

**A HERMENEUTICAL HOUSE OF HORRORS:
SOME HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE INTERPRETATION OF
BIBLE PROPHECY**

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Everyone who interprets Bible prophecy does so within a theological system. Some protest - "I have no system! I just interpret the Bible!" They are like William James' famous crustacean who protested - "I am not a crustacean! I am myself!" But to have no system is probably to have a defective system just like having no theology is to have a bad theology.¹

It is my humble but grateful persuasion that dispensationalism is the system of interpretation that most consistently and satisfactorily squares with the Biblical data. In comparison with competitive systems, it is most vertically consistent and most horizontally fits the facts. Its distinctive features are:

- 1)the periodization of history (although not unique, cf Augustine, Bernard).
- 2)the clear and continuing difference between Israel and the Church (and the pre-tribulation Rapture of the bridal Church, the two-stage parousia).
- 3)the critical contrast between law and grace.
- 4)the contrast between "the gospel of the kingdom" and "the gospel of the grace of God" (involving the offer of the kingdom and its postponement).
- 5)the insistence on consistent historico-grammatico exegesis, i.e. the plain, simple, natural meaning of the text, literal where possible. This does not rule out poetic metaphor (mountains that leap and trees that clap their hands) nor does it rule out allegory when it is clear (Hagar and Sarah in

Galatians 4) or extended metaphor (in the vine and the branches in John 15). Nor does it rule out figurative language (like sheep and goats in the judgment of Matthew 25) or Jerusalem (called figuratively Sodom and Egypt in Revelation 11) or locusts and frogs representing demons. But we would insist that behind any metaphor, allegory or figurative language there is a literal reality. Any writer expects us to read his work this way.

The imperative of a careful consistent hermeneutic cannot be overstated. Of what benefit is our stalwart defense of Biblical inerrancy if we play fast and loose with what the text means? We can lose it all right here! We must not harass the text or indulge in special pleading with the text. I remember seeing a sign outside of a woodworking shop - "All kinds of twisting and turning done here." We need a deep respect for the text and a profound commitment to exegetical integrity. We must keep asking ourselves: "Is this what the text really says?" Thank God for the promise of a continuing work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating the meaning of the inspired page. We must not add to it or subtract from it (Deuteronomy 4:12, Revelation 22:18-19). To ignore eschatology as so many do these days is to subtract from Scripture. The late Paul Feinberg and I often team-taught "Preaching from Bible Prophecy," and there were those whose big idea from any text was always "God is sovereign" or they were pan-millennialists, "Everything is going to pan out." But Scripture says more than that, as Bishop N.T. Wright and Graeme Goldsworthy need to be reminded in their "realized eschatology."

But equally dangerous is adding to the Scripture - this is probably where

we tend to err - to see more in a text than is in fact there. OUR POSITION IS STRONG AND THERE IS NO NEED FOR OUR SEEKING TO BUTTRESS OUR POSITION WITH PHANTASMS AND ILLUSORY EVIDENCE. We undercut our integrity when we overstate or pile on applications which the text does not support. I want to share some historical notes on some areas in which we seem to be vulnerable.

I.SOME CLASSICAL HERMENEUTICAL BLACK HOLES

1)the theory that a day in prophetic calculation equals a year, as in Daniel 8 where instead of 2300 days (leading up to the impieties of Antiochus Epiphanes in the inter-testamental period) some would project 2300 years, leading the Seventh Day Adventists to their nefarious Sanctuary Doctrine in which the Lord Jesus entered the inner sanctuary in 1844 and other Millerite errors. The theory was first introduced as best as I can discern by Tyconius the Donatist heretic who seduced Augustine into amillennialism.² But others have succumbed to this error as well.

2)the 6000 year theory has sporadically surfaced in the history of interpretation but is manifestly a figment for date-setters and is false because it challenges the imminence of the Lord's return for his church. The doctrine of imminence as taught by Christ and all of the Apostles provides the foundation for our conviction of a two-stage parousia. Where is this theory in any Biblical text? cf Daniel's 70x7, 9:24-27.

3)the gospel in the stars is a gloss on the prediction of celestial signs (Luke 21:25) and has lured such worthies as J.A. Seiss, E.W. Bullinger and D. James Kennedy in our time. Extra-Biblical resort to the heavenly

constellations as a source of revelation is futile and dangerous. Let's stick to the Bible! The prophetic significance of the "Jupiter effect" some years back and interest in flying saucers have been calamitous cul-de-sacs for serious students of prophecy. Shall we ever be "learning and never coming to knowledge"? Shall we abandon the sufficiency of Scripture?

4)pyramidology has frequently become a snare for the British Israelites but so insightful a prophetic scholar and chartmaker as Clarence Larkin got snagged here. Let's not map tunnels in the pyramids - study Scripture!

5)the danger of the Bible codes as devised by some young Orthodox Jews purportedly predicting the assassination of Yitzak Rabin and the upcoming nuclear destruction of the U.S. has inveigled many including Michael Drosnin, an unbeliever, who made a pile of money on his books popularizing this approach. The equi-distant spacing technique used is especially fruitful with the Hebrew consonantal text (observe that nothing of the NT is treated and hence no testimony to or for Christ) but even the works of Dickens and Hawthorne can be turned into something with it.³

6)the United States in prophecy has been a quagmire engulfing some who for jingoistic or patriotic reasons argue a priori that God must include the US in prophecy, be it the eagle of Ezekiel 17 (except there are 2 eagles) or the burning mountain of Revelation 8, etc. I don't see the United States in prophecy other than as a part of "the whole world" which goes after beast (Revelation 13:3-4). We must tread very carefully here.⁴

7)the extraordinary creativity of some (or lunacy as some would insist) is seen among those who argue that space-men are responsible for many

electronic device and that the Great Pyramid was a radio transmitter used by the ancients. Some have authenticated their prognostications by actual guided tours of the heavenly domain. We are in an area now which has brought all prophetic studies into ridicule and disfavor. Thank God we seem to have passed by some heinous horrors - I remember that early in World War II some prophecy buffs were trumpeting Isaiah 3:28, "round tires like the moon" as presaging tire rationing, or the "Beast of Belgium," or the increase of vulture population in Israel, or Indiana granite being quarried for the new temple. The notion that Deuteronomy 33:24 ("Let him bathe his feet in oil") predicts discovery of an oil field in Asher in Israel was worked hard by some but ended where it ought to be - in the dust-bin. How careful and cautious we need to be in handling this rich material.

II. IN SOME AREAS THERE IS ROOM FOR LEGITIMATE DIFFERENCE

In view of the fact that hermeneutics is not an exact science like mathematics or formal logic, it is little wonder that we do not see all issues identically. No one is an infallible interpreter. The Apostle spoke to the issue: "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully" (1 Corinthians 13:12b). Where Scripture does not explicate a matter, it is appropriate in narrative or didactic material to explore hypotheses - as when Paul says "You see what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand" (Galatians 6:11). We are not presumptuous to ask "why?" or "how?" in handling the Scriptural text as long as our projections are reasonable and plausible understandings and not accorded status on the level of the plain dicta

of Holy Scripture. This is not an area for pontification but for the Berean spirit of "examining the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was

true” (Acts 17:11). We can be relaxed with each other here and learn from each other here. We need to make our case for our convictions but recognize these are not the radicals or essentials of the faith, but nonetheless important in their possible implication. Let us fight irenically. Some sample areas of difference among evangelicals are:

1)William R. Newell and most of us would see the first beast out of the sea as the Anti-Christ and the second beast out of the earth as the False Prophet (Jewish? John 5:43). Our beloved H.A. Ironside sees the second beast as the Anti-Christ. I believe he is mistaken and few follow him.

2)Classical dispensationalists have understood the third and fourth parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 (the mustard-seed and the leaven) as essentially negative and the fifth and sixth parables (of the treasure in the field and the leaven) to represent Israel and the Church. We see evidence of some revisionism in interpretation these days, more in Mark Bailey of Dallas and less in Dwight Pentecost.⁵ I am inclined to stay with the more traditional Scofieldian understanding but I relish the debate!

3)Is the Church in the Olivet Discourse? Are both Israel and the Church here? After all, the Lord has introduced the Church in three passages (and possibly in the parable of the pearl of the great price). Must we press the obvious Jewish cast of Matthew 24:4-25 to embrace the latter half of the chapter and the next chapter? Was there anything in the Olivet Discourse directly for the church age as it was written well into that time frame? I don't think this is nailed down air-tight. There are discussable issues here.

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4)The meaning of ta genea in Matthew 24:34, generation or “this people” (Alford)? Several different approaches - how dogmatic shall we be?

5) Shall we emphasize the discontinuity in the great image vision of Daniel 2 and speak of “the revived Roman Empire,” the ten-toes phase of the end-time; or shall we emphasize the continuity and the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church as part of the far reaches of the Roman Empire, with its division into the two legs in 1053 AD? My preference is for the latter but the issue is not of the same magnitude as the Virgin Birth.

6) Is apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 the great final spiritual declension and rebellion described elsewhere in Scripture (cf Luke 18:8, 1 Timothy 4:1ff, etc.) or is this a reference to the rapture (departure) as E. Schuyler English first argued in *Re-Thinking the Rapture*⁶ and as others have more recently picked up or is this as it would appear to be an evil event in contrast to “our being gathered to him” (2:1)? Not crystal-clear.

7) Do the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3) have a tertiary application setting forth seven periods in the history of the Church as Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede first argued at Cambridge in the seventeenth century? A good case can be made without any demeaning of the remarkable scholarship of Sir William Ramsey and more recently by the late Colin Behmer of Australia showing the extraordinary match of the descriptives to the actual first century milieu. The cherished view of many dispensationalists that the further application is sound gives particular thrust to the Revelation 3:10 promise to the Church in Philadelphia.

8) The identity of the two witnesses in Revelation is not stated. The early

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church was almost unanimous in seeing them as Enoch and Elijah and many still do. The context has led more in our time to see them as Moses and Elijah. But who can say with absolute certitude?

8)The complex issue of whether Babylon in Revelation 17-18 is a rebuilding of ancient near eastern Babylon (in seeming contradiction to passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah) or is it figuratively code language for the new Rome and the western confederacy of the end-time (cf 1 Peter 5:13)? This divided the original Scofield Bible Editorial Committee right down the middle, four and four. The late Dr. Charles Feinberg held the latter and his two sons, Paul and John have held to the former. How hard should we come down on the issue while stating our own personal predilection?

9)Is the awakening to life in Daniel 12 the physical resuscitation of Israel (Ezekiel 37) or their spiritual rebirth? It is Walvoord vs Carl Armerding.

10)Dispensational opinion has leaned strongly to seeing the first rider on the white horse in Revelation 6 to be the Anti-Christ but Zane Hodges enters a minority report arguing it is the Lord Jesus.⁷

Sometimes we may need to shift a view given greater evidence as when Dr. Walvoord at a point in time abandoned what many had vehemently argued as a difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel set a date for the return of Christ but later repented. Still there are very idiosyncratic views like that of the late J. Barton Payne whose massive *Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* has put us all in his debt (a clear step above William Biederwolf's still impressive *The Millennium Bible*). Payne clung to imminence but

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spiritualized the Tribulation (something like Dr. Robert Gundry). I think this is severely flawed and unfortunately like Rosenthal's pre-wrath rapture and his mentor Robert Van Kampen's *The Sign* are really over the line. Some among us like Oswald J. Smith after a date-setting frenzy in the 1930s abandoned the rapture teaching altogether. Similarly Arthur Pink who gave

us possibly the best book ever written on Satan's masterpiece, "the man of sin" (*The Anti-Christ*, 1923), in moving to a hyper-Calvinistic stance also moved his eschatology totally into that of John Calvin. Sadly enough, G. Campbell Morgan whose earlier *God's Methods with Man* (1898) was an articulate gem of dispensational truth not only became exceedingly cautious and non-committal on matters of eschatology but really became the forebear of today's many prophetic "know-nothings" or mugwumps - mug on one side of the fence and wump on the other (to draw an analogy from American history).⁸

III. THE DISASTROUS DEBACLE OF DATE-SETTING

The mischief of date-setting has hung over the Christian Church virtually from the beginning. The doctrine of imminence means we do not know when Christ is coming. Could it be clearer than our Lord stated it - "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"? (Mark 13:32). It is hard to stand on the tip-toes of expectancy for 2000 years. In order to rouse folk out of their lethargy we may be tempted to say more than we should. The wicked servant said "My Lord delays his coming" (Matthew 24:48) which is an egregious error but it is equally inadmissible to argue that we are the terminal generation

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since our Lord made it quite clear that "It is not for you (us) to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). The reason why "that day will not surprise us like a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:4) is that we are watching for the imminent return of Christ. We are to be awake and alert. Signs of the approaching end of the age (the rapture itself is signless or else it would not be imminent) quicken our pulse

such as the Israel-sign (unique to our generation) and the moral free-fall in our times (as depicted in 2 Timothy 3, for instance), but we must pull back to what imminency demands. We cherish “the any-moment” rapture and believe that is grounded in the teaching of Christ and the Apostles and in the understanding of the early church which held to it along with a regnant view of Christ’s return to set up his kingdom and rule for 1000 years!

Still date-setters have incubated their erroneous schema from the earliest days (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Those who say “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:4) are making one serious mistake - but those of us who “love his appearing” are vulnerable to chronological overstatement, especially when we write articles and hold prophetic conferences. The early Montanists (156 A.D.) lurched toward too great a specificity in dates.⁹ In view of the upcoming doomsday explosion of 1000 A.D., a church council in 900 A.D. spoke of the beginning of the final century of church history. Shades of Y2K when many foolish things were said among us. Brother Arnold of the Friends of the Poor set 1260 as the date. Martin Hauska of the Taborites predicted 1420. Hans Nut pegged 1528. Isaac Newton using the year-day theory posited the the thesis that therefore

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Christ could not come until the 21st century! The French prophets in the early 1700s were ardent datesetters as was J.A. Bengel (1836) and Frederick Franson, one of the founders of the Evangelical Free Church and of TEAM mission (in his untranslated *Himla uret*, or Heavenly Clock). The cults have majored in date-setting but shame on us for walking in their train. Can we do more than say “What if it were today?”

A notorious date-setter of great influence has been Salem Kirban of Second Coming, Inc. In 1977 he identified the locusts of Revelation 9 as “killer bees” described in modern science. He predicted that in 1978 there would be a head transplant, that in the 1980s church property would be confiscated and that in 1983 the capital of the U.S. would be moved. He saw the Guardian Angels as agents of Anti-Christ and fiber optics as the eyes of the Anti-Christ so that we are being observed even when we turn off the television. The fact is that he has been a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:21f), as has been Edgar Whisenant whose *88 Reasons Why Christ is Coming in 1988*, revised the next year to *89 Reasons*, the 89th reason being that he didn’t come the year before. The same is true of Harold Camping who prophesied Christ would come in 1996 (he is an amillennialist). Reg Dunlop set 1991 as the date based on his advocacy of the 6000 year theory. Lester Sumrall: “I predict 2000 A.D.”

More than a few among us spoke of the Lord’s coming around 2000 - how does this date-setting square with imminence? Sometimes a kind of “can you top this?” competition seems to goad some into extremism--

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Texe Marrs and company of Austin, Texas spoke of 2000 as the limit of U.S. survival, with “crematoria, foreign troupes in America and concentration camps throughout America, all engineered by the Illuminati and the Trilateral Commission under the aegis of Senator Dole, Rush Limbaugh, Dan Quayle, Phil Gramm, Jesse Helms, Henry Hyde and Allen Keyes.¹⁰

The Prophecy Club of Topeka, Kansas, has majored in sensationalistic fear-mongering but admittedly based on special revelation - The Angel Gabriel accurately fortold (sic) thirteen specific prophecies to Dumitru Duduman.¹¹ They have predicted a civil war in the U.S. orchestrated by the Communists and then an attack by Russia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico and two other unnamed nations. This is like the idea that each Psalm is a prophecy of our time - Psalm 48 is 1948, etc. What in Psalm 105 speaks of today? What happens to imminency? Some are convinced that Christ will

come (according to the Feasts in Israel) in the Feast of Trumpets, but this is to ignore the fact that this is the Jewish calendar and then Christ could not come back today. "O consistency, thou art a jewel!" The same must be said of those who insist that the Temple in Jerusalem *must* be rebuilt before the Rapture or that there *must* be a world-wide revival before Christ returns. This is to say that "my Lord delays his coming." Verbotten.

George Ladd told me many things had to happen before the Rapture. But more damage has been done by the usually reliable Hal Lindsey than by any other (and he has been used to bring many to Christ). Following David L. Cooper he has plainly asserted that "Within forty years or so of

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1948" (the establishment of the state of Israel) the end will come.¹² But even elongating the length of a generation (Mark 13:30) cannot mitigate the tragic falseness of this as well as all date-setting. Wrong-headed.

IV. THE MENACE OF MIS-IDENTIFICATION AND OVERSTATEMENT

Let it be very clear that every school of prophetic interpretation has its bizarre and curious mis-identifications. Oddly the venerable B.B. Warfield of Princeton taught that the Millennium was in the Middle Ages. Dear J. Marcellus Kik believed that the angelic trumpet call in Matthew 24:31 was the summons to the early church to do missionary work. Oswald T. Allis was of the persuasion that the stone not cut out with human hands in Daniel 2 was the church! The business of the church is to destroy the nations? Strange things have been done to the prophecy of the seventy weeks as when Arthur Bloomfield adds another 3 1/2 years to the chronology to make it 10 1/2 years. Daniel 9:14-27 explicitly states that 490

years total (not 493 1/2) are required to achieve six objectives. G.H. Lang, always stimulating, can only disappoint us by denying that the four beasts in Daniel 7 are the four world empires but modern nations. Even J.A. Seiss fails to see that the woman who brings forth the man-child in Revelation 12 is Israel but argues it is the church of God on earth.¹³

E.W. Hengstenberg who wrote so admirably on *The Christology of the Old Testament* exposes the underbelly of Historicism when he sees the loosing of Satan in Revelation 20 as the French Revolution. Some have argued that there is much gold buried in Iraq because Babylon was the

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head of gold in Daniel 2. Silver in Persia? Bronze in Greece? Iron?

With due respect and in all kindness, is it not possible to become obsessive on minor details in prophecy? Really how important is the Ark of the Covenant in the end-time wrap-up - does Hebrews really make an argument here? I know of one brother dedicated to showing that the Dead Sea Scrolls are a hoax (for me they have been a most positive affirmation of the reliability of the Masoretic text). William Henry has written a book on *The Atomic Christ: FDR's Search for the Secret Temple of the Christ Light* (2000) which explores the Druids, Mongolia and the origin of the atomic bomb. Others are caught up with the so-called Ezekiel stones, allegedly 64 marble and 4 basalt tablets about 14 inches square. They have been hidden for years in a secret room in West Jerusalem. Ostensibly they were in the possession of a former president of Israel and are the originals of the Book of Ezekiel. Of course there are hidden messages in the stones which (as of 1990) could not be revealed. If true, this would be the only original extant autograph of any Biblical book. If true, why have we heard really

nothing about it? How seriously should we take material of this kind? Is this not a side-track from serious prophetic study?¹⁴

How important really is the Spear of Longinus, the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Jesus? Was it in fact found in Hitler's bunker and did Eisenhower order that it be returned to a museum in Vienna and will the Anti-Christ hold it in his hand and does this really matter at all?

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Of course the colossus of futile speculation and inquiry is the identification of the Anti-Christ. Dispensationalists of all people are those well taught that until the bridal Church is removed in the Rapture, the parousia of the Anti-Christ cannot take place. Satan, not knowing the date of the Rapture, has to have a prime candidate for this malign slot ready in every age, but he is unidentified until the Rapture has taken place! (cf 2 Thessalonians 2:7ff). Historicists like Luther and Guinness make the facile identification of the Pope as the Anti-Christ. Innumerable candidates have been seriously put forward. Among them, in World War I the Kaiser (Caesar) of Germany; Oswald Smith's candidate was Benito Mussolini. Some pegged Henry Kissinger. Some said it was Jimmy Carter and that his sister Ruth Carter Stapleton was the High-Priestess. Others said Anwar Sadat would start World War III. Of course Big Foot and the Abominable Snowman are to be seen as demons (must be running out of material for the magazine). This is patently nonsense. It is the seedpickers of Acts 17 redivivus, "spending their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" (17:21). Charles Taylor advanced the idea that King Juan Carlos of Spain would be the Anti-Christ. Some speculate Clinton. The latest candidate is Bill Gates, richest man in the world. George Ladd said the Anti-Christ was the Abomination of Desolation and Robert Van Kampen opined that the Anti-Christ would be Hitler raised from the dead. Why can't we just let it be

a matter of agnosticism? We don't know and we can't know his identity.

What profit is there in speculation on this score?

But of course, some have extraordinary prescience - they know that the Bermuda Triangle is the abussos of the New Testament so they must have

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some special kind of revelation. Or do they? This repells some dear folk.

But let it be clearly underscored that the most gargantuan mis-identification is the fast-growing error of Replacement or Supercessionism which identifies the Church as the new Israel, utterly supplanting and replacing ethnic, geo-political Israel. Israel is mentioned 74 times in the New Testament and in no passage is it a reference to the Church. Even George Ladd conceded that the Church is never called Israel in the NT.¹⁶ That all of the judgments upon Israel are literal and that all of the unconditional and conditional promises are spiritualized and for the Church is a puzzle. That Israel has been consigned to the slag-heap in perpetuity is one fertile seed-bed for anti-Semitism. Since Israel is the hermeneutical crux in interpreting Bible prophecy, this heresy is of immense proportion.

Next to this popular and preposterous mis-identification in our time must certainly come preterism in its various shades (realized eschatology with a vengeance) which sees the Olivet Discourse fulfilled in the events of 70 A.D. in the destruction of Jerusalem. Is the Lord's Supper indeed the marriage supper of the Lamb as preterists maintain? Were this so, we have totally lost our handle on any hermeneutic and are out on the sea of subjectivity facing all the shoals and sandbars of a clueless Scripture with no roadmap to the future. Is the destruction of Jerusalem really "the

consummation of the age” of which our Savior spoke in Matthew 28:18-20? Is Maranatha passe? Charles Wesley wrote 500 hymns on the Second Coming. Was he totally off? Is the incineration of the Second

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Temple “the blessed hope?” Is not this the “boasting” over the branches?

V. THE LAMENTABLE OVER-DRAWING OF THE TYPICAL

There is an additional landmine to which I would gently call attention as a peril in prophetic interpretation. Genuine types and typology are found in Scripture (1 Corinthians 10:11, examples = tupos). There are explicit types (endorsed by NT speakers or writers like the serpent lifted up in the wilderness as typifying Christ’s death in John 3:14) and I would urge that there are also implicit types (the cities of refuge and Noah’s ark as emblems of the way of salvation). But there is an over-doing of types that bleeds into eschatological understandings and we must beware of undercutting textual integrity when it does.

The early Arthur Pink wrote many probing and powerful studies in Scripture, but when he presents 100 ways in which Joseph prefigures the Lord Jesus or 40 ways in which Eliezer seeking a bride for Isaac (as set forth in Genesis 24) adumbrates the work of the Holy Spirit in finding a bride for Christ, must we not become a little uneasy?¹⁷ M.R. DeHaan was on the mark so consistently that it is acutely painful to question his contention that most Biblical passages have “a prophetic revelation.” Now there is an immense mass of prophetic material in Scripture - 1527 passages in the OT and 319 in the NT, but are we in danger of losing

authorial intent of the text when Daniel 3 is seen as “a prophetic picture of Israel in the Tribulation”?¹⁸ This reminds one of the medieval 4-fold

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interpretation of Scripture in which the fourth, anagogical is eschatological. Is chapter 6 really a picture of the preservation of the 144,000 during the Tribulation? Meaning and application of a passage are closely related but the passage is supreme in delineating the parameters of the application, a point well made by Paul Tanner in his outstanding work, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*.¹⁹ The text must control and shape the application.

A dear brother preached on WHAT WILL THE LORD SAY TO US WHEN HE RETURNS? This is a most engaging theme, but the text is Song of Solomon 2:8ff. His mains are: 1)the expression of an invitation, 10,13; 2)the expression of cessation of trial - winter is past; 3)the expression of love and holy ardor - “let me see thy countenance.” These are indeed lovely thoughts - but is this exposition? Is this preaching the text? Is this exegesis or eisegesis? Is the text a nose of putty to be made to fit our system whether or not it was ever intended to do so?

Another more academic issue is raised by Professor John Sailhamer’s adaptation of Brevard Childs’ canonical criticism. I know and appreciate John Sailhamer and his work. He is a dispensationalist, but he has a peculiar view in which there are eschatological types and typologies in virtually all historical narrative.²⁰ Thus his, in my view, exaggerated intertextuality is something that is overdone. The Hebrew noun *eretz* (earth), for instance, wherever it occurs, is really referring proleptically to Israel, the earthly people of God (as in Genesis 1:2). All literary genre are to be read eschatologically and typically. This is too much.

But how do we determine what is too much? With typology or anything else in prophetic interpretation? Sometimes it is relatively simple to ascertain, as when Benny Hinn prophesies that Castro would die in the 1990s and that the end of the world would come by 1990. There is only one name for such a person and that is false prophet. Robert Gundry tries to make a case for our being able to know “approximately” when Christ will come.²¹ Marvin Rosenthal was early on confident that his position on the pre-wrath rapture would be a major position of the believing church by 2005.²² David Chilton and Gary North in blasting what they call “pessimillennialism” rather arrogantly predict that premillennialism would be buried by 1987.²³ These cases are relatively easy to access - twaddle.

Under pressure to produce (and who doesn't feel it), we may strain too hard to find contemporary verification. George Otis, Jr. has done this with regard to Islam, it seems to me, in his book *The Last of the Giants: Lifting the Veil on Islam and the End Times*. We have always held that Islamic countries would be major players in the end-time scenario (as in Ezekiel 38-39 and Daniel 11, the “King of the South”) but they will not be totally pre-emptive as Otis suggests.²⁴ There are other centers of power, in Europe and in Asia (the Kings of the East-*Time Magazine* allows that the Peoples Republic of China could amass an army of 200 million, cf Revelation 9:16). Let's not oversimplify in the light of a current situation.

There is some soundness in John Hagee but he also argues that Islam will rule the world and advances the odd notion that the 1335 days of Daniel

12:12 are in fact 1335 years which in the Muslim reckoning of time (?) would bring you from 622 A.D. and the founding of Islam up to 1917 and the Balfour Declaration and Allenby's occupation of Jerusalem.²⁴ He also greatly exaggerates the significance of Yitzhak Rabin in the affairs and destiny of Israel. His heart is right, however, on the Rapture and on Israel.

Obviously there are many secular false prophets - like *The Kiplinger Letter* predicting on December 6, 1941 that there would be no war. Such scientists like Paul Ehrlich writing in the sixties about the imminent catastrophes of the "population bomb" and world food shortage, which have never come true. In the fuel crisis of the 1970s we were told that the world would run out of fuel in 10 or 15 years. These prophets of doom and gloom were and are false prophets. But we who are ambassadors for Christ must not be false prophets by venturing beyond the text and cautious application. I speak to my own heart as I speak with a heartfelt plea to you. Jeremiah had grim news but always projected HOPE!

This is not to say that we should shrink back from clear teaching in Scripture when appearances seem to shift. The collapse of Soviet state socialism in our time gave some of our critics a field day. They mocked our understanding of a key Russian role in the early consolidation of the Anti-Christ's power. But let's not surrender on this. Scripture stands and our interpretation is old and true. Historians have pointed out that Russia is never more dangerous than when on her back (ask Napoleon). She is still a powerful, nuclear and energy rich country with vast ambition.

France's and the Netherlands' turndown and Britain's reluctance to accept the European Constitution is not the end of a developing European union with a combined higher G.D.P. than the U.S. It is premature to abandon our understanding of the ten toes of the image (Daniel 2) and the ten horns of the beast (Daniel 7). Let us not panic in haste on these issues.

VI. THE BLESSED PERSPICUITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

No system of interpretation is without its sticky wickets. We all wish the Apostles would have stated a few things a bit differently or explicated some expressions more fully. But we judge a system on its radicals, its main points and it is my undying conviction that dispensationalism stands these tests well. Some of our critics have issued premature obituaries, as has Jack Van Deventer in *Agenda*:

"Today, dispensationalism is in a theological turmoil, having declined sharply since the 1970's because of mounting criticism. Grenz notes: 'Dispensationalism today is in a state of fluidity. No longer are the rigid distinctives of the past held to with unswerving certainty. Many progressive dispensationalists are no longer certain as to exactly what are the defining tenets of the system that commands their allegiance.'"²⁶

This may be accurate in part with regard to the schools and the academy but is not true at the grassroots. Sources tell us that the burgeoning underground church in China holds to imminence and premillennialism. Remember that imminence necessitates pre-tribulationism. I can picture the little cemetery in El Salvador with the sign: CHRISTO VIENE. The Word has perspicuity - if read clearly: Christ is coming - Christ is coming soon - we need to be ready. Only in dispensationalism is there really any real excitement about the return of the Lord. Who else holds conferences

on Bible prophecy? Whose are the hymns and gospel songs about the Second Advent? Who has the best-selling fictional projections setting out the Biblical scenario of the end-time (starting out with Sidney Watson in the early 19th century up to the *Left Behind* today).²⁷ How many faith missionary societies and schools have had these tenets embedded in their statements of faith! D.L.Moody, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham have all been premill-pretrib. Dispensationalism itself has embraced the Reformed (like Barnhouse and Boice). the Amyrauldian and the Arminian. Dispensationalism has claimed the Yale/European educated R.A. Torrey and the layman, William E. Blackstone.

As Augustine observed: The Bible is like a river - an elephant can swim in it and a little child can wade in it. The least sophisticated can grasp the essentials and the profoundly probing can be entranced for hours with a single expression. This is the miracle of the Word of God. I can bear personal testimony - I was a boy preacher and began to preach before I was converted. W.B. Riley baptized me when I was ten. I preached my way through numerous schools. My old pastor Gustaf F. Johnson at Park Avenue Covenant Church in Minneapolis preached often and deeply on prophetic themes - I remember the Sunday evening after the detonation of the atomic bombs he preached on "The Atomic Bomb and 2 Peter 3:10." After the establishment of the state of Israel he preached on that the following Sunday evening. My immigrant parents/grandparents had no schooling but cherished their Bibles and the blessed hope. I pastored for

32 years, most lengthily I followed Paul S. Rees at historic First Covenant Church in downtown Minneapolis (formerly the Swedish Tabernacle). Since 1981 I have taught preaching and been chief homiletician at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and have some association also with Moody Bible Institute (though retired, I still teach and at master's and doctoral levels). Bible preaching and Bible prophecy have been my life's work.

My urgent plea to my students has always been: STICK TO THE TEXT! Of the various historic forms in the taxonomy of preaching, none is more appropriate to our high view of Scriptural inerrancy than is expository preaching. Why abandon it in preaching on prophecy? Let even our systematic constructions in theology be submissive at all times to the text and corrections of Holy Scripture. Let us live out more consistently the implications of Biblical inerrancy. Let us sacrifice sensationalism for the sanity of what the Biblical text actually says. If we stayed more assiduously to the text of Scripture itself we would be less prone to those aberrations and false starts which have sometimes intruded into our proclamation and lured us into an hermeneutical house of horrors. Let us preach the Word boldly and fearlessly and accurately and powerfully through the Holy Spirit in order that we might all be workmen "who do not need to be ashamed and who correctly handle the word of Truth: (2 Timothy 2:15). Grant it to your unworthy servants, O Lord. And even so "come quickly, Lord Jesus. Maranatha! Amen.

1. David L. Larsen, *The Company of Hope: A History of Bible Prophecy in the Church* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2004) 459
2. *ibid.* 75
3. John Weldon, *Decoding the Bible Code: Can We Trust the Message?* (Eugene, Or: Harvest House, 1998). Among the best studies on this.
4. S. Franklin Logsdon, *Is the United States in Prophecy?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968). A most bizarre thesis - Babylon=USA. Charles Hunter, the charismatic healer, insisted that "the beast" in Rev. 13 is USA. Those in Pentecostalism espousing "Dominion Theology" are often called "positive confession" charismatics and include Pat Robertson. cf Robertson's *The New Millennium* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990).
5. In his very well-done series on the parables of Matthew 13, Mark Bailey in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1998-99, views the mustard seed and the leaven as positive and the treasure in the field and the pearl as showing how we must abandon all for the kingdom, rather than Israel/Church. Pentecost would seem to agree with the former but not the latter. I would hold with Walvoord and Toussaint here.
6. E. Schuyler English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture* (Travelers Rest, SC: Southern Bible Book House, 1954).
7. Zane C. Hodges, "The First Horseman of the Apocalypse" in *Bib Sac*, October, 1962, 324ff; Daniel K.K. Wong, "The First Horseman of Revelation 6" in *Bib Sac*, 153: April-June, 1996, 212ff
8. G. Campbell Morgan, *God's Methods with Man* (New York: Revell, 1898; cf ed. Jill Morgan, *This Was His Faith: The Expository Letters of G. Campbell Morgan* (London: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.) p249ff, 269ff.
9. William M. Alnor, *Soothsayers of the Second Coming* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1989). A veritable compendium of quakery. I have drawn from it.
10. Texe Marrs, *Flashpoint*, Vol. 96-4 and other such undated sources which I have on file. The five major prophecies made by Karl Marx have also proven false--cf "What is Left of Socialism," Lezek Kolakowski, in *First Things*, October, 2002, 42ff. We must beware of "the wolf, wolf syndrome"--Larry Burkett had been promising "the economic earthquake" since 1991 and the Dow has risen 200%. His advice for Y2K to keep \$10,000 hidden in the house and move from 401 (K) to money-market funds has proven disastrous for anyone who followed him.
11. The Prophecy Club article "Will Russia Attack America?" was in *USA Today*, October 7, 1998 and on the inside cover of *Insight on the News*, May 4, 1998. David Wilkerson has consistently mis-propheesied that

Russia would attack the US with nuclear weapons, that marijuana would be legalized, that the RC Church would oust charismatics, etc. etc.

12.Hal Lindsey and C.C. Carlson, *Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 54.

13.J.A.Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep.1964) 278f

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14.David Allen Lewis, *Prophecy 2000* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 1990).

15.David L. Larsen, "Replacement Theology: The Heresy of Supersessionism: in *The Discerner: A Non-Denominational Quarterly Exposing Unbiblical Teaching and Movements*, Jan.-Mar.,2005, 25.3

16.David L. Larsen, *The Company of Hope*, op. cit. 443

17.Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1922) 139ff. So iconclastic and idiosyncratic did Pink and his wife become that they did not attend any church in their last years in Scotland.

18.M.R.DeHaan, *Daniel the Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947) 81ff, 188ff

19.Paul Lee Tanner, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974). A superb discussion of the subject. Also very helpful is Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 159ff, 251ff (Israel and the Church).

20.John H. Sailhamer, "The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy," in *JETS*, 30/3, September, 1987, 307-315
One of the problems with such an esoteric hermeneutic is that takes the Bible out of the hands of laypersons requiring almost a PhD to interpret it. This violates our understanding of the perspecuity of Holy Scripture.

21.David L. Larsen, *The Company of Hope*, op. cit. 252

22.ibid. 504

23.ibid. 480

24.George Otis, Jr., *The Last of the Giants: Lifting the Veil on Islam and the End Times* (Tarrytown, NY: Chosen Books/Revell, 1991)

25.John Hagee, *Beginning of the End, Final Dawn Over Jerusalem, Day of Deception* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000). Hagee holds that Israel will force the removal of the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque on the Temple Mount. Many of us see another scenario (as do many of the Rabbis today).

26.Jack Van Deventer, "Dispensational Origins of Modern Premillennialism" in *Agenda*, 7.3, 31

27. Crawford Gribben, "Before Left Behind," in *Books and Culture*, July/August, 2003, 9

Postscript: In an article in *Near East School of Theology's THEOLOGICAL REVIEW* (XXVI/1, 2005, 3-38), Professor Marc Schoeni, although bitterly opposed to Dispensationalism, concedes: "A consistent Biblicism has to be Zionist" (38). He admits that parts of the OT have a clear Zionist import. Zionism wasn't created out of thin air! The issue is: HERMENEUTICS! he urges. How shall we understand Scripture as a whole. This is the key.