingdom, it was postponed. Dispensationalism does not say that if they had accepted the offer, Jesus Christ would not have had to die on the cross. The substitutionary death of Christ for the sins of the world was necessary even if there was no church age at all.

Now think for a moment what would have happened if in the plan of God there'd be no church age. In the Old Testament, they didn't know that there was a church age. They just thought it was going to be kingdom, and then eternity. Now supposing there was no church age, and all that God had offered was the Davidic Kingdom. Supposing the Lord came, He made his offer, and they rejected it. What would have had to be done? What would have happened then is that Christ would have died on the cross because of their rejection; He would have been raised from the dead; and, then the kingdom would have been instituted immediately. The cross was necessary apart from the church. Even after the Jews rejected their Messiah and crucified him, the Davidic Kingdom could have been established following the resurrection of the Lord. The only reason He didn't bring the Kingdom into effect upon his resurrection was because God had another plan yet to fulfill which He hadn't revealed--the plan relative to the church. So, the postponement is due to the fact that God had an unrevealed part of His plan. The postponement was not due to the fact that they killed him. It was due to the fact that God had another factor of His plan to incorporate.

So, if the kingdom had been accepted, then what? Then God would have provided for the crucifixion of Christ for the sins of the world in another way. How he would have done that is unknown to us. But the death of Christ and His suffering was required before the kingdom. If they had accepted him, God would have made the provision. This situation is similar to many other times when you have divine sovereignty on one hand and man's freewill on the other hand. For example, the Bible tells us that God ordained the lamb before the foundation of the world. What did He ordain the lamb for? To be slain. Why was the lamb to be slain? For the sins of the world. Alright, along comes Adam. God made this man. What does He tell Adam? Don't sin. God knew very well he was going to sin. God had already provided a lamb to be slain to cover the fact that he was going to sin. Now you tell me how to put it together. This is what the amillennialist is up against just as well. God's sovereignty is moving in one direction, and man's freewill is operating out here. And we don't have all the information to know how these two are related, so that God in His sovereignty says, "I'm offering you a kingdom." And at the same time that Jesus Christ was offering this kingdom, He was telling his disciples, "I'm going to die. I'm going to be buried for three days and three nights. I'm going to rise again. I'm going to die for the sins of the world." He knew that that was the reason he came. But His offer of the kingdom was genuine because God, in His sovereignty, was operating on one side, and man in his freewill was operating on the other side.

How about the time of the flood? Do you think that the preservation of the human line was dependent upon Noah deciding, "Yes I'll build the ark and get on it. God in his sovereignty had already arranged that the human line was going to be preserved. Yet, Noah in his freewill had to listen to God and to turn to his three sons and say, "Let's go boys. We're going to go build a boat." The destiny was not uncertain. The existence of the nation Israel was not in doubt waiting until Abraham agreed to leave Ur of the Chaldeans. The birth of Christ was not in doubt until Mary had agreed as a virgin to bear this child. The death of Christ and the predictions of it were not in doubt until Pilate decided to issue the order of execution. He was provided as a lamb before the foundations of the world. Eventually the freewill of Pilate was going to come in and execute the order.

So in this way too God could promise, in full sincerity, a kingdom on earth, which he knew was to be rejected at the First Advent, but which He knew would be accepted at the Second Advent. Nothing was postponed in God's view. We say that the kingdom was postponed because that's just the way we talk. But in God's view, it was not postponed. It was following his orderly progression. God, in the same way, offers salvation to non-elect people, incidentally, too today, knowing full well that non-elect people are not going to accept salvation. Yet He makes them a bonafide genuine offer of eternal life. He can in truth say, "Whosoever will may come." The problem is you will not will to come if you are non-elect. Your will will not be moved to come.

The amillennialist says, "The trouble with you premillennialists is that you don't understand that the kingdom was in the hearts of men. He says it's in the midst of you, and they interpret that as meaning in the heart. That's where the kingdom is. Well, if Jesus and his disciples were not preaching an earthly kingdom, then it was a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men that they are referring to. And if it was a spiritual kingdom, the amillennialists say that the condition for receiving that spiritual kingdom was repentance and a new birth. The condition for bringing that spiritual kingdom about was repentance and new birth. This salvation requirement was even reached before the cross. Supposing all of the Jews who heard Jesus and the disciples preach said, "I believe." Every Jew that they spoke to, including the Pharisees, all received Christ as Savior. Now, what was to hinder the spiritual kingdom? Nothing. There it was. All they had to do was believe. They all believed. Now, why should Christ go to the cross? There was no need to. They're all saved, before he went to the cross. This is the same condition. His death was necessary even if you say it's just a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of people. The death was still necessary even if they had all believed. God would have had to make His provision for that sacrifice under that situation.

So we as dispensationalists do not belittle the cross.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1970

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