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# Dispensationalism, Date-Setting, and Distortion

by Thomas D. Ice

The recent attempt by Edgar Whisenant (*88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988*) to set the date of the Rapture is just the latest of many attempts made by Christians over the centuries to predict the second coming of Christ. In fact, just this week (the week before Christmas) I received in the mail from an anonymous sender, a book entitled *Blessed Hope*, 1996, written by someone from the Houston area named Salty Doc. You guessed it, the Rapture is slated for 1996. Unfortunately, many who are opposed to dispensationalism have jumped on this and other recent forecasts as evidence that dispensationalism is a false system of theology or interpretive approach and are using it to discredit the system. Unfortunately, both advocates and antagonists of dispensationalism are woefully ignorant that the very Biblical assumptions underlying dispensationalism are themselves hostile to date-setting of the Rapture. Much harm has been done by the supposed friends, not to mention the critics of dispensationalism by these distortions.

## Fruit and Root

Dispensationalism has become a victim of its own recent popularity, especially concerning the issue of the Rapture. Popularity often leads to acceptance without critical understanding of a position. This is one of the reasons why many in the church today are unfamiliar with the term dispensationalism, since the popularity of the Scofield Reference Bible has waned with the acceptance of modern revisions. However, due to the writings of Hal Lindsey and other prophecy popularizers, most Christians are familiar with at least one doctrine usually associated with and unique to dispensationalism--the pre-tribulation Rapture of the church. They have tasted the fruit but are not aware of the root which produces this fruit. In this edition of Biblical Perspectives we want to clarify some of the misconceptions about dispensationalism and use the Whisenant book as a case in point to demonstrate that any attempt to date-set the Rapture is possible only when certain conclusions of dispensational theology are tied to a non-dispensational methodology. In fact, we will also see that one of the reasons dispensationalism became popular was that it was the only approach to premillennialism which strongly opposed date-setting. For it affirmed that the signs of the times, the "prophecy clock," would not resume ticking until after the Rapture of the church. Therefore, no one could possibly predict the Rapture on the basis of events taking place in the current church age because there are no signs relating to the Rapture. The fruit of date-setting and many other contemporary errors have not been gathered from the root called dispensationalism.

## What is Dispensationalism?

Dispensationalism, like most theologies, is not monolithic. There is a spectrum of beliefs and differences within the camp of those who take the label "dispensationalist." In a recent essay, dispensationalist, John Feinberg calls our attention to the fact that

"although not all dispensational positions are alike. Nonetheless, it seems possible to delineate those elements to all dispensational systems".<sup>1</sup>

Feinberg prefaces his list of six essentials to dispensationalism by noting some popular myths about what is necessary to dispensationalism. He notes that often various people who are dispensationalists hold to a particular interpretation of certain passages which are often identified so closely with

dispensationalism, but is in reality not essential to dispensationalism. Some of these non-essentials include a certain interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, a certain number of dispensations, the test and a failure view of history, Calvinism or Arminianism, a certain view of church government, and a certain view concerning the Mosaic Law (pp. 68-71).

## Dispensationalism's Six Essentials

1. The multiple senses of terms like "Jew," and "seed of Abraham." Feinberg explains that "dispensationalists recognize multiple sense of terms like "Jew," "seed of Abraham," "chosen people," and they insist that none of those senses is canceled out or becomes unimportant once one turns to the NT" (p. 72). The Bible uses these terms in at least four distinct ways: First, is a biological, ethnic, national sense in which Scripture refers to the genetic or biological descendants from Abraham called Jews. This use is clearly illustrated in the NT in Romans 9-11 (p. 72). Second, the terms are sometimes used in a political sense. "Israel" can refer to all twelve tribes, the nation, and later in a more limited sense to the Northern Kingdom. Jesus is called the King of the Jews in the NT. This sense is not identical to the first, "for through military conquest or conversions to Judaism followed by living in Israel the political nation of Israel could have at times included non-ethnic Jews" (p. 72). Third, is a spiritual sense. Terms like "seed of Abraham" and "chosen race" also apply to any individual or group, regardless of ethnic background, properly related spiritually to God by faith, i.e., the redeemed. The terms in this sense may be used of Gentiles (e.g., some instances of "seed of Abraham" in Romans 4). But the terms in their spiritual sense are even used to distinguish mere biological Jews from Jews who are both biologically and spiritually related to God (e.g., Rom. 9:6ff)" (p. 72). Fourth, is a sense often called typological. "For example, in the OT there are times when Israel, while being Israel, may also function as a type of the church. Some NT passages even state that some event involving Israel is a lesson for the church (1 Cor. 10:1-6, e.g.)" (p. 72).

Feinberg summarizes that which is "distinctive of dispensational thinking is recognition of all senses of these terms as operative in both Testaments coupled with a demand that no sense (spiritual especially) is more important than any other, and that no sense cancels out the meaning and implication of the other senses" (pp. 72-3). This area of dispensational thinking has traditionally been stated by the slogan of "making a consistent distinction between Israel and the Church." Dispensationalists believe that proper exegesis of the text of Scripture produces the above four senses. Therefore, the context of each text governs which sense is meant in any given passage, whether OT or NT. However, those who do not handle the text in this way often use some NT theological/redemptive approach to declare that one or more of the senses has been made obsolete. This errant approach is the method recently used by James McKeever to say that the Church alone is Israel. He ignores the multiple sense use of the term "Israel" in the NT and demands that only the spiritual sense is used. This is why McKeever boldly declares that it is "time to put an end to the false teaching that the Hebrews living on the shores of the Mediterranean are Israel and for the church to recognize and claim its inheritance: the church is Israel."<sup>2</sup>

Restorationist, Rick Godwin makes a similar, but wrong remark when he declares concerning ethnic Israel, "they are not chosen, they are cursed! . . . Yes, and you hear Jerry Falwell and everybody else say the reason America's great is because America's blessed Israel. They sure have. Which Israel? The Israel--the church. . . . That's the Israel of God, not that garlic one over on the Mediterranean Sea!"<sup>3</sup>

2. Hermeneutics. Traditionally dispensationalists are said to exercise a more consistent literal interpretation of the Bible than do other approaches. This is true if we correctly understand what Feinberg is saying. This means that the dispensationalist gives proper place to the progress of revelation as well as implementing the right use of typology. The progress of revelation is

properly understood as the dispensationalist "takes each Testament on its own and the less he tends to see one Testament's understanding as normative for the other" (Feinberg, p. 79). This is often the case with other approaches as they impose man-made theological ideas like the "NT interprets the OT," or a "Redemptive Theology" approach. This also means that as each Testament stands on their own, there is no contradiction between the two, which have been handled by one's allegorical handling of certain texts. Dispensationalists believe that "both type and antitype must have their own meaning even while bearing a typological relation to the other, understanding the implication of NT reinterpretation of the OT" (p. 79). The dispensationalists hermenutic is consistent from Genesis to Revelation and does not have to resort to abstraction when the theology does not seem to fit.

3. Covenant promises to Israel are unconditional and eternal. Feinberg notes,

"What is unconditional is that God will fulfill the covenants to Israel. On the other hand, not every last Jew, ethnically speaking, will receive the benefits of those promises. Individual blessing under the promises is always conditioned upon obedience to the God who made the covenant" (p. 79). Dispensational distinctives would note the following four points: First, those addressed in the OT covenants are ethnic Israel. This does not mean that they cannot apply to Gentiles. Second, "the covenant promises contain an unconditional element. The particular Israelites who realize them are the believing remnant, but their unconditionality for the nation necessitates a fulfillment of the believing remnant as a corporate entity" (p. 80).

Third, the promises involve not just spiritual blessings, but also social, political, and economic blessings. "Dispensationalists demand that one emphasize the variety of elements of covenant blessing, not just the spiritual" (p. 80). Fourth, this leads to the conclusion that although parts of both the spiritual and physical aspects of the covenants have been fulfilled, the full measure awaits a future consummation. This means that "many OT prophecies of future blessing for Israel not only can have double fulfillment (once each for Israel and the church) but must" (p. 81).

4. A distinctive future for ethnic Israel. Dispensationalists believe that this means that the Church and Israel are distinct and that God will fulfill a specific plan for national Israel in the future. This means that the church "neither replaces nor continues Israel. There will be a distinctive future for ethnic Israel." Since God has eternally elected Israel, "even after Israel rejects Christ, a future for Israel is still promised" (p. 83). This will occur after Israel believes in Jesus as their Messiah (Zech. 12:10).

5. The church is a distinctive organism. The church does not begin until the day of Pentecost, during the NT era. "This also means that the church did not exist in any form in the OT" (p. 83). Since "the church is an organism of spiritually gifted people, and if Christ did not begin giving those gifts until after the Ascension, one is led to conclude that the church did not exist until the NT" (p. 84).

6. A broad philosophy of history. Dispensationalists do not see God's plan primarily as salvation history, but rather as "the gradual implementation and outworking of the kingdom of God." Dispensationalists "emphasize both the spiritual/soteriological and the social, economic, and political aspects of things" (p. 85). The dispensationalist sees the kingdom of God fully established by both phases of the career of Christ, His first and second comings, as well as His direct presence and intervention to establish both the spiritual and physical parts of the kingdom.

A Seventh Essential Since it is really impossible to be a dispensationalist and not believe in the pretribulation Rapture of the church, this needs to be added to Feinberg's six essentials. When people

begin to deny the pretrib Rapture they will at the same time move away from dispensationalism. I also believe that the pretrib Rapture is the only consistent conclusion when one rightly applies the other six essentials. With the questions answered, "What is dispensationalism?," we can now apply this theology and approach to the issue of date-setting.

## **Date-Setting and Dispensationalism**

Dominion theologians have tried to make dispensationalism look bad by wrongly associating the recent epidemic of date-setting as a product of dispensationalism. Gary North is typical of the dominionist propaganda when he links Whisenant with dispensationalism by declaring,

"This is all too typical of dispensationalism."<sup>4</sup>

Oh no it's not! Date-setting is not typical of dispensationalism in any shape, matter or form.

## **The Anti-Date-Setting Theology of Dispensationalism**

Dispensationalism believes the fact of the Rapture is stated in 1 Thess. 4:17. However, the timing of this event, whether pre-, mid-, or post- tribulational is a product, not of specific passages, but is the application of one's theology to the chronological issue. In other words, there is not a verse of Scripture that says, one way or the other, whether the timing of the Rapture will be before the seven-year tribulation (pretrib), or at it's end (posttrib). Anyone's understanding of the timing of the Rapture depends on one's theology relating to Israel and the church and just how consistent they are in applying these theological conclusions to the timing of the Rapture. For example, if the church age ends before the tribulation begins, as dispensationalists believe, then it follows that the Rapture is pretribulational. If the church is found to be in and participating in the tribulation, not believers but church age believers, then it follows that the Rapture is posttribulational. Dispensationalists believe that God's single plan for history includes some of the following factors: The church was not predicted in the OT. It was a mystery or secret, hidden away in God's plan, until the NT revealed it (Eph. 2-3). Since the church began without warning, so it will end without warning. This is called the "any-moment" possibility of the Rapture.

In addition, the current church age does not have specific events which will be fulfilled relating to the course of this age. The church age is described by general characteristics (usually moral in nature) describing overall trends within this age. For example, 2 Tim. 3:13 says, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." You never know when you have arrived at such a state, because no matter how bad men get, they can always get a little worse. In contrast, God's plan for Israel is related to specific events which can be related to chronological sequence. For example, believers alive during the seven-year tribulation (which is Daniel's 70th week and given for Israel according to Dan. 9:24, cf. with 9:20) will be able to keep track of the time indicators and know when events will occur.

Another chronologically related event will be the abomination of desolation which will distinctly occur at the three and a half year mark of the seven-year tribulation period. There does appear to be some overlap of God's program for Israel at the beginning and end of the church age. This is due to the transitional nature of those times. The Book of Acts records the birth of the church and its transition from the age of Israel to the age of the Church. There are some incidents of specific fulfillment of OT prophecy at the beginning of the church age. In a similar manner, there will likely be "stage setting" at the end of the church age as God's plan progresses from the church age to Israel and the tribulation. This is why dispensationalists would say that Israel's return to the land will very likely turn out to be a fulfillment of prophecy if this event is part of the stage setting for the transition from the church age to the tribulation. A consistent dispensationalist should not yet make a definitive announcement on the subject, since the timing factor is still a mystery. Therefore, based upon such an understanding of Scripture, the church is removed by the pretrib Rapture before God resumes His plan for Israel and the

nations. This explains why some prophetic passages speak of Christ taking or receiving His people (the church) to be with Him in the clouds (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:17), while other language describes a return to the earth to judge His enemies and to rescue Israel (Zech. 12-14; Luke 21:25-28).

### **Whisenant the non-Dispensationalist**

Edgar Whisenant is not a dispensationalist, nor does he use a dispensational theology or approach in his date-setting attempt. The most dispensational thing that can be said about Whisenant would be that he takes a dispensational conclusion--the pretrib Rapture--and then destroys the basis upon which that conclusion was reached by his date-setting approach. By definition, to date-set is to be non-dispensational because it denies the any-moment Rapture feature of dispensationalism. Furthermore, it is questionable whether or not Whisenant even holds to a pretrib Rapture. He seems to waver between a pretrib and what is known as a partial Rapture position. The partial Rapture theory states that those who are spiritual are taken before the tribulation, while those who are carnal are left to be purified by the trials of the tribulation. This view denies the grace of God, since it is based upon our merit rather than God's mercy. The same grace that saved us from our sins will also be the grace that qualifies all believers to be taken out when the Rapture comes. It is my contention that it is impossible to set a date for the Rapture and still be rightly classified as a dispensationalist. Here's why. Dispensationalists believe in the "any-moment" possibility of the Rapture. If a date could be set for the Rapture, then Christ could not return at any-moment. He would be limited to that specific time. Therefore, since there are no signs or time indicators related to the Rapture, dispensationalists cannot date-set.

There is a difference between those who say that Christ is coming soon (say within a lifetime), based upon "signs of the times," and those who say He could return at any-moment. North wrongly says that dispensationalism "creates a mentality based on emotion and the expectation of the imminent end of all things" (p. 2). Dispensationalists do not say that the end is imminent but that it is possible at any-moment. It is true that people who are dispensational do say that Christ is coming back soon. However, I believe that this is not in keeping with the principles of dispensationalism. Whisenant cannot be right since he confuses the Rapture and the second coming. Since the Rapture is a signless event, there are no signs related to it's occurrence. Since there are no signs for the Rapture, he takes passages that relate to the second coming and then predicts the Rapture on that basis. He cannot predict the timing of the second coming during the church age, because God has not given any time indicators related to the length of the church age. Therefore, it is impossible to know when to start the seven-year countdown of the tribulation leading up to the second coming. And it is even more impossible to know when the Rapture will occur.

### **Other Errors by Whisenant**

Whisenant says that we should know when the Rapture will occur since God always tells His people before He does something in history. One of the examples he cites is from Gen. 18:17 where the Lord tells Abraham of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is at least one major difference between this and Whisenant's approach. In the Bible God tells people about events, while Whisenant has calculated the timing of an event. Whisenant is devoid of Revelation on this matter and it is merely his own schemes.

Another non-dispensational feature in Whisenant's scheme is that he assigns two of Israel's feasts to the church. This kind of mixing of things related to Israel with the church is clearly counter to the approach taken by dispensationalists. If this OT feast were fulfilled by the church (which it is not, it will be fulfilled by Israel during the kingdom) then it would be an OT prophecy relating directly to the church. Whisenant is not suggesting a typological relationship to the church, but literal fulfillment. Whisenant has a habit of taking certain numbers, feasts, and events and then arbitrarily assigning them numerical value. This accounts for the fact that his math "seems" to be so accurate and work out.

William Miller's day/age theory was a similar approach taken by that famous date-setter of the previous century. Miller substituted years for days in order to arrive at his 1844 date for, not the Rapture because he did not believe in the Rapture, but the second coming. Miller also gathered quite a following and the event was labeled in history as the "great disappointment." At least William Miller had the Christian integrity to tell his followers that he was wrong. There has been no such confession that we have heard from Whisenant. I could probably list at least 88 more reasons why Whisenant is not only wrong, but also why his scheme is not in keeping with dispensationalism and the Bible, but I need to move on to other issues.

## **Lessons From History**

We have seen that the character of dispensationalism does not lead to a date-setting approach toward the Rapture or the second coming. Since this is the case, then what is the ingredient that many are mixing with dispensationalism which has produced the current date-setting mindset? For many it will come as a surprise, but the errant factor is usually found to be a non-literal, allegorical interpretative approach to prophecy, especially the Book of Revelation.

### **The Historicist Hermeneutic**

The historicist interpretation of Revelation was widespread in the first half of the 1800's in America. The previously mentioned William Miller was its champion. Dwight Wilson noted that this "interpretation assumes that the two beasts in Daniel and Revelation are identical and that the forty-two months of Revelation 13 figuratively represent 1,260 years, 538-1798. This is an example of one of those necessary shifts to symbolism--days equal years--an uncomfortable equation for literalists."<sup>5</sup>

The result of this approach meant that the current church age was equated with events taking place throughout the book of Revelation. Hardly in keeping with the futurist approach demanded by dispensationalism. If a sharp interpreter could peg which contemporary events in today's newspaper headlines were fulfilling the prophecies of Revelation, then he could establish our current location in relation to God's time table. Then it would make sense, from that point the chronology that would follow leading to the second coming. This leads to the development of specialists who could correlate current events with Bible prophecy, as well as fostering a date-setting mentality. One such specialist applied the historicist method and concluded that the "Antichrist was identified as Napoleon; he would be destroyed in Palestine; the drying-up of the Euphrates predicted in Revelation 16:12 means the fall of the Turks; the 'kings of the east' of Revelation 16:12 signified the restoration of the ten lost tribes of Israel" (Wilson, p. 20).

### **Postmillennial Date-Setting**

This kind of "newspaper exegesis" is not limited to premillennialists. Postmillennialists have historically demonstrated a great aptitude for newspaper exegesis. "America's first major postmillennial thinker was Jonathan Edwards. His views paralleled those of Daniel Whitby (1638-1725), the founder of modern postmillennialism" (Wilson, p. 18). In the mid 1700s, "Edwards speculated in his History of Redemption that within a century and a half the Mohammedans might be overthrown and the Jews converted. Contemporary signs convinced him that the millennium was at hand" (Wilson, p. 19). Nearly 250 years have elapsed and Edwards has been proven wrong. Contemporary postmillennialism is not immune to the date-setting temptation. Amazingly, Gary North, who has been quick to poke fun at premillennial date-setters like Whisenant, has dabbled in the art himself. Writing in Feb., 1985, North said that the millennium will arrive around the year A.D. 2000.

"It will not take long; under 20 years."<sup>6</sup>

In fact, there are a number of similarities between North and Whisenant on certain issues. Some of the similarities would include the fact that both are inclined to the six thousand years of the earth's history, which correspond symbolically to the six days of creation. The seventh day of rest symbolizes the thousand year millennial rest. Whisenant and North both apply the blessing and cursing section of Deut. 28 to modern America. Both seem to think that America is under direct covenant with God, as was Israel, rather than the covenantal jurisdiction governing the Gentiles in the Noahic Covenant. If we cited many more parallels, it would not be long before some might begin to think that Whisenant was a disciple of dominion theology. It is certainly safe to say, that Whisenant has as many elements within his thought that are common to dominion theology as to dispensationalism. However, Whisenant is not a dominionist; at least not yet. Neither is he a dispensationalist.

## The Rise of Dispensationalism

The effect that the great disappointment had upon mid-nineteenth century evangelicalism was to produce a negative reaction to anything premillennial. However, into this environment came a brand of premillennialism which became known as dispensationalism. This approach was developed and championed by an Irishman named J .N. Darby. Historian Ernest R. Sandeen noted that

"Darby's view of the premillennial advent contrasted with that held by the historicist millenarian school in two ways, First, Darby taught that the second advent would be secret, an event sensible only to those who participated in it.... Second, Darby taught that the secret Rapture could occur at any moment. In fact, the secret Rapture is also often referred to as the doctrine of the any-moment coming."<sup>7</sup>

As this new, dispensational approach gained ground during the last half of the the 19th century, it made it acceptable to become premillennial again. In fact, dispensationalism rose precisely because it was an anti-date-setting, anti-newspaper exegesis theology. "Unlike the historicist millenarians," observes Sandeen,

"Darby taught that the prophetic timetable had been interrupted at the founding of the church and that the unfulfilled biblical prophecies must all wait upon the Rapture of the church. . . . Darby maintained that none of the events foretold in the Revelation had yet occurred nor could they be expected until after the secret Rapture of the church. Christ might come at any moment" (p. 63). Sandeen further notes that "Darby avoided the pitfalls both of attempting to predict a time for Christ's second advent and of trying to make sense of the contemporary alarms of European politics with the Revelation as his guidebook" (p. 64).

## The Decline of Dispensationalism

When dispensational theology and history is understood, one can only ignorantly lay at its doorstep the errors of sensational newspaper exegesis and date-setting, as has been done by Gary North and countless others. "Dispensationalism is the victim of self-inflicted wounds," declares North. Oh no its not! Dispensationalism is the victim of the fact that it has not been properly understood and applied by those who claim to follow its approach. The current epidemic of prophetic speculation and date-setting is a resurgence of the historicist method mixed with some dispensational conclusions (i.e., the Rapture). Actually because dispensational thinking has declined in recent years the following conditions are currently widespread:

1. The more that premillennialism has become less dispensational, the more it moves toward the old historicist tendency to speculate concerning current events and date-set.
2. The fact that a book like Whisenant's, which date-sets, became as popular and influential within premillennialism, is an indication that the rank and file premillennialist really is not educated in

dispensationalism.

3. Date-setting concerning the Rapture is a more recent development, since belief in a pretrib Rapture is the product of dispensationalism. This trend is produced by taking the product of dispensationalism--the pretrib Rapture--and speculating about the timing of it by means of a historicist scheme--date-setting.

4. A confusion between an any-moment Rapture, as advocated by dispensationalism, with the belief that Christ will return soon, as advocated by the historicist approach. The difference is as follows: an any-moment return cannot say for sure that Christ is coming soon. It may be soon or it may not be soon. The soon coming view would require an impending return and could not be correct if Christ returns 100 years from now. Gary North is wrong again when he says, "dispensationalism creates a mentality based on emotion and the expectation of the imminent end of all things" (p. 2). Dispensationalism does not advocate an imminent end, but rather an any-moment Rapture of the church. Hopefully those who claim to be dispensationalists will actually apply that aspect of the theology and become more dispensational in their approach, as well as many of their conclusions. Dispensationalism continues to be the most anti-newspaper exegesis and anti-date-setting theology around. It merely needs to be applied.

## Stage Setting

What role do current events play within a dispensational framework during the current church age? Since I noted earlier that the church age is an interim period, surrounded by God's plan for Israel, I mentioned that the beginning and end of this period includes a transitional phase. Therefore, as God is preparing the players for the tribulation phase of history, this would mean that most of the alignment will begin to be set up during the current church age. As a result, it is significant that Israel, for instance, is back in her land. It is wrong to say that this is the fulfillment of specific biblical prophecy, but if this sequence does lead to the fulfillment of Israel's prophecy during the tribulation, then the current events can properly be viewed as stage setting for future fulfillment. So a dispensationalist sees certain current events as heightening his expectations about the future and can say that if this event or trend leads to specific fulfillment in the tribulation, then a certain current event was the beginning of prophetic fulfillment. However, it is wrong to say that events today fulfill prophecy.

## Distortions of Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism has likely suffered distortion as much from its friends as from its foes. The most severe current criticism is coming from the dominion theology camp. Note the following misconceptions:

1. Dominionists say that dispensationalism does not favor social action. To lay the blame for the social retreatism of the evangelical church at the feet of the dispensationalists betrays either an ignorance of 20th century church history or a desire to polemicize rather than pursue truth. While I strongly agree that most if not all dispensationalists up through the seventies were not involved nor wrote about social action, they weren't the only ones. In reaction to the liberal social gospel of the 19th and early 20th century all conservative evangelicals, regardless of their end-time theology, threw the baby of social involvement out with the bath water of social gospel.
2. It is popular today to say that dispensationalism is the source of the modern anti-tongues or anti-gifts movement. This of course denies the historical stand of the church from the 2nd century and seeks to make the anti-tongues stand only a recent development, when in fact, it has been the orthodox position of the church. This means that dispensationalism merely stands within the stream of historic orthodoxy.
3. Dominionists also charge that dispensationalism is against God's law and thus antinomian. Dispensationalism is not against God's law, but we do affirm that the Mosaic law was fulfilled by

Christ and church age believers are under the law of Christ, as a rule of life, which is a higher law. 4. Surprise expressed by some Dominionists over what was said in Wayne House and Thomas Ice's book *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* on ethics demonstrates not so much a shift in dispensationalism, as they advocate, but rather reflects the depth of ignorance of dispensationalism on their part. They have made the fatal error of confusing past applications of certain dispensationalists with its essentials. Thus, this invalidates many of their criticism and leaves them exposed before the bar of historical reality. I make an appeal for friends and foes alike to make a greater effort in understanding and applying dispensationalism.

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#### Endnotes

1. John S. Feinberg, "*Systems of Discontinuity*," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, editor John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Ill. : Crossway Books, 1988), p. 67.
2. James McKeever, "*Wake up Church--You Alone are Israel!*", *End-Times New Digest* (Issue 121, October, 1988), p. 19.
3. Rick Godwin, Taped message at Metro Church; Edmond, OK; April 11, 1988.
4. Gary North, September, 1988 letter to Institute for Christian Economics newsletter subscribers, p. 1.
5. Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 19.
6. Gary North, "*The Sabbath Millennium*," *Biblical Economics Today* (Vol. VIII, No. 2; Feb./Mar., 1985), p. 4.
7. Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), pp. 62-3.

Dispensationalism, Date-Setting, and Distortion. Thomas Ice. The recent attempt by Edgar Whisenant (88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988) to set the date of the Rapture is just the latest of many attempts made by Christians over the centuries to predict the second coming of Christ. In this edition of Biblical Perspectives we want to clarify some of the misconceptions about dispensationalism and use the Whisenant book as a case in point to demonstrate that any attempt to date-set the Rapture is possible only when certain conclusions of dispensational theology are tied to a non-dispensational methodology. In fact, we will also see that one of the reasons dispensationalism became popular was that it was the only approach to premillennialism which strongly opposed date-setting. But PD (Progressive Dispensationalism) changes several important features of even Revised Dispensationalism. Therefore it qualifies as a truly new phase in Dispensationalism and not just more tinkering. PD addresses itself to issues: How does the plan of salvation relate to the distinctions made in the New Testament between Israel and the Christian Church? Just how distinct is the distinction between Israel and the Christian Church? Granting that there are distinct periods in history during which God administers His people in particular ways, how many periods are there and what are the Dispensationalism is a religious interpretive system and metanarrative for the Bible. It considers biblical history as divided by God into dispensations, defined periods or ages to which God has allotted distinctive administrative principles. According to dispensationalism, each age of God's plan is thus administered in a certain way, and humanity is held responsible as a steward during that time. Dispensationalists' presuppositions start with the inductive reasoning that biblical history has a Dispensationalism is a religious interpretive system and metanarrative for the Bible. It considers biblical history as divided by God into dispensations, defined periods or ages to which God has allotted distinctive administrative principles. According to dispensationalism, each age of God's plan is thus administered in a certain way, and humanity is held responsible as a steward during that time. Dispensationalists' presuppositions start with the harmony of history as focusing on the glory of God and put God at its center - as opposed to a central focus on humanity and their need for salvatio