

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PREMILLENNIAL DISPENSATIONALISM'S
INTERPRETATION OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL AND ITS
EFFECT ON THE B.A.T.M.* STUDENT BODY'S APPROACH TOWARDS
CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETAL ISSUES.**

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ABSTRACT

This study has sought to establish a link between the theological belief system put forward by Premillennial Dispensationalism and the apparent social disengagement of those within the Body of Christ who subscribe to such an eschatological school of thought.

The development of Dispensationalism was subjected to a historical, albeit brief, analysis. This covered the period from its genesis in 19th century Britain up until the present. This analysis concentrated on the main role players in the development of Premillennial Dispensationalism as a modern day theological system. The fact that Premillennialism and Dispensationalism are not synonymous was acknowledged, but the relationship between the two was discussed and evaluated.

The Seventy Weeks of Daniel is both the central plank of Premillennial Dispensationalism and the argument of this thesis. With that in view, the study of the prophecy was undertaken from the perspective of the Early Church's understanding of eschatology and with due regard for ancient Jewish eschatological thought. The goal here was to offer a suggested historical and conservative interpretation of the prophecy. In so doing the Seventy Weeks was discussed along with the identity of the correct royal decree necessary for the correct calculation of the commencement of the period of the fulfilling of the prophecy.

In the light of the above, the negative impact of Premillennial Dispensationalism on societal issues was analyzed by way of historical examination.

This thesis concluded with a summary of the research findings and an attempt to reconcile the findings to the field of systematic theology. Furthermore, a suggested methodology for the correcting of the practical and doctrinal problems arising from Premillennial Dispensationalism was presented.

CONTENTS

Chapter One	
Introduction	1
Chapter Two	
Dispensational Premillennialism –	A examination of terminology, historical development and primary characters. 9
1. Dispensational terminology.	9
2. Dispensationalism’s distinction between Israel and the Church.	10
3. The seven dispensations commonly agreed upon among dispensationalists.	11
4. The various tribulation viewpoints and the secret rapture.	12
5. Prominent Millennial positions within eschatology.	13
5.1 Postmillennialism.	13
5.2 Amillennialism.	14
5.3 Premillennialism.	14
6. Premillennial Dispensationalism and the Seventy Weeks of Daniel.	14
7. The issue of Futurism.	15
7.1 Futurism.	15
8. Acknowledging the fact of the constant shifts in Christian thinking.	16
9. A Premillennial Dispensationalist apologetic.	16
10. The relationship between Premillennialism and Dispensationalism.	17
11. The Dispensational view of the Church and Israel.	19
12. Premillennial Dispensationalism and the pretribulation position.	21
12.1 Pretribulationism and the doctrine of imminency.	21
12.2 Pretribulationism and the secret rapture.	22
13. A brief history of Premillennial Dispensationalism.	22
13.1 The Reformation and Dispensationalism.	23

13.2 The nineteenth century birth of Dispensationalism.	24
13.3 Edward Irving.	25
13.4 John Darby.	27
13.5 Cyrus Ingerson Scofield.	29
13.6 Clarence Larkin.	31
13.7 The Port Glasgow Prophet – Margaret MacDonald.	31

Chapter Three.

The historical interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel.	33
1. The effect of Jewish eschatological thought.	33
1.1 The belief that a new age would come...	33
1.2 The conviction that before such an age...	33
2. Eschatological thought in the Early Church.	34
3. Evidence from the Apostles' Creed.	42
4. A suggested interpretation of the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.	43
4.1 The focus of the Seventy Weeks.	46
4.2 The purpose of the Seventy Weeks.	46
4.2.1 To finish the transgression.	46
4.2.2 To make an end of sin.	47
4.2.3 To make atonement for iniquity.	47
4.2.4 To bring everlasting righteousness.	47
4.2.5 To seal up vision and prophecy.	48
4.2.6 To anoint the most holy.	48
4.3 Identifying the correct decree.	51
4.3.1 There are four royal decrees...	51
4.3.2 There is no doubt that Scripture...	52
4.3.3 Such was the significance of Cyrus'...	52
4.4 Calculating the commencement of the Seventy Weeks.	52
4.4.1 Cyrus issued his decree in 536 B.C.	52
4.4.2 The decree of Darius 1 (Hystaspes).	53
4.4.3 The decree of Artaxerxes (Longinamus).	53

4.4.4 The second decree of Artaxerxes (Longinamus).	53
5. The Dispensationalist distinction between the Church and Israel and its impact upon the plan of salvation.	59
Chapter Four	
An analysis of the negative impact of Premillennial Dispensationalist belief on societal issues.	63
1. What lies behind the Western fascination with the end of the World?	65
1.1 The lack of a Scriptural timetable gives rise to wild speculation.	66
1.2 The role of Western thought.	66
1.3 The classical views of history.	66
1.3.1 The cyclical view of history.	67
1.3.2 The linear view of history.	67
1.4 Optimism and determinism.	67
2. The Premillennial Dispensationalist parenthesis as a part of apocalyptic thinking.	68
2.1 Premillennial Dispensationalism rests on two basic assumptions.	68
3. The roles and interaction of Zionism and Dispensational doctrine.	70
4. Christian Zionism and Premillennial Dispensationalism.	73
5. Some implications of the Christian Zionist and Premillennial Dispensationalist position.	75
6. A brief historical survey of the consequences of Premillennial Dispensationalist-style thinking.	82
6.1 The great date-setting trap.	86
7. The pessimism of Premillennial Dispensationalism.	88
8. Why is pessimistic Premillennial Dispensationalism so attractive to so many?	94

9. Some concluding thoughts on the social impact of Premillennial Dispensationalist theology.	96
Chapter Five	
Conclusion.	100
1. A brief summary of key issues.	100
2. The issue of social disengagement.	101
3. A suggested methodology for the correction of the practical problems identified.	110
4. A suggested methodology for the correction of the doctrinal problems identified.	116
5. The necessity of further research.	118
6. Concluding thoughts.	119
Bibliography.	121
Appendix 1.	
Raw data for survey conducted.	124
Appendix 2.	
Memorandum – Al Aqsa in danger.	128

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Contemporary South African Biblical Christianity faces huge challenges from both outside and within. It is my contention that the greatest challenge comes from within through the plethora of interpretations to be found in the area of eschatology. While most of these views are held by Godly people, the lack of a cohesive 'statement of faith', so to speak, can in no way aid the Church in fulfilling its mandate to effectively communicate the Gospel in South Africa.

Premillennial Dispensationalism represents the prominent and most effectively disseminated eschatological view in contemporary South African Christianity. Dispensationalism is a broad subject encompassing soteriology, hamartiology, eschatology, and ecclesiology. Within dispensational thought, the area of eschatology alone has various interpretive schemes. However, dispensationalism is overwhelmingly premillennial and pretribulational (Kyle: 102). It is this premillennial school of thought, as it appears in dispensationalism, that will form the focus of this thesis. While it cannot be contested that the majority of those who hold to the dispensationalist position are truly Christian, I do state, in agreement with John Gerstner that, "(dispensationalism) is a serious deviation from Biblical doctrine." (Gerstner: 1).

This thesis will seek, among other things, to encourage a more "Berean" attitude (Acts 17:10&11) towards exegesis and hermeneutics as they effect the interpretation of the Scriptures used to support premillennial dispensationalism. Such an attitude is vital when one considers that C.I. Scofield made II Timothy 2:15 a text central to his entire doctrinal scheme (Gerstner: 2). After all, one so great as the Apostle Paul had his teachings subjected to critical analysis by the people of Berea. To that end, the Scriptures will provide the only sure basis for the support or refutation of any position covered in this discussion.

Hence, the basic premise of this paper is that as Christians our sole authority for doctrine is Scripture (Mathison: x) and not subjective experience or the fanciful interpretation of current events.

The Church, as the guardian and communicator of truth, must discourage the basing of beliefs, no matter how convincing or seemingly logical, on the teachings of fallible ministers, be they authors or television personalities, regardless of their popularity or profile.

This thesis will analyze Dispensationalism in terms of eschatology as a whole before concentrating on the aspect of premillennial dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism is a theology with its own distinctive components. One of its many features is Premillennialism, the primary driving force behind the end-time thinking that has gripped modern America (Kyle: 99) and consequently the nations she profoundly influences, not least of which is South Africa.

Furthermore, it is a system of theology that encompasses much more than one particular millennial view. Premillennialism therefore cannot be equated with Dispensationalism (Mathison: 4) as the latter provides a system for premillennial ideas (Schwarz: 332). Dispensationalism, in terms of eschatology, is much more than one view regarding the 'End Times' and the Rapture, *et al.* It does encompass such under the heading 'Premillennial Dispensationalism'. It is a comprehensive theological system with a distinct hermeneutic colouring reading of any Biblical text (Riddlebarger: 24).

Premillennial Dispensationalism as disseminated by popular authors, ministers, and television evangelists such as Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart and Billy Graham (Chapman: 276), has achieved profound popularity among the curious or frightened minds of many (Schwarz: 99). Such seem to constitute a considerable portion of the 21st century Church of Jesus Christ in South Africa.

This thesis, through the examination of verifiable historical events, will show that during periods of great distress, Premillennialism awakens a morbid feeling of discontent, a fretfulness and impatience. In addition, it promotes an unhealthy desire for a vengeful visitation upon the prevailing unrighteousness of the time and upon ungodly men (Rutgers: 155).

The Premillennial Dispensationalist assumes the following: When times of upheaval come and people become fearful and uncertain - thinking that things will go from bad to worse - the Church will be raptured and thus avoid the Great Tribulation and the Antichrist. In this way the system offers comforting answers to painful questions (Riddlebarger: 26) but does not encourage a 'here and now' effective Church action. There can be no doubt that in our current era there is much doomsday hysteria that provides a fertile ground upon which to base such escapist 'theologies'.

Premillennialism in general represents a philosophy of despair. Its tone is one of pessimism and depression tarnishing any possible brightness of outlook on life and it views the world "with an ominous forecast" (Rutgers: 155). Such a view prevents, or at the very least, hinders an effective strategy of Christian service to a lost world. What motivation can possibly be mustered when one hears that "the Church and the world are destined to grow morally worse until the end of the age and it will end in diabolical wickedness?" (Rutgers: 157).

Such escapism is at odds with true Biblical Christianity. The Christian life is no longer, since the Reformation at least, about fleeing the world or spiritual resignation from it. The Christian is to be engaged in attack upon the world system and a calling to serve in the world (Moltmann: 331) to the glory of God. It is this point which this author will seek to establish, i.e. the necessity for the Church in South Africa to assume a more aggressive and relevant posture towards the societal needs of this developing nation.

In order for it to accomplish its goals, this thesis will undertake a thorough investigative study of Dispensationalism in terms of its history, development, terminology and teachings as they impinge on the area of eschatology. While

Dispensationalism has much to say in the areas of soteriology and harmartiology, neither of these are within the province and scope of this thesis. Therefore attention will be limited, where at all possible, solely to issues eschatological. This will include such matters as the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Revelation of Jesus Christ (The Apostle John's book) and the Book of Daniel, the Millennium, the Second Coming and so on. Prophecy teachers and authors have gone, and are still going, to great lengths to match specific political, historical, environmental, and sociological happenings to the texts of such apocalyptic books as Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation (Kyle: 99). Therefore such an undertaking is necessary.

In order to clearly understand the Dispensationalist positions as listed above, it will be necessary to study and critically evaluate the evolution of such doctrines and the terminology employed. In so doing I will study the main protagonists in the genesis and development of eschatology within Dispensationalism. The biographical study of prominent figures will be necessary, as such will give insight into the thinking that lay behind the original ideas and their subsequent development to the present day. What must be borne in mind is the fact that Dispensationalism has assumed a somewhat chameleon-like character regularly adjusting to suit the changes in current events (Kyle: 99).

The Premillennial Dispensationalist interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel, as this is a primary pillar of the entire system, will receive particular attention (Riddlebarger: 149). A correct understanding of the Premillennial Dispensationalist position is vital as they, the premillennialists, claim, "[here] we have the indispensable chronological key to all New Testament prophecy" (Riddlebarger: 150). Given the importance of this portion of Scripture to the entire dispensationalist position, this thesis will employ it as a central plank of its own argument.

Again, it will be necessary to maintain a narrow focus even in interpreting the Seventy Weeks of Daniel. In seeking to establish the accepted conservative Biblical interpretation, this thesis will discuss the Dispensationalist position.

This position speaks of a postponement or an alleged “gap” or “parenthesis” between the 69th and 70th Weeks of Daniel that places the latter somewhere in the future (Kyle: 103).

The entire issue of Premillennial Dispensationalism in general, and the Seventy Weeks in particular, cannot be studied or discussed without accepting the significant role and position, in terms of Dispensationalism, of the nation of Israel in Bible prophecy and eschatology. “The essence of Dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church. This grows out of the dispensationalist’s consistent employment of normal plain interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.” Charles Ryrie (Mathison: 5).

William Orr of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles said, “There isn’t the slightest doubt but that the emergence of the nation Israel among the family of nations is the greatest piece of prophetic news that we have had in the 20th century.” (Kyle: 124).

Those who subscribe to this view focus on the future regarding the Middle East and the ‘conspiracies’, both political and religious, which are fashionable from time-to-time. This often occurs at the expense of matters of local society and those issues of human need (Gerstner: 32). To the premillennial mind “Christianity is to be understood as the community of those who in the ground of the resurrection of Christ wait for the Kingdom of God and whose life is determined by this expectation” (Moltmann: 326).

This thesis will strive to show how negatively Premillennial Dispensationalism can and does impact upon the individual’s effectiveness both in terms of evangelism and social action. Concerning the former, the Premillennial Dispensationalist position on Israel severely hampers a Christian’s ability to reach the Muslim community. In the United States of America (a major player in the shaping of South African thinking) even international affairs, as part of government policy, have been and continue to be effected by dispensational

thinking and its consequential attitude towards the issues of the Middle East. Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan were dispensationalists (Chapman: 276). The current White House incumbent, George W. Bush, is seen as a supporter of Israel because of his conservative religious leanings and he has formulated policy that both directly and indirectly favours the nation of Israel (Sizer: 89&270).

It will be necessary to investigate the issue of the nation of Israel in terms of its position within conservative New Testament theology because the underlying concept within Dispensationalism is the separation of Israel and the Church (Gerstner: 33).

Only when the Kingdom of God is correctly identified in our current time as real and present with Jesus Christ as King now can a true understanding of the real Israel be achieved. Not only this, but our position as believers in this world (yet not of it) will be established and our abilities confirmed. To arrive at this point it will be necessary to answer the following question: "Why do dispensationalists deny that Christ is reigning as King today?" (Mathison: 112). It is only when a correct interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel is achieved that the issues surrounding natural Israel as a nation and the Kingdom of God can be resolved. Premillennial Dispensationalism claims that the Kingdom promises remain the sole property of national Israel and that these promises will only be filled in the future Millennium (Mathison: 113).

The identification and analysis of the dominant themes of Premillennial Dispensationalism are necessary before one can move on to an examination of the eschatological understanding of the Early Church and interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel. In so doing one will acquire an appreciation for the original understanding of the passage before the advent of Premillennial Dispensationalism. There will then exist a mechanism for comparing Premillennial Dispensationalism and its eschatological claims to the beliefs of the Early Church as inherited from the First Century apostles and the congregations of the New Testament writings.

This thesis will seek to show that much of the writings of the early church fathers were largely admonitory with very little that belonged to a specifically premillennial scheme. Edification of the church members seems to have been the chief goal (Rutgers: 247). In so doing the common Premillennial Dispensationalist assertion that the church of the first three centuries embraced Premillennialism of a Dispensationalist flavour will be challenged with a view to exposing such a position as being without significant support (Rutgers: 239).

It has therefore become necessary, in my view, to encourage the initiation of a debate concerning the veracity of Premillennial Dispensationalist views and their impact upon the attitude of the Church towards the challenges presented to it in contemporary society. It is here that one should appreciate that the hope of the Gospel, while having a polemic effect, does offer a liberating consequence on the practical life of people and to the relationships in and through which their lives are lived (Moltmann: 330).

In addition, there will be a discussion on the effect, both negative and positive, that the Premillennial Dispensationalist view has upon the attitude and necessary actions of the South African Christian in the area of societal responsibility and action. After all, the Body of Christ which follows Christ's mission to the world is also engaged in Christ's service to the world. The Church must manifest as its nature the crucified and risen Lord seen in specific acts of service in obedience to its mission to the world. The existence of the Church is completely bound to the fulfilling of its divinely mandated service. For this reason it is nothing of itself but exists solely for others. It is the Church of God only where it is also the Church for the world (Moltmann: 327).

The student body of the Bible Alive Centre of Learning in Cape Town will represent the South African Christian population. This student body comprises two groups. The first will be made up of those who are studying towards accredited qualifications through Bible Alive's Centre of Learning agreement with the South African Theological Seminary. The second group comprises

those who attend the various daytime and evening 'School of the Word' events and are working towards non-accredited awards. Group discussion and individual interviews will offer insights pertinent to this thesis.

In order to investigate as many avenues of thought on this subject as possible, it will be necessary to consult some academic and popular journals. With this in mind, pertinent websites will further the goals of this thesis.

The establishing of the various positions in this debate will allow for analysis, through historical study, of the behaviour of the Church. This behaviour will be seen in its attitude toward the societal needs that have surrounded it through the ages when exposed to dispensational style thinking or any of its related forerunners.

In so doing the effect, both negative and positive, will become clear. By summarizing all of the issues covered in the preceding chapters, it will be possible to draw conclusions.

The conclusions drawn from this research will enable one to make clear and informed decisions concerning the doctrinal issues raised by Premillennial Dispensationalism and the subsequent attitudes concerning societal responsibility which face the Church in South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

Dispensational Premillennialism – An examination of terminology, historical development and primary characters.

1. Dispensational terminology

Before identifying the genesis and tracing the development of Premillennial Dispensationalism, it is necessary to become acquainted with the terminology surrounding this doctrine to clearly understand the issues at stake.

Although the terms Premillennial and Dispensational are used together throughout this chapter they are not synonymous. Furthermore, Historical Premillennialism and Dispensational Premillennialism are different positions. Most if not all dispensationalists are premillennial, but not all premillennialists are dispensational. Premillennialism was dominant until the rise of Augustine of Hippo. It then all but disappeared for about a thousand years.

Premillennialism states that Jesus Christ will return before that literal one thousand-year period called the 'Millennium'. This position was the dominant belief in the Church of the first four centuries after Christ (Mathison: 4). Dispensationalism, on the other hand, is a system of theology that encompasses far more than just one particular view of the Millennium. Therefore, it is vital to not equate Premillennialism with Dispensationalism (Riddlebarger: 24). Having said that, there are those dispensationalists who hold to a premillennial Second Advent and, in so doing combine the two views as Premillennial Dispensationalism. From the dispensationalist perspective, their position is Premillennialism in "the purity of its expression" (Gerstner: 70). Dispensationalist leading lights such as Scofield, Darby, Chafer, Walvoord and Ryrie held such a position. Dispensationalism's association with Premillennialism lends it an aura of historicity as the latter has been in the Church more or less from the very beginning (Gerstner: 78).

Most systems of Christian theology recognize “various administrations or economies within God’s plan” but having said that, it would be both irresponsible and inaccurate to claim that all such systems are dispensational. Keith Mathison quotes the eminent Dispensationalist, Charles Ryrie: “A man can believe in dispensations, and even see them in relation to progressive revelation without being a dispensationalist” (Mathison: 4).

Dispensationalism does provide a system for premillennial ideas (Schwarz: 332) and therefore it is vital that both of these terms are clearly understood.

Dispensationalism, a movement founded in 19th century Great Britain, teaches that human history is divided into a series of dispensations wherein humanity faces tests with respect to some revealed aspect of God’s will. During each successive dispensation, humanity fails and consequently faces Divine judgement. Subsequently humanity embarks on a new course of history under new covenant conditions (Schwarz: 332). The early history of the Church contains no trace of this theology (Erickson: 109).

2. Dispensationalism’s distinction between Israel and the Church.

Classic Dispensationalism separates the Church from Israel, insisting that we are currently living in the Church Age (Kyle: 100). “The essence of Dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church. This grows out of the dispensationalist’s consistent employment of normal plain interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well” (Ryrie: 47).

Ecclesiology is the touchstone of Dispensationalism (Mathison: 17). God has two distinct programmes in history according to dispensational theology, one for Israel and one for the Church.

Dispensationalism teaches that God’s covenant with natural Israel (originally with Abraham) is unconditional. Regardless of Israel’s response, they will

remain God's special and chosen people and ultimately receive His blessing (Erickson: 115). Dispensational teaching contends that the term "Israel" still means the physical descendants of Abraham. Using Romans 9:6 for support, Ryrie states that Israel is not the Church (Erickson: 116) because God is dealing exclusively with the unforeseen Church and, as such, there are no Old Testament prophecies relevant to such a body of people.

Dispensationalists hold to the concept that the Church is not foreseen anywhere in the Old Testament and that not one of the prophets make mention of it at all. The Church then is merely a parenthesis that occurs between the 69th and 70th Weeks of Daniel (see Chapter Three). Therefore, there has been no fulfillment of prophecy since the time of Christ and the prophetic clock, so to speak, has not ticked since Pentecost (Erickson: 119).

The Dispensational position involves what can be termed a postponement of the Kingdom after Israel rejected the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church, therefore, is little more than a substitute for Israel in the overall plan of God. The Kingdom of Israel was God's true intent. As such, God will offer it again to Israel after the time of the Gentiles when the so-called Church Age is complete. Dispensationalism advocates that the Church has not displaced Israel and God has neither forgotten nor rejected His people Israel (Erickson: 119).

3. The seven dispensations commonly agreed upon among dispensationalists.

- Innocence (in the Garden).
- Conscience (up to the Flood).
- Human government (since Babel).
- Promise (since Abraham).
- Law (since Moses).
- Grace (since Christ). *Age of Grace ends with the pre-tribulation rapture.
- Kingdom (the coming Millennium). (Schwarz: 333)

*Resting on a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophets, dispensational eschatology is overwhelmingly premillennial and pretribulational (Kyle: 100).

Concerning Premillennial Dispensationalism, the events between the dispensations of Grace, or more particularly, the pre-tribulation rapture and Kingdom, are the most important to the futurist position (Schwarz: 333).

4. The various tribulation viewpoints and the secret rapture.

Some other terms commonly used in this area of study are Pretribulationism, Mid-Tribulationism, and Post-Tribulationism (Tenney: 390). Each of these terms refers to the timing of the occurrence of the rapture, the secret catching away of the Church. The rapture, as Premillennial Dispensationalists contend, is the first stage in what they believe to be the two-stage Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, those who believe that the Church will not go through the Great Tribulation subscribe to the Pretribulation view.

The Rapture belief causes the Second Coming of Christ be seen as a two-stage affair. The Rapture is the secret catching away of the Church prior to the Tribulation because it has completed its task of bringing in the great final harvest (Hilton Sutton interviewed by Richard Roberts on God Channel TV 26/01/05).

This secret catching-away will cause the disappearance of millions of Christians who will vanish and meet the waiting Christ in the clouds. In so doing, they will avoid the 'Great Tribulation' following in the wake of their disappearance (Kyle: 101). The futurist understands this seven-year period to be "the times of Jacob's troubles", the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:23ff).

The Great Tribulation will last for seven years. The first half of that period will see a gradual deterioration of human conditions. Meanwhile, political and military power will shift to a European confederacy that will resemble a

reconstituted Roman Empire. This Confederacy is to be led by the Antichrist (Kyle: 101) who will be an actual person and not just a system.

The Tribulation will bring fear and suffering beyond imagination and culminates in mighty armies marching upon Israel with the goal of taking Jerusalem. They meet their doom on the plains of Meggido as the Lord appears in glory to defeat the forces of darkness. This battle of Armageddon will rage for over a year prior the Lord's arrival, killing millions of combatants and civilians alike.

This mighty victory for the Lord then ushers in the Millennium, a literal period of one thousand years of the earthly rule of Christ from Jerusalem.

The temporary release of Satan from the abyss follows the Millennium and rebellion ensues. The uprising fails and the Lake of Fire becomes Satan's eternal dwelling place. The general resurrection then follows, after which the final judgment, the Great White Throne Judgement, commences. God then undertakes the creation of a new heavens and a new earth – the dawn of eternity (Schwarz: 333 & Grenz: 616).

5. Prominent Millennial positions within eschatology.

It is now necessary to understand a further three important terms relevant to the subject at hand: Postmillennial, Amillennial and Premillennial (Tenney: 390). These three views result from different interpretations of the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation.

The crux of the matter is to determine whether the Millennium (the 1000 years) is literal or figurative. Furthermore, does it precede or follow the Second Coming of Christ? (Tenney: 390).

5.1 Postmillennialism regards the so-called Millennium as a figurative long interval that precedes the Second Advent. At the beginning of this period, a point difficult to determine, the Gospel will finally triumph over

the nations ushering in “a reign of peace” which will last until Christ appears and establishes His rule upon the earth (Tenney: 390).

5.2 The Amillennialist, on the other hand, does not subscribe to the view of a literal Millennium at all. Some Amillennialists view the Millennium as the intermediate state of the dead. However, Amillennialism teaches, in the main, that Christ could return at any time. When He does, He will judge the world and usher in the eternal state of bliss for the righteous and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth (Tenney: 390).

5.3 Premillennialism teaches that Christ will return personally and initiate His earthly kingdom reign from physical Jerusalem directly after the Great Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon. The resurrected righteous dead will reign with Him personally on earth for one thousand years. Immediately after that period there will be a brief rebellion initiated by the release of Satan. Subsequently, the wicked will face judgement and eternity will begin (Tenney: 390).

6. Premillennial Dispensationalism and the Seventy Weeks of Daniel.

Premillennial Dispensationalism teaches that the Seventy Weeks of Daniel (see Chapter Three) ran until the rejection of Christ as the Messiah by natural Israel at the end of the 69th Week. It was then necessary to postpone the seventieth week of years while God dealt with the Gentiles. This period, known as the Church age, ends with the Rapture. This ‘catching-away’ signals the beginning of the seventieth week – “the time of Jacob’s troubles”.

During this seven-year period, the Antichrist will rise to power. This will be an actual person, in terms of Premillennial Dispensationalism, not merely a system. He assumes power by initiating a world economic system that brings relief, albeit brief, to the world’s problems of poverty and conflict. The Antichrist then receives a mortal head wound from which he miraculously recovers. Capitalizing upon this ‘miracle’, he brokers a peace deal in the

Middle East at a time of extreme crisis. The success of this venture makes it possible for him to move his seat of power from Rome to Jerusalem. In the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, the Antichrist blasphemes God, breaks the peace pact and treacherously turns on Israel. He then broadens the scope of his persecution to include the entire world. In a display of his true nature, he compels all to receive his sign, '666', the so-called 'Mark of the Beast' with the help of the 'False Prophet' (Kyle: 101).

7. The issue of Futurism.

Much of Premillennial Dispensationalist belief centres on the Book of Revelation. With that in mind, Historicism, Preterism, Idealism and Futurism are four primary terms prominent in eschatology. However, only futurism is within the remit of this thesis.

7.1 Futurism.

Those who subscribe to Futurism see prophetic and apocalyptic elements in Revelation as pertaining to what is termed the 'End Times' or the 'Last Days'. It is during this 'End Time' that such prophetic and apocalyptic events will come to pass as they are, for the most part, still future. The Futurist sees the first three chapters of John's Revelation as applying to the day in which John was alive. There exists an alternative view within the Futurist ranks. This view states that the seven churches addressed in the first three chapters of Revelation represent seven sequential periods in Church history commencing at the time of writing until the present day (Tenney: 389).

It is important to bear in mind that Premillennial Dispensationalism follows the futurist method of interpretation almost exclusively (Erickson: 98). The Postmillennial and Amillennial positions are, in the main, Historicist (Tenney: 391).

8. Acknowledging the fact of the constant shifts in Christian thinking.

The history of Christian theology moves in a manner similar to that of a pendulum. An interpretation will run its course and in so doing achieve maximum acceptance and consequently influence. Before long, another that moves in the opposite direction supplants the preceding school of thought. More often than not, the new view will bear remarkable resemblance to the replaced view. It would appear that there is seldom a total break from its immediate predecessor as it is impossible to not be influenced by that which has gone before (Erickson: 30).

Tabor College professor Richard Kyle states, "The last half of the nineteenth century witnessed two significant shifts in respect of end-time thinking" (Kyle: 101). In the main, dominant Postmillennialism gave way to Premillennialism. Moreover, within Premillennialism, Futurism displaced Historicism. These two seismic changes served to shape the apocalyptic outlook of evangelical Protestantism. Kyle states that evangelical Protestantism is a sub-culture that now dominates the American eschatological scene (Kyle: 102).

9. A Premillennial Dispensationalist apologetic.

Premillennial Dispensationalists level the charge that their critics have "always found it easier to identify the simplistic approaches of Scofield, to criticize the excesses of Lewis Sperry Chafer, and poke fun at the charts of Clarence Larkin than to understand and appreciate the self-critical and self-corrective drive that has characterized dispensationalism at a deeper level" (Blaising: 12).

This attempted defence continues by charging that such critiques of Premillennial Dispensationalism are superficial and generally fifty years out of date. "They [the critics] have failed to understand Dispensationalism, and its proponents have been and continue to be in process" (Blaising: 12).

While one would expect nothing less from an adherent of any firmly-held persuasion, mistaken or otherwise, it is incumbent upon all who seek the truth regarding Premillennial Dispensationalism to examine the facts as they present themselves.

10. The relationship between Premillennialism and Dispensationalism.

In order to offer a critical analysis of the doctrine of Premillennial Dispensationalism, it is necessary to break down the doctrine into its component parts, i.e. Dispensationalism and Premillennialism.

Millard J. Erickson contends that God has revealed more and more truth as the centuries have passed. In that regard, Dispensationalism has recognized that fact in a formal fashion. It has taken seriously the idea of progressive revelation and has developed its theology upon and around it (Erickson: 123). Dispensationalism has always sought to be thoroughly Biblical and has taken exegesis very seriously, as has its partner, in terms of this thesis, Premillennialism. This attitude is summed up in the question that will be raised by the dispensationalist when discussing any particular point, "What does the Bible say?" Whatever the rights and wrongs of Dispensationalism, such a Biblicism must be considered a virtue.

There can be no questioning the enormous influence of Dispensationalism in restoring Premillennialism to the Church. To the Premillennialist, this is nothing short of positive. David Pawson, himself a Premillennialist (Pawson: 267), states that once again millions believe that Christ is returning to earth to reign from Jerusalem for 1000 years (Pawson: 264).

For instance, the premillennial interpretation of Revelation chapter twenty, when viewed in isolation, is more adequate and definitely raises fewer questions than do alternative interpretations. However, real problems attach themselves to the premillennial scheme:

- ❖ The evidence for a literal Millennium is sparse to say the least. In fact, Revelation chapter twenty contains the only explicit reference to such a period anywhere in the Scriptures.
- ❖ Jesus did not predict such a period of His physical earthly reign.
- ❖ Paul made no mention at all concerning an earthly reign of Christ at sometime in the future.

The Amillennialist challenges not only the veracity of such a claim but also the validity of such a reign. Jesus made it clear to Pontius Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Would not such a claim make a physical Millennium superfluous?

To the premillennialist, the Millennium is the establishing of the rule of Christ upon the earth, His Kingdom come, as it were. However, such an establishment seems at odds with the other Biblical conceptions of such an establishing. Premillennial Dispensationalism sees the Kingdom initiated through a dramatic and forceful demonstration of power by the Lord Jesus Christ executing judgement and establishing His reign by way of the 'iron rod'. Such action seems to contradict God's methods as witnessed at any time since Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives. God works through the quiet, internal, invisible operation of the Holy Spirit changing the hearts of man from within.

The whole dispensational scheme significantly altered previous premillennial thinking. This was perhaps more noticeable as the Millennium became significantly more Jewish than Christian (Pawson: 263). The premillennial tendency to give the Millennium, if there is to be one, a distinctly Jewish flavour has been criticised down the centuries. Two such critics were Caius of Rome (ca 200) and Origen.

Professor Erickson, in support of the above, makes the following statement: "The premillennialist must be on guard lest literal Israel retain such a significant place in God's plan and program that it virtually displaces the Church as the primary object of God's working. He must also beware of

interpreting the New Testament with the Old Testament, thereby nullifying progressive revelation” (Erickson: 106).

While the dispensationalists claim to uphold progressive revelation in theory, in practice the opposite is very often true. To the dispensationalist, the ‘Golden Age’ of God’s redemptive history was the time of His special dealings with Old Testament Israel. After that ‘Golden Age’, there were a number of dispensations. For the dispensationalist, the plan of God, however, calls for a reversion to His dealings with Israel. In so doing, the dispensationalist sees what is currently transpiring, i.e. the Church Age, as a necessary departure from the plan or an interim arrangement. The Old Testament has not given way to the New is the net result of such thinking (Erickson: 123).

11. The Dispensational view of the Church and Israel.

The essential issue in Dispensationalism is that of the relationship between the Church and Israel. There are two distinct programmes in history, one for Israel and one for the Church (Mathison: 17). This distinction is difficult to maintain consistently.

Dwight Pentecost believed that Scripture was beyond intelligibility for anyone who could not distinguish between God’s programme for His earthly people, Israel, and that of the Church. As such the Rapture had to separate the Church from Israel before the Great Tribulation. A failure to grasp this ‘fact’ would render Scripture a place of confusion and mystery (Pentecost: 259).

Dispensationalism has carefully selected texts that seem to favour, or perhaps accommodate, his particular interpretation. Romans 9 and Galatians 3 are not so easily disposed of, however. Both of these passages make it difficult to escape the conclusion that Paul regarded the Church as the people of God comprising the regenerated of both covenants. Jew and Gentile alike have now come into the promises originally made to natural Israel (Erickson: 124). Having said that, it does seem more than likely that there will be a period of special favour extended to the Jews. During this period large numbers of them

will turn to God (Romans 9-11). Such a turning to God will come about through their conversion and integration into the New Testament Church. This period of favour will not be the result of God reverting to His 'Golden Age' relationship with Israel.

Probably one of the most contentious Scriptures employed by all sides of this debate is Galatians 6:16. The dispensationalist holds this Scripture to say that it provides no clear proof that the Church is equal to Israel. Keith A. Mathison, Director of Curriculum Development for Ligionier School of Theology, responds to this as follows: "But how can the fact that Galatians 6:16 proves nothing verify the distinction between Israel and the Church?" If I were to argue that either Amillennialism or Postmillennialism is verified by the fact that Revelation 20 does not clearly teach Premillennialism, I would be arguing from silence" (Mathison: 23).

The Apostle Paul's understanding of salvation in Christ incorporated both continuity and discontinuity with regard to His own Jewish roots. The issue of continuity is founded in God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1&2). Discontinuity, on the other hand, lies in the fact that one is not a part of the people of God on the basis of 'nation.' In the New Covenant, one gains entry as an individual through faith in Christ Jesus (Fee: 64).

The Church, therefore, is not only the continuation of the Old Covenant people of God, but is in true succession of that people. Therefore, in the Pauline view, 'to be saved' means to become a part of the people of God.

The sharp separation of Jewish and Christian destinies and the unbalanced emphasis on the Jewishness of the Millennium contradicts Jesus' clear teaching of one Shepherd and one flock (John 10:16). Such an emphasis also rides roughshod over Paul's teaching of the grafting in of the "full number of Gentiles" into one olive tree (Pawson: 265). As there was an olive tree for the grafting in of the regenerated Gentiles, it proves that there was a remnant of regenerated Old Testament saints out of Israel for the Gentiles to join. Such a position ignores the concept, rightly in my view, that Israel remains God's

elect regardless of their response to their covenant commitments. Although many disputes exist within the dispensational school concerning the timing and 'audibility' of the Rapture, there is one point of agreement: The Rapture will execute the final separation between Israel and the Church. In so doing, the unity of the Church will be broken, if not for all eternity then definitely for a period (Gerstner: 78).

12. Premillennial Dispensationalism and the pretribulation position.

Contained within the concept of Premillennial Dispensationalism, more often than not, is the Pretribulation view. Pretribulationism, with its concept of imminency, has imparted a sense of expectancy to the Christian faith and it continues to do so and that such a position does carry with it a purifying hope which pulls in its wake a sense of urgency. In other words, the time is short and the opportunity to work towards the fulfillment of the Great Commission is limited. Premillennialism in tandem with its common partner Pretribulationism has for its part engendered more eschatological earnestness than have many representatives of competitive systems.

12.1 Pretribulationism and the doctrine of imminency.

While the concept of imminency may be a motivating factor in the quest to complete the work of harvest, the dispensationalist who holds to this view is hard-pressed to offer convincing evidence from Scripture for any such notion of imminency.

The pretribulationist places the necessary view of imminency upon the New Testament injunctions to watch for Christ's return which will occur at an unlikely time and without attendant antecedents. The pretribulationist contends that there can be little point in being watchful if there still remains, at the time the injunctions were spoken, unfulfilled events such as those discussed in John 21:21ff and the sacking of Jerusalem in AD 70 as taught by Jesus in Matthew 24.

12.2 Pretribulationism and the secret rapture.

Pretribulationism depends, for the sake of its claimed veracity, on the secret catching-away of the Church, the Rapture, before the commencement of the seven-year Great Tribulation. The Scripture most used to underpin the theory of the Rapture is I Thessalonians 4:16&17, such is the narrow support base for a theory that the dispensationalist who holds to the view of Pretribulationism has to rely upon. In seeking to shore up his interpretation of the aforementioned verses, the pretribulationist seeks to employ II Thessalonians 2:3. The word “departure” is a possible translation, but is it the best possible translation? Upon closer investigation, it would appear that the context of the verse does not support such a contention. Erickson offers the following rule of interpretation as a safeguard against error: “A safe rule of interpretation is to adopt the most common or most likely meaning of a term unless there is some good reason in the context for adopting another” (Erickson: 142).

13. A brief history of Premillennial Dispensationalism.

The purpose of this section is to trace the development of Premillennial Dispensationalism from its humble beginnings in 19th century Britain through to the 21st century where it is now the predominant Christian eschatological view. In order to accomplish this, one must rely upon the witness of history (Varner: 136) and attain an awareness of the past in order to understand the present (Gestner: 1). In other words, one can only begin to appreciate this doctrine when one has some understanding of its genesis and evolution over the last one hundred and fifty years.

To survey Church history before the 19th century would be fruitless as Dispensationalism in general and Premillennial Dispensationalism in particular were not in the least anticipated by the Church (Varner: 136).

Even the Futurists – those who subscribe to premillennial dispensationalism – claim novelty for their view (Gerstner: 1). It was, as the testimony of history will illustrate, a 19th century phenomena, a view held and happily promoted by the Futurist school (Varner: 136).

Although it is true to say that Premillennial Dispensationalism became a systemized eschatological view in the 19th century one must go back to AD 1585 to identify the true roots of this view.

13.1 The Reformation and Dispensationalism.

The Protestant Reformation stayed, in the main, with Augustinian Amillennialism. Most reformers identified the Papacy as the Antichrist, the Pauline “man of sin” (II Thessalonians 2:3&4) (Kyle: 61). In addition, they were historicists with regard to the interpretation of prophetic Biblical books, in particular the Revelation of Jesus Christ. They believed that its fulfillment had been taking place throughout the Church Age (Varner: 136 & Kyle: 61).

To allow a teaching equating the Papacy with the Antichrist to go unchallenged was potentially damaging to the Roman Catholic institution. So pronounced was the threat that a Jesuit priest by the name of Francisco Ribera undertook an intensive study of Bible prophecy. Ribera’s extensive research and study resulted in the publication of a five hundred-page commentary concerning Babylon and the Antichrist. In order to deflect attention from the Papacy, Ribera adopted a futuristic interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 commonly called the ‘Seventy Weeks of Daniel’. This Jesuit’s commentary became the foundation stone of Premillennial Dispensationalism. The work of another Jesuit, Cardinal Robert Bellarine, supplanted that of Ribera (Kyle: 62).

As far as the Apostle John’s Revelation of Jesus Christ is concerned, Ribera placed the first three chapters of the Apocalypse in the 1st

century and the balance in the distant future. Furthermore, to support his view, he taught that the Jewish temple would be rebuilt on the original temple mount in Jerusalem and a literal Antichrist would arise who would abolish Christianity, deny Christ and claim to be God. In so doing, he would subjugate the entire world (Varner: 138).

Ribera's sole motivation in undertaking this monumental work was to counter the claims of the Protestant Reformation and to set aside their claims that the Papacy was the Antichrist (Varner: 138). It is therefore extremely dangerous to use his writings as the basis for a defence of any position as, after all, 'the root determines the fruit.'

So how did the 16th century writings of a Jesuit priest give rise to modern day Premillennial Dispensationalism?

13.2 The nineteenth century birth of Dispensationalism.

Samuel Maitland, an otherwise obscure librarian of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1826, while going about his duties, 'discovered' Ribera's manuscript. The claims of the Jesuit so impressed Maitland that he decided to have the writings published in the public interest (Varner: 140).

Furthermore, Maitland published a number of pamphlets commenting on the original contents of the Ribera manuscript. One such pamphlet found its way to John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. It was at this time that there was a heightened interest in Great Britain in all things prophetic. Darby's receipt of Maitland's pamphlet only served to fuel the already feverish activity and interest surrounding Biblical prophecy. British newspapers and journals discussed prophetic issues openly and regularly. Prophetic conferences abounded the length and breadth of the nation (Varner: 140).

One of the earliest and most important of these gatherings was held at Albury Manor, outside London, and annually from 1826 – 1830. The venue for these meetings was the home of Henry Drummond. Another important location was the Irish residence of Lady Theodora Powerscourt.

Historians have consistently associated two men, Edward Irving and John Darby, with those early conferences and the development of the futurist position of that era (Varner: 140). This position in eschatology, formulated in Great Britain, found acceptance in America in the second half of the 19th century almost without question. In fact, classic Darbyism would escape serious challenge until the late 1940's.

13.3 Edward Irving.

Edward Irving, born in Scotland in 1792, possessed a brilliant mind and received an M.A. degree from Edinburgh University when only sixteen years old. He was subsequently ordained into the Presbyterian ministry six years later at the age of twenty-two.

This tall and elegantly handsome man was nothing short of a genius in the minds of many, even if he was somewhat eccentric. Many who heard him preach dubbed him 'the greatest orator of his age', although he was not an expository preacher.

In 1822 Irving travelled south to London and took over the Caledonian Chapel. This facility soon proved to be too small necessitating a new building in Regent Square in 1827 with a seating capacity of one thousand. Although based in London, he held regular outdoor meetings in his native Scotland that regularly drew crowds of ten thousand and more.

This so-called 'father of modern Pentecostalism' enjoyed the patronage of some of London's aristocracy during the early years of his ministry, one of who was the former Unitarian, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Irving believed that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, as listed in I Corinthians 12, were a sign of the imminent return of Christ. Although an advocate of glossolalia, Irving never spoke in tongues or prophesied. This oddity however did not deter him from proclaiming the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the first recorded instances of the Gift of Diverse Tongues manifesting among the Irvingites took place in March 1830 when Mary Campbell of the Gare Loch region in western Scotland began to speak in tongues. Suffice to say at this juncture that the Campbells were friends of the MacDonalds of Port Glasgow, a family very much under the influence of Edward Irving. The youngest of whom, teenage Margaret, was to become an essential component in the formulation of the Futurist position.

Irving met Henry Drummond, author of 'No Greater Love', among other works, in 1824 and later participated in the Albury Conferences that began two years later in 1826. The Albury Conference of 1828 decided, underpinned by Drummond's wealth, to publish a quarterly prophecy journal entitled 'The Morning Watch.'

Henry Frere, who based his studies on the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of Jesus Christ, caused a further spark of interest in Irving for all things eschatological. Frere firmly believed that all of the Biblical prophecies were fulfilled and consequently that the Second Coming of Christ was only a few years away.

In 1826, Edward Irving translated, from Spanish, the work of Manuel de Lacunza entitled "The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty". He completed this around the time that Samuel Maitland discovered the

Jesuit Ribera's writings (Varner: 142). Lacunza wrote of a future Antichrist, an indication of the influences that brought about Irving's changing views. According to 'The Morning Watch', from as early as 1830 the Charismatic Irvingites were teaching a pretribulation rapture.

In 1831, Irving's London congregation split due to his excessive beliefs concerning the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Seven hundred faithful Irvingites left with him and established the 'Catholic Apostolic Church'. In the wake of these events, the London Presbytery excommunicated him. He was subsequently condemned by the Church of Scotland for teaching the sinfulness of Christ's humanity. This arraignment challenged his 1830 work entitled "The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature' (Varner: 143).

Edward Irving published many works and was a primary participant in the organization of the Albury prophecy conferences. These conferences set the pattern for similar gatherings throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries.

On 7th December 1834, Edward Irving died in Glasgow aged forty-two. His prophetic enthusiasm spread around the nation and impacted many including John Darby.

13.4 John Darby.

John Darby was born in London, England, on 18th November 1800. After school, he read Law at Westminster College before graduating with a B.A. from Trinity College in Dublin, Eire.

Although he had studied for the Law, he switched careers and prepared for ministry, being ordained into the Anglican priesthood around 1825. Disillusionment with the Anglican fellowship led to him and a group of friends forming the Plymouth Brethren in 1826/27 while in Dublin (Sizer: 51). It was after these decisions that Darby developed

his dispensational ideas and his group soon became ardent advocates of the “any moment” doctrine (Kyle: 74).

Some religious historians contend that the Brethren were teaching a two-stage Second Coming as early as 1831. Others believed that Darby introduced ‘the secret rapture of the Church theory’ at the Powerscourt meetings in 1833. In any event, it is worth noting that such prominent brethren as George Muller were in open opposition against the teaching of a secret rapture because of its lack, they claimed, of Scriptural soundness (Varner: 144).

John Darby first crossed the North Atlantic Ocean to the United States in 1864. He enjoyed his greatest influence among the Presbyterians and the Baptists. During the decade of the sixties Darby also travelled to New Zealand and the West Indies. To these destinations he carried the concept of a two-stage Second Advent (Kyle: 104).

Darby, the father of Dispensationalism, as he was dubbed by the editor of his works William Kelly (1820 – 1906) (Varner: 143), died in Bournemouth, England on 29th March 1882. Eight to ten thousand people attended his funeral. A prodigious writer, he left behind some forty volumes of writings. It was through his books that the Futurist system travelled around the English-speaking world.

As Darby’s influence was so far-reaching, Dispensationalism prevails as a belief system within mainstream evangelical Christianity. After all, he had been instrumental in setting up around one thousand five hundred assemblies around the world.

John Darby’s impact upon the thinking of C.I. Scofield, who was a student of James Brookes, the father of American dispensationalism (Gerstner: 37&39), is probably among the most important developments in the growth of Dispensationalism in evangelical thinking (Varner: 145).

13.5 Cyrus Ingerson Scofield.

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield was born in the northern state of Michigan, U.S.A. in August 1843. After infancy, he grew up in Tennessee before serving in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War. After military service, he studied law.

Scofield came to salvation under the ministry of Dwight L. Moody, a claim often questioned. In 1880, he joined the Pilgrim Congregational Church under the pastorate of D.C. Goodell, a close friend of James Brookes, a proponent of the Futurist position.

With no theological training to his credit, although he did give himself to diligent study in the home of James Brookes, Scofield received his licence to preach. His first assignment was a pastorate in Dallas, Texas in 1882 (Gerstner: 41).

His Roman Catholic wife, Leontine, who he married in 1866, sued for divorce on 28th July 1881. The charges levelled against her husband included absenting himself, abandonment of the family, neglecting of duty and the failure to support or contribute towards the needs of his family in terms of clothing, food or home. Scofield denied every charge (Varner: 145).

In spite all of this, Presbyterian minister James Brookes (mentioned above), who had worked with John Darby, sponsored Scofield's ministerial endeavours and helped to shape his eschatological views (Varner: 146 & Gerstner: 41).

J.R. Graves also influenced Scofield, the author of 'The Work of Christ Consummated in Seven Dispensations' published in 1883. The latter was also influenced by the writings of John Darby and William Kelly.

In 1890, Scofield released the 'Scofield Bible Correspondence Course' dealing with Dispensationalism. Moody Bible Institute took over the course in 1914/15. At the same time he was also the head of the South Western School of the Bible in Dallas, Texas, until his death on 24th July 1921. The South Western School was the forerunner of the Dallas Theological Seminary founded in 1924 by Lewis S. Chafer (1871 – 1952).

In 1909, the Oxford University Press published 'The Scofield Reference Bible'. This reference Bible is probably the most influential published work in the history of the Futurist position. Its production and publication came about with the help of seven consulting editors including such dispensational leading lights as A.C. Gaebelain and A.T. Pierson. Since its first publication, it has gone through two major revisions, in 1917 and again in 1967. Prominent Brethren businessmen financed the initial publication (Varner: 147 & Gerstner: 42). Within fifty years of publication, The Scofield Reference Bible achieved approximately three million sales worldwide.

The work of Finis Jennings Dake, the author of 'Dakes Annotated Reference Bible' published in 1961, furthered the propagation of Scofield's Dispensationalism.

The Scofield Reference Bible is the closest Dispensationalism, as a whole, will get to a manifesto such as Communism's 'Das Kapital'. Even as Karl Marx, popularly thought of as the father of dialectics, Freidrich Engels was most definitely his necessary accomplice. In the same way, Clarence Larkin, a mechanical engineer and architect by profession, supported the work of Scofield and Dispensationalism increased in momentum with the publication of his chart-laden 'Dispensational Truth' published in 1918.

13.6 Clarence Larkin.

Although not the recipient of any formal theological training, Larkin was ordained into ministry at the age of thirty-four after a career in business. At the time of his ordination, Larkin was not a Premillennialist but subsequently adopted the Futurist view (Varner: 150).

Larkin revealed that the material used for his charts in his Futurist 'Dispensationalism', "in its present form...originated at the end of the sixteenth century with the Jesuit Ribera" (Larkin: 5).

13.7 The Port Glasgow Prophet – Margaret MacDonald.

Earlier in this chapter, mention was made of the teenage Margaret MacDonald. She was the first person who saw the Second Coming not as stageless, but divided into two separate events (MacPherson: 45). It is through this young woman, in the Scottish town of Port Glasgow in 1830, that the first mention was made of a two-stage Second Coming.

Dr. Robert Norton, a brilliant Englishman, had been the eye, and, in fact, the 'ear witness', if you will, of Margaret MacDonald's utterances. His record of those momentous events and revelations can be found in his book entitled, 'The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets; in the Catholic Apostolic Church' published in 1861.

He published the book, in part, to refute the ever-growing opinion that Darby and Irving had been the originators of the two-stage Second Coming theory (MacPherson: 47). In his book, Norton declared MacDonald as the true revelator. Preceding her 'revelation', he recorded his impressions of her and the event itself: "Marvellous light was shed upon the Scripture, and especially upon the doctrine of the Second Advent, by the revived spirit of prophecy. In the following account by Miss Margaret MacDonald, of an evening during which the power of the Holy Ghost rested upon her for several successive hours,

in mingled prophecy and vision, we have an instance; for here we first see the distinction between that final stage of the Lord's coming, when every eye shall see Him, and His prior appearing in glory for those who look for Him" (Mac Pherson: 48).

It is therefore clear that a publicity-shunning teenager, in an obscure Scottish town, triggered the pretribulation rapture theory which has grown into a universally-known, if not always wholly-accepted, doctrine that pervades the eschatological landscape of evangelical Christianity.

CHAPTER THREE

The historical interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel

1. The effect of Jewish eschatological thought.

One cannot begin to examine the beliefs of the early Church without making reference to the fact that the thinking of the New Testament authors was influenced, at least in part, by the eschatology of the Jews.

For the Jews, the promise of a final vindication of God's people and the establishment of a new order in which His ways would prevail were beliefs that had their roots in the very [Old] Covenant itself (II Samuel 7:8ff) (Rowland: 87).

Even Jewish eschatology displayed two constant features in common with early Christian thinking:

1.1 The belief that a new age would come in which peace and righteousness would prevail.

1.2 The conviction that before such an age would dawn there would be a period of severe distress, political and cosmic disorder and cataclysmic upheaval. These 'birth pangs' of the new age are reflected in Mark 13:7ff and Romans 8:19ff (Rowland: 88).

Furthermore, throughout ancient Jewish eschatological writings, one finds that a deterioration in man's condition precedes a coming time of happiness in which the pattern of existence will then be as it was at the beginning of creation (Rowland: 89).

2. Eschatological thought in the Early Church.

When considering first century Christian thought, it would be a gross distortion to imagine that the future hope was peripheral. When one speaks of the future hope one is dealing with something central and integral to the faith of the Early Church. The meaning of phrases such as the 'Kingdom of God' and the 'Son of man' are a necessary part of the eschatology of the New Testament (Rowland: 112).

During the Apostolic age of the Church (the ascension of Christ to the death of John), the New Testament documents reveal an intense conviction that the so-called 'hope of Israel' (i.e. future hope) had at last come to pass (Kelly: 459).

In the coming of the Son of God, His vicarious death and resurrection, God had decisively acted upon His ancient promise to redeem His people (Genesis 3:15). His people, those who had accepted the finished work of redemption by faith, Christians, now shared by anticipation the powers of the age to come. In short, the history of this world had reached its climax and the reign of God was now manifest.

Inter-woven with this realized eschatology was an equally vivid expectation that what had been received thus far, in terms of the wonderful outpouring of grace, was but the beginning, a mere foretaste. In due course, the marvellous plan of God would come to a dramatic conclusion in the Lord's Second Coming on the clouds of glory. This Second Advent would bring about the consummation of a new age. The whole created order would be reconciled to God (Kelly: 459). This, in essence, was the principal expectation in Jewish eschatology, i.e. the belief that a new age would come in which peace and righteousness would prevail.

The Second Coming was no arbitrary belief plucked out of the stock of Jewish eschatology. It was part and parcel of convictions about the resurrection. The

Second Coming was the consummation of a promise of which the resurrection of Jesus was a guarantee (Rowland: 115).

Such a conviction and understanding stretched into the Second Century. Ignatius of Antioch stated, "The end of all things are near" (Staniforth: 79).

The Didache (i.e. the teaching), a collection of regulations that made up what could be termed, in modern parlance, a 'church life manual' contains a section on eschatology and fittingly, perhaps, it comes at the end of the 'manual'.

The writer's comments on eschatology are, by and large, consistent with the general Christian expectation of the day. It speaks of the rise of false prophets and teachers as well as the general ongoing rise in lawlessness that marks the 'last days'. The writer alludes to the rise of an Antichrist who will work signs and wonders but does not place this individual's rise in between any sort of two-stage coming. The author only mentions the coming Perousia and subsequent Divine judgement (Staniforth: 235).

The so-called Early Church Fathers are a vital source of information concerning the early Church's understanding of eschatological matters, in particular their understanding of the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.

The late Wilbur Smith of Fuller Theological Seminary has described Jerome's commentary on Daniel as the "most important single work produced by the church Fathers on any of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament" (Archer: 5).

For the first two hundred years or so, Christians expected Christ to return and usher in a golden age within their lifetimes. The two hundred years that followed saw a change in that expectancy. The urgent expectation of Christ's return waned and the Church began to make peace with the world. Before long, official Church doctrine declared that the millennium was in progress. Consequently, the breathless expectation of Christ's return dissipated for about one thousand years (Kyle: 27).

The joyous and confident attitude of the Church prevalent in the immediate wake of the Apostles now began to give way to the concept of exclusively future blessing instead of the acceptance that the age to come had already broken through to their present time. The Letters of the New Testament powerfully reflected the blessing of living in the first fruits of the Spirit in the Messianic Age of the Church.

This wondrous understanding gave way to the Kingdom being a region or a state located exclusively in the future. As such it was no longer a certain inheritance by faith through grace but a place reserved for those who manfully struggle in this present life (Kelly: 460).

In the early centuries, wherever Christianity was healthy and alive, the primitive conviction of enjoying already the benefits of the age to come remained vividly before the believer's consciousness. In part this was the result of the early Church's attachment to Scripture and apostolic tradition in which salvation was expanded in terms clearly suggesting that God had intervened once and for all in human history (Kelly: 461).

Such an attachment lends credence to the assertion that the Church received no teaching concerning a future intervention in human affairs, besides the commonly accepted Second Advent. While enjoying the benefits of the age to come through anticipation, the early Christian kept an eye, so to speak, on the sky for the arrival of the King of kings. The early Church leadership felt no need to educate believers with regard to the Second Coming beyond that which had been written in the New Testament documents that were available to them. Jesus would come again in glory, once and for all. There would be no two-stage Advent with an intervening reign of Satan through an Antichrist.

While change in Christian eschatological expectation did eventually occur, it is necessary to remain focused on the thinking of the Church immediately after the Apostolic Age and not become overly influenced by the gradual deterioration of expectation of the subsequent three centuries. To do so would

lead to the risk of losing the understanding of the Early Church with regard to the eschatological teaching of the Apostles.

It is with this in mind that one must undertake an examination of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel. Just how did the early Church understand Gabriel's words in the light of contemporary eschatological expectation? The accurate interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel is vital to a correct understanding of Biblical prophecy and the issue of eschatology as a whole.

The dispensational interpretation of the Seventy Weeks provides an interpretative grid to make sense of, among other things, the Olivet Discourse and the greater part of the Book of Revelation. If one were to take away the dispensationalist interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27, the entire system would collapse (Riddlebarger: 150).

The common Premillennial Dispensationalist assertion that the Church of the first three centuries embraced dispensationalism is without [significant] support. When weighed in the balance, such a view is found wanting. Historically, this position is not justifiable. It is upon the authority of some Church historians that such an assumption is made but is not supported by the evidence at hand (Rutgers: 239).

The New Testament does not give us any explicit evidence that eschatology was a problem. Indeed, there is a danger of our assuming that what we consider to be a problem must also have been so to the early Christians, i.e. the interpretation of Daniel's Seventieth Week. The clearest evidence that it had the potential to become an issue emerges in what is by common agreement the latest document in the New Testament, Second Peter. Here we have the clearest indication possible that the community addressed was having to wrestle with the matter of what appeared to be a delaying parousia (II Peter 3:1ff) (Rowland: 287). The danger inherent here is the will to develop a doctrine to 'excuse' the delayed Parousia. The need to explain such a delay to a mocking world forced the hand of some to go beyond accepted teaching.

The writings of the early representatives of the Church (post-apostolic era) were chiefly admonitory with few, indeed, identified as belonging chiefly to a millennialist scheme. Edification of the Church members seems to have been the aim Hermes, for example, had in mind. He vividly portrayed his message in symbolic figures and images, weaving into the production several injunctions to holiness, righteous living and repentance. As an early witness of Dispensationalism, he offers only meagre support at best (Rutgers: 239).

It is interesting to note that Polycarp, a disciple of John, makes no mention at all of the existence of a parenthetical gap between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's prophecy. John, the author of the Apocalypse, would have passed on to his disciple any such vital information concerning a pause in an otherwise consecutive four hundred and ninety years. Had such a parenthesis been in the teaching of John, published or otherwise, it would make sense for Polycarp to have taught on such an important issue. Irenaeus, in turn, was a pupil of Polycarp but he too makes no mention of the subject that is now so important to Dispensationalism.

When one considers that all of John's writings were written post AD 70 (Tenney: 128), it is surprising to discover that he not once alludes to the existence of a seventieth week that is still to come from his perspective. Given John's apocalyptic understanding, if there were some truth in a parenthetical gap, surely he would have spoken of that final week still to come, particularly in the wake of the AD 70 sacking of Jerusalem and its undoubted significance.

John does make mention of the issue of "antichrist" (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3 & Second John 7). It seems possible that there was a teaching in circulation that spoke of a particular individual who was to come in the future. John questions such a view by pointing out that many antichrists were already in circulation.

Polycarp's name, which might be translated "Mr. Much-Fruit", aptly portrays his character. By all accounts, he did not have much in the way of academic learning. He alluded to this fact in his letter to the Philippians wherein he humbly concedes that his knowledge of the Scriptures does not match that of

the Philippian believers. Although his writing was simple and direct, he did not have a reputation for creativity. While he could not originate, he did transmit most faithfully. It is this fact that explains the peculiar value of his witness.

During Polycarp's season of influence, the Church suffered much doctrinal uncertainty. His steadfast reiteration of the truths he had learned, much of it from John, was doubtless the greatest service he could have rendered to the early Church. His single-minded fidelity ensured the continuity of the apostolic faith as nothing else could have done. Like his mentor, John, Polycarp includes the term "antichrist" in writings that still survive by saying, "To deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is to be antichrist" (Staniforth: 138).

It stands to reason that had John the Revelator believed and taught that the Second Coming would be a two-stage affair, such a disciple as the uncreative but faithful Polycarp would surely have made mention thereof.

The view of one future antichrist figure survived John. Hippolytus (AD 170 – 236), a bishop of Rome, definitely identified a physical and singular Antichrist who was future even to him. Hippolytus claimed that this Antichrist would arise and persecute the believers and such persecution would be a sign of the Second Advent (Coxe: 179).

In addition, Hippolytus held that after Christ appeared and accomplished His divine task there would still remain one week. It was during this week, he claimed, that Elijah and Enoch would appear. It would be in the middle of that week that the abomination of desolation would occur (Coxe: 182). Hippolytus, albeit a disciple of Irenaeus (Coxe: v), as a prominent Early Church voice, stands more or less alone in his views which could be interpreted as dispensational in the minds of the most eager dispensationalists.

Africanus, for his part, taught that Jesus Christ appeared to the world at the end of the Seventy Weeks. This writer may be at odds with Africanus over exactly which end of the week in question Jesus appeared, but there can be

no doubt that Africanus saw no evidence of a gap between the 69th and 70th weeks (Archer: 99).

An early commentator by the name of Appollinarius stated the following: “It is impossible that periods so linked together be wrenched apart, but rather the time-segments must all be joined together in conformity with Daniel’s prophecy” (Archer: 105).

In the light of the evidence examined thus far, it is possible to conclude that the early Church looked for a single unified Second Coming that would follow the tribulation spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24 (MacPherson: 40).

In Premillennial Dispensational thought, the reconstructing of the Temple in Jerusalem during the end times is of central significance. The Epistle of Barnabus (circa AD 130) refers to the temple’s destruction in AD 70, “ I will show you how mistaken those miserable folk were in pinning their hopes to the building itself...” He goes on to say that such hope was the “purest folly” (Staniforth: 215).

It would appear that the early Church understanding of eschatology did not include the rebuilding of a structure that had captured the minds and hearts of so many of those made miserable by its destruction. It is here that one can see that such a rebuilding would require a physical land in which to build.

Having said that, it is worth mentioning that Cerinthus claimed that he came to his knowledge of eschatology through the ministry of angels who he said had showed him truths concerning the last things. Included with his angelic revelations was that subsequent to the Second Advent, Jesus would establish His Kingdom on earth in Jerusalem. Eusabius describes Cerinthus as an enemy of God’s Scriptures as he wished to deceive the Church by stating that the one thousand-year rule would be spent in wedding festivities (Stevenson: 96).

Another possible clue to how Early Church thinking developed is found in the fact that the first century Church was very aware of living in the Messianic Age and were enjoying the first fruits of the Spirit (Kelly: 460). They were not looking forward to one in the future centred on a particular physical geographic location. Such is powerfully evident in the Epistles.

Barnabus does reveal his hand a little later in his letter: "When the week draws to its close then a temple of God will be built gloriously in the Name of the Lord." It would appear that while the source of his quotation is unknown, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that he was referring to Daniel 9:24. If so, the author clearly believed in the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks. The temple to which Barnabus referred was in the hearts of believers. Such an abode only came about by the vicarious death of Christ. That death, it would appear, had taken place as the seventieth week was drawing to a close.

When discussing the Sabbath, Barnabus claims that he and his contemporaries were living in the sixth day. Five days or five thousand years had already passed. This seventh day (God's rest) or the millennium would follow, then Christ would descend and reign in glory on the earth (Staniforth: 216).

The issue of a literal millennium is not central to this thesis although, having said that, Barnabus does not refer to a preceding two-stage Second Advent.

In the teachings of each of the leaders cited above, there is no outright declaration of a belief in a two-stage Second Coming. Furthermore, not one of the above, with the possible exception of Hippolytus, makes any statement that supports the idea of a coming Seventieth Week divided from the preceding sixty-nine by an indeterminate period.

3. Evidence from the Apostles' Creed.

The early statements of faith, or creeds, of the early Church offer clear insight into matters eschatological. These creeds itemised issues of importance to the Church at the time of their publication as well as matters already accepted as issues of faith and practice.

In seeking out the credal position of the Early Church, one is attempting to identify, according to Athanasius, "the actual original tradition, teaching and faith of the catholic Church, which the Lord bestowed, the apostles proclaimed and the fathers safeguarded". (Kelly: 459).

The three major creeds of the first five hundred years of Christianity were the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed (Grenz: 33).

The Apostles' Creed had become the basic statement of faith of the early Church not long after AD 100 (Barclay: 12). The Apostles' Creed as it appears today did not come into being until the eighth century. It first assumed the name, the Apostles' Creed, in AD 390 (Barclay: 10).

This Creed does give one an insight to the main articles of belief deemed necessary by the early Church Fathers and the leadership of the various local churches across the empire. The only reference in the entire Creed that could appear remotely eschatological is, "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead". There is not even a vague hint of a two-stage Second Coming in this quotation. His coming to judge is clearly one connected event.

It must be acknowledged that had there been an entrenched doctrine which amounted to a parenthesis between the 69th and 70th Weeks, such a Creed would surely have made mention of it given the vital role that such a parenthesis plays in Dispensational Eschatology. Furthermore, that part of the Apostles' Creed which deals with the Second Coming offers not even a hint of a two-stage coming.

The Apostles' Creed, as it existed circa AD 100, is the earliest statement of faith reflecting the understanding of the early Church. This statement is drawn from the early Church's understanding of the Scriptures in which, as far as the New Testament is concerned, no mention is made of the 70th Week or even a suggestion of a two-stage Second Coming. The absence of any such discussion in the New Testament letters need not be a mystery if one accepts that the writers acknowledged the fulfilment of such a prophecy in the life of Christ, the birth of the Church and the martyrdom of Stephen.

4. A suggested interpretation of the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.

Correct understanding of this prophecy (9:24-27) is only possible when it is studied in its necessary context - Daniel 9:1-19. Achieving a correct understanding is absolutely vital as this portion of Scripture forms one of the primary pillars of the entire system of Dispensationalism. From this passage springs the future seven-year tribulation that encompasses the appearance of the Antichrist and the Rapture of the Church (Riddlebarger: 149).

The prophecy in question concerning the future of Daniel's people and the holy city, Jerusalem, occupies a few verses in Scripture, yet in these crucial sentences the destiny, not only of Jerusalem, but the whole world, is outlined (Cohen: 6).

It is from this prophecy that the dispensationalists develop their doctrine of a future seven-year tribulation (the Seventieth Week). It commences when the Antichrist signs a peace treaty with the physical nation of Israel around the time of the secret Rapture. The latter being the first stage in a two stage Second Coming that mark the beginning and end of the Seventieth Week, i.e. the Rapture marks the beginning of the week while the Second Advent the close.

This interpretation gives rise to the dispensationalist understanding of an indeterminate period between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week in which

they perceive the future course of Israel's history and God's dealings with the Gentile nations (Riddlebarger: 150).

As has already been said, it is vital that the correct context governs the interpretation of the prophecy in question. Not to do so would remove from sight important information necessary for the correct understanding of the prophecy.

Throughout Daniel 9:1-19, the prophet includes in his prayer of repentance that Israel had continually broken the covenant and, in consequence, the renewal of covenant had become necessary. It is with this in mind - the necessity of a new covenant - that one must commence the interpretation of Gabriel's words. Christ was central to the prophecy as it was He alone who could fulfil the Old Covenant requirements. Furthermore, only He could initiate and validate the New through His vicarious death and physical resurrection.

The prophet, in his prayer that precedes Gabriel's arrival, invokes God's covenant mercies and in so doing makes repeated use of God's covenant name (YHWH). In addition, Daniel repeatedly uses the name '*Adonay*' which is the characteristic designation of the dominant party in the covenant (Riddlebarger: 151).

This entire passage, therefore, displays a clear understanding of covenant that is impossible to ignore. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that Daniel 9:24-27 follows the covenant administration pattern set out in Leviticus 26. Daniel's prayer corresponds to the confession of Leviticus 26:40. Gabriel's prophecy corresponds to the covenant restitution and renewal of Leviticus 26:24ff. As Riddlebarger points out, "Too often, this important context is overlooked." (Riddlebarger: 152).

It should also be remembered that there is another important redemptive-historical connection in Leviticus 26:43. The Lord declared that there would be a time when the land would "enjoy its sabbaths" while the land was deserted by the children of Israel. In II Chronicles 36:21, the writer looks back on the

fulfilment of that prophecy-making mention of the seventy years that were now completed in the first year of King Cyrus of Persia (vs. 22). This corresponds with the prophecy of Jeremiah that Daniel had been reading before Gabriel's arrival. It was therefore clear that Israel's enforced exile was now over and the prophesied time of redemption was to begin with the proclamation of Cyrus concerning Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt" (Isaiah 44:28).

It should be noted that Jeremiah, and consequently Gabriel, make no mention of a gap between the last two years of this prophecy. If Jeremiah's prophecy provides the contextual framework for Gabriel's message to Daniel, as it doubtless does, then such a framework must guide the interpreter.

Gabriel indicated to Daniel that as the seventy years of captivity were over a new set of sabbatical years was about to begin. The difference with this new sabbatical scheme was the realization of all the covenant blessings of the ultimate jubilee (Riddlebarger: 153).

Associated with the seventieth week was the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One whose mission was summed up in Isaiah 61:1. Verse 2 ties all of this together. The Messiah would deliver the captives and proclaim the ultimate jubilee. Therefore, Isaiah's suffering servant must be "cut off from the land of the living" so that many might be justified (Isaiah 53:8-11).

When one reads of a covenant in Daniel 9:27, there should be no difficulty in recognizing the identity of the "anointed one". Dispensationalists confuse the subject in verse 27 with the prince, i.e. Antichrist, who would destroy the city and the sanctuary. In order to make their view fit their interpretative scheme, dispensationalists insist that the Messiah is cut off after the sixty-two sevens. An indeterminate gap of time comes between the end of the sixty-nine sevens and the seventieth seven. It is during this final seven, they say, that the one who comes to confirm a covenant with many (Israel) arrives on the scene ready for his malevolent mission. This interpretation is at odds with the declared dispensational hermeneutic of literalism, for where can one literally

determine in the passage any evidence of a gap between the penultimate and final week?

Of course, understanding this prophecy requires more than just the correct identification of the characters of verse 27. What comes before is absolutely vital. Verse 24 identifies six factors which are to be accomplished during the four hundred and ninety years so that the blessings of covenant will apply to God's people during the ultimate jubilee to follow (Riddlebarger: 153).

4.1 The focus of the 70 weeks.

The Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the sole focus of this prophecy (vss. 25-27). It must be constantly borne in mind that He is the central figure in redemptive history and eschatology (Riddlebarger: 149). This principle is sacred, for to ignore this is to distort the prophecy and, in so doing, become open to gross deception.

The six objectives listed in verse 24 refer to the coming of the Messiah and their fulfilment would announce the impending destruction of the temple (Cohen: 10). The Messiah only could accomplish the six objectives.

4.2 The purpose of the 70 weeks.

The seventy weeks concerned Daniel's people and the city of Jerusalem. Therefore it must be understood that while the first three purposes deal with sin universally as well as with the Jews, the 490 years were decreed to the Jew and this city in particular (N.B. All six purposes or objectives are universal in their [eventual] application).

4.2.1 To finish the transgression, in the sense of breaking sin's power over God's people (Isaiah 43:25; 53:5; John 19:30; Romans 6:1&2; Hebrews 9:15).

4.2.2 To make an end of sin (Matthew 1:21; John 1:29; Hebrews 8:12 & 9:26).

4.2.3 To make atonement for iniquity (Romans 5:10; II Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:19-20).

The first three objectives deal with sin. The far-reaching and comprehensive manner of dealing with sin indicates the importance of this prophecy. The first three purposes deal directly with the issue of sin in all of its aspects:

Transgression - PESHA (*peh-shah*) = A revolt, faithlessness, apostasy, defection.

Sin – CHATTATH (*khat-tawth*) = An offence (sometimes used for habitual sinfulness).

Iniquity – AVON (*aw-vone*) = Perversity (moral evil).

Therefore, the first purpose was to deal with the original transgression, i.e. the revolt in the Garden of Eden (Cohen: 12). The second effectively deals with the result of the rebellion, i.e. the offences of the rebels. The third purpose deals with the result of ongoing sinfulness, i.e. the seared conscience (I Timothy 4:2; cf. Jeremiah 17:9).

Through these acts, Jesus Christ will take away all the consequences of the curse (Riddlebarger: 153).

The following three are connected to the aforementioned three. The two groups of three are mutually dependent and they form a whole in terms of Christ's accomplishment on our behalf.

4.2.4 To bring everlasting righteousness (Romans 10:10; I Corinthians 1:30; II Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9; Hebrews

7:1-2). Christ did this through His perfect obedience as the final high priest (Romans 5:19).

4.2.5 To seal up vision and prophecy (Matthew 5:17-20; 11:13; John. 5:39; 19:28-37; Acts 3:18-22; Revelation 19:10). This Jesus accomplished in His prophetic office, as Peter declared Him to be the greatest prophet of whom Moses had spoken (Deuteronomy 18:15&16 & Acts 3:22).

4.2.6 To anoint the most holy (Luke 1:35; I John 2:20; Psalm 45:7; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Romans 1:4).

Daniel 9:24-27 is entirely about Jesus, centred in the finished work of the Lamb of God!

This prophecy therefore reveals how that God would ultimately deal with transgression, sin and iniquity. Gabriel, the same archangel who announced the Messiah's birth (Matthew 1 & Luke 1), now prophesies His death. He arrives at the time of the "evening offering" (the ninth hour) – the hour of Jesus' death by crucifixion (Matthew 27:45-46; John 19:30). Gabriel came to give Daniel and us "understanding" of this prophecy. His explanation prophesied the New Testament revelation of Jesus' finished work, the putting away of all sin and the cessation and all sacrifice and oblation (Hebrews 9&10).

The accomplishment of the six objectives can only be achieved at the close of the seventieth week, say the dispensationalists. There would not be a problem here if it were not for the insertion of the dispensational parenthesis. Their assertion that the Seventieth Week is future results in the six objectives vital to our salvation being invalid until somewhere in the distant unknown (Karayan: 15).

The seventy years of captivity as prophesied by Jeremiah (29:10) serve as a basis for the seventy weeks of Daniel (70X7 years) that were to commence at the close of the seventy-year Babylonian captivity.

The cry "It is finished" uttered by Jesus on Golgotha is the most significant of statements. Around this agonized declaration flows the truth of God's plan of redemption and salvation. Our understanding of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New revolves around these pivotal words.

When Jesus died, the veil of the temple tore apart from top to bottom. This momentous event signified the removal of the barriers that separated the Israelites from all other nations (Ephesians 2:11-22) as well as opening the way for all into the presence of God. At this point, the New Covenant came into being (Verse 27 – "in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering") (Cohen: 77).

The termination of the seventy sevens coincides then, not with the time of Antiochus Epiphenes nor any other form of antichrist, nor the end of the present age, i.e. the second Advent of our Lord, but with His first Advent (Riddlebarger: 154).

"Seventy Weeks have been decreed..." It is important to remember that Daniel had been studying the writings of the prophet Jeremiah (9:2) who spoke of Judah being in captivity for seventy (literal and consecutive) years (Jeremiah 25:8-11 & 29:10).

The angel Gabriel broadens the seventy literal years of captivity into seventy weeks of years in order to give Daniel understanding of what was to come:

- The prophecy of seventy weeks of years spans 490 literal calendar years.
- Seven weeks = 49 years.
- One week = 7 years.

- Seven weeks (49 years) – Referring to the rebuilding of the city and the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah.
- Sixty-two weeks (434 years) – Up to the coming of Messiah.
- One week (7 years) – The week in which Messiah died (Cohen: 10).

It must be understood that Jeremiah speaks of seventy consecutive years with absolutely no 'gap' or 'parenthesis' appearing at any point in that period (Jeremiah 29:10).

The Prophecy of Seventy Weeks enlarges on Jeremiah's predictions. It is wholly Christological and Messianic, putting an end to the Old Covenant and inaugurating the New Covenant (as prophesied by Jeremiah 31:31-34), among the JEWS (who were Daniel's people) and in JERUSALEM (Daniel's city) through Jesus Christ's death on the CROSS.

Clearly there are only two people mentioned in Daniel 9:24-27. The primary character is the Messiah and the other is the ruler whose people will destroy the city and the sanctuary. When identifying the two characters one would do well to acknowledge that it is a plain fact of history that Titus was the ruler of the armies that destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. It is also a clear fact of history that Jesus confirmed the New Covenant with many at the precise time predicted in Gabriel's words to the prophet Daniel (Cohen: 72).

Nothing that is mentioned in Daniel 9:24, however, was accomplished in the first 69 weeks of this prophecy. All events in verse 24 occurred during the 70th week, the seven years that followed (consecutively) AFTER the 69th week with no chronological break. When the Messiah came He had one prophetic week to successfully complete the objectives.

The accomplishment of the six objectives by the close of the 490 years is the task of the coming of the Messiah. There is only one event in all history where all of these objectives were accomplished – the crucifixion of the Messiah on Golgotha outside the gates of Jerusalem (Hebrews 13:11&12).

If Jesus failed to accomplish all of these six objectives at Calvary, the salvation of the Church remains incomplete. Furthermore, the vicarious death and physical resurrection of the Messiah becomes nothing more than a precursor to the Second Advent that would mark the achievement of redemption.

Verse 27 speaks of the making of a firm covenant with many for one week. The English translation of this verse carries with it the idea that the covenant spoken of will only last for one week (seven years). However, when one considers that the word “for” does not occur in the original Hebrew, the meaning becomes very different. The translators for the sake of correct English inserted the word “for”. The context of this part of the prophecy relates to the total period of four hundred and ninety years with the last remaining seven years of seventy sevens in view. Therefore, the one seven clearly refers to the time of covenant ratification and not to its duration (Cohen: 75).

4.3 Identifying the correct decree.

Daniel 9:25 begins the odyssey of what was still to come from the command to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem to the destruction of the temple and city and the permanent removal of the temple.

“From the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” (verse 25) is one of the most important chronological landmarks of Scripture (Mauro: 89 cf. Cohen pg. 41). The reason being that from it stretches the measuring line of 483 years “until Messiah the Prince.”

4.3.1 There are four royal decrees recorded in Old Testament Scripture: One by Cyrus, one by Darius and two by Artaxerxes (Ezra 6:1-12; 7:11-26 & Nehemiah 2:1-8).

4.3.2 There is no doubt that Scripture gives great significance to the decree of Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1&13; II Chronicles 36:22&23; Ezra 2:1, 6&65; cf. Ezra 5:17 & 6:14&15).

4.3.3 Such was the significance of Cyrus' decree that Isaiah prophesied it some 150 years before the king's birth (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1&13) (Cohen: 42).

When Daniel was praying, he knew from his study of the writings of Jeremiah that the period of the Captivity of 70 years was drawing to a close. The decree of Cyrus marked the end of the captivity and prepared the way for the beginning of the 490 years spoken of by Gabriel. This decree was the original decree allowing the exiles to return and to begin the work of restoration. It was also the decree to which all other subsequent edicts referred (Ezra 5:17 & 6:14&15) (Cohen: 43).

There has been much dispute over the validity of the decree of Cyrus as the starting point of the Seventy Weeks. This dispute centres on the claim that the decree speaks only of the restoration of the Temple. Josephus actually points out that Cyrus did, in fact, give permission for the rebuilding of the city (Josephus: 227).

4.4 Calculating the commencement of the Seventy Weeks.

The Bible clearly shows that Cyrus opened the way and that all future developments in this context were made possible by him (Ezra 6:14). However, it is unlikely that Gabriel meant that it was his particular decree that would commence the 490 years (note the dates).

4.4.1 Cyrus issued his decree in 536B.C. to rebuild the Temple (II Chronicles 36:22&23; Ezra 1:1-4; Isaiah 44:28).

4.4.2 The decree of Darius I (Hystaspes) for Zerubbabel to continue and complete the Temple in 520B.C. (Ezra 4:24; 6:1-15).

4.4.3 The decree of Artaxerxes (Longimanus) for Ezra to beautify the Temple and restore the worship as well as the rebuilding of the Jewish state in 457B.C. (Ezra 7).

4.4.4 The second decree of Artaxerxes (Longimanus) for Nehemiah to rebuild the city walls and gates in 445B.C. (Nehemiah 2) (Varner: 260).

It would seem then that the third decree, which was a reaffirmation of the first two decrees of Cyrus and Darius, was the starting point for the 490 years.

- Artaxerxes made his first decree in the seventh year of his reign (Ezra 7:8) which was 457 BC according to ancient chronological records. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem on the first of the fifth month (Ab = August) 457 BC.
- Thirteen years later (444 BC), Nehemiah sought and gained permission to rebuild the walls and gates from the same king, now in the twentieth year of his reign. Upon arrival in Jerusalem he found that work on the city was already underway and he completed the task in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). Daniel 9:25 confirms the experience of Nehemiah having times of trouble while building the city and its walls (Nehemiah 6). Furthermore, the building of the temple suffered delay due to various circumstances as indicated in Haggai and Zechariah.

The first decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra is therefore the starting point for the prophecy of Seventy Weeks (Varner: 261).

Seven weeks (49 years) were allotted to the building of the city and the wall – i.e. 457 BC until 408 BC (9:25). The completion of this construction programme completed the first seven weeks of the Seventy Weeks.

A further sixty two weeks (434 years) takes us from 408 BC to AD 27 (N.B. The addition of one year is necessary when going from BC to AD). In AD 27, Jesus would have been thirty years of age (He was born in 4 BC, the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1 & 21-23; cf. Matthew 3:15-17 & Mark 1:14&15).

N.B. These two periods – the seven weeks and the subsequent sixty-two weeks - must be taken together. In verse 26 it says, “Then after sixty two weeks...” This period must be seen as subsequent to the first period of “seven weeks” (vs. 25) during which time the city was rebuilt, thus resulting in 69 weeks.

Therefore, the *sixty-ninth week* ended in AD 27 when Jesus submitted Himself to John the Baptist for water baptism. The seventieth week (vs. 9:26a) thus began when Jesus arose from the water to have the Holy Spirit alight upon Him. The ministry of Jesus lasted three and a half years and ended with His crucifixion (vs. 26) “Then after sixty two weeks the Messiah will be cut off...” vs. 27 -“in the middle of the week He will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering”) cf. Hebrews 9&10 (Riddlebarger: 156).

The correct understanding of verses 26&27 in terms of grammar and subject material is vital. Using the updated New American Standard Version as a model, the verses can be broken up as follows:

Verse 26: Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing – *Speaking of Jesus.*

and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. – *Speaking of General Titus and the siege and sack of Jerusalem in AD 70.*

Verse 27: And he will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; - *Speaking of Jesus.*

And on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate. – Speaking of General Titus and the siege and sack of Jerusalem in AD 70.

[N.B. Premillennial dispensationalism as taught by C.I. Scofield claims that the “prince” mentioned in these verses is the so-called Antichrist who is to arise in a future seven-year period called the ‘Great Tribulation’. In support of this, the premillennial school teaches the rebuilding of the temple in physical Jerusalem and its desecration by the Antichrist. II Thessalonians 2:3&4 is erroneously used to support this view. Scofield taught that the reinstatement of animal sacrifices in this temple would be a memorial to what Jesus had accomplished. Such teaching rides roughshod over such Scriptures as Hebrews 9&10 (Scofield: 913)].

At this point it is necessary to take note of Gabriel’s words. He made it clear that Jerusalem’s destruction would “come like a flood”. The only time Jerusalem was completely levelled future to Daniel was in AD 70 when the sacking of Jerusalem by the Roman troops (“the people”) under the command of General Titus (“the prince”) took place.

The Roman legions raised their standards inside the temple courts and offered sacrifices to the pagan gods and the emperor, acclaiming the victory won by General Titus. The destruction of Jerusalem followed this ‘desolation’. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the Romans took 97000 prisoners and slaughtered approximately 1.1 million people, many by crucifixion, around the burning walls. The Romans then set fire to all of the outlying areas and completely demolished the city walls. Not one stone was left on top of another (Micah 3:12). The temple suffered the same fate. Such was the heat generated by the fires that the gold of the temple melted and flowed between the stones of the temple walls. The separation of each and every stone was necessary (Matthew 24:2) in order to retrieve the gold (Cohen: 82).

Jesus foresaw this impending tragedy and warned those who would listen to flee the city when the signs were clearly being fulfilled (Matthew 24:15-22) and consequently many lives were saved.

N.B. These events surrounding General Titus were to take place sometime after the close of Daniel's Seventieth Week and are parenthetical to the whole prophecy. This tragic episode does not fit into the Seventieth Week but occurred about thirty-five years later. In His mercy, God sometimes withholds His judgement for a period of time. Furthermore, this prophecy does not centre upon the work of desolation but upon the work of Christ. He and He alone is the primary subject of this prophecy.

Understanding verse 27 is vital to the New Covenant believer. It is here that Gabriel pinpoints when the Messiah would come and do away with sin and all of its attendant offerings and ceremony (Matthew 26:18&45 & John 2:4; 7:6, 30; 17:1).

For nearly forty years after the crucifixion of Jesus the old system continued in Jerusalem, although now obsolete and worthless, while the preaching of the Gospel continued across Israel and the world.

The destruction of the temple during the AD 70 sacking of Jerusalem and the subsequent dispersion of the Jewish people who had survived signalled the complete end of the Old Covenant mode of Judaism. Hebrews 8:13 points towards the replacement of the Old Covenant order by the perfect and final sacrifice of the Messiah.

The sacrificial system of the Old Covenant was but a temporary measure designed to anticipate the one final sacrifice of the Messiah which would render all other sacrifices obsolete.

Verse 27 closes by repeating the warnings of verse 26 regarding the consequences of rejecting the Messiah. Those who denied and crucified the Messiah would suffer appallingly in AD 70.

Therefore, the rewriting of verses 26 and 27 in chronological order, in terms of their subject material, would produce the following result:

“Then after the sixty-two weeks, He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, and the Messiah will be cut off (and have nothing) in the middle of the week, [and] He will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.”

“The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” (Riddlebarger: 153).

Concerning the above, Matthew 23:13-39 is to be studied noting in particular verses 29-39 [A Biblical generation is often described as forty years].

The New Covenant made by Jesus Christ (the Messiah) through His redemptive work is a direct fulfilment of Daniel 9:27. It must be remembered that Gabriel came to give Daniel understanding (9:23) of what he had been studying i.e. the prophecies of Jeremiah. So Gabriel was concentrating on the issue of the New Covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Daniel 9:1&2). The Messiah would confirm the New Covenant with His own blood “with the many” of the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matthew 10:5&6). In the first three and a half years of His earthly ministry, Jesus focused on the Jews (Matthew 10:5&6; 15:24; John 1:31; Romans 1:16).

Through His disciples and by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:16-20 & Galatians 4:6), Jesus confirmed His New Covenant with many of the elect for the rest of the Week (AD 31-34).

In the final three and a half years of the Seventieth Week, the Messiah continued to focus upon “the Jew first” (Acts 1-7 & Romans 1:16). The beginning of the Book of Acts marks the first moments of the final three and a half years. The 120 who were part of the new-born Church in the temple

courts (Acts 2:2-4) were all Jews, as were the first converts reaped subsequent to Peter's sermon.

Therefore, the first half of the Seventieth Week commenced in AD 27 and closed in AD 31. The crucifixion of the Messiah until the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 1-7) marks the period of the second half of the Seventieth Week. Therefore, Stephen's death marked the close of the Seventieth Week (Acts 8:54-60) as it was then that the Messiah was formerly rejected by the High Priest and the Sanhedrin (Acts 13:46) (Varner: 284).

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, is a valuable witness. As a non-Christian, he had no particular doctrinal axe to grind but as a historian he sought only to record verifiable observations.

It should also be pointed out that the Book of Daniel, along with other works purported to be by him, were held in high esteem by the first century Jew in general and by Josephus in particular (Whiston: 227).

It would appear that Josephus hinted that the interpretation of the seventy weeks and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans might take place in his lifetime. He did not think those years (making up the seventy weeks) were literal years, but rather days for years. By this calculation alone the seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety days, would have reached to his time (Whiston: 224).

The entire prophecy uses covenantal imagery and language. In order to clearly comprehend the meaning of the 'sevens', one needs to examine the terms of covenant relating to the issue of 'sevens'. This meaning reflects the sabbatical pattern found in Leviticus 25:1-4.

The first of the 'sevens' (Daniel 9:25) comprises seven sabbatical years which constitute the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8) in which the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years; this preceded the fiftieth year, in which liberty was proclaimed (Leviticus 25:10). The total period of seventy sevens

therefore constitutes ten Jubilee eras, with the emphasis falling on the ultimate Jubilee yet to come after the 490 years had passed – the Messianic Age (Leviticus 26:43; cf. II Chronicles 36:21 & Isaiah 61:2).

5. The Dispensationalist distinction between the Church and Israel and its impact upon the plan of salvation.

The status of the Land and that of national Israel is central to the dispensationalist understanding of Daniel 9:24-27.

It is impossible to consider the status of national Israel without making reference to the 'Land' itself. For it is this land that the Jews claim by covenantal right and the adherents of dispensationalism on behalf of the Jews.

The death of Jesus effectively shattered the geographic dimension of the religion of the Fathers. With this in view, Paul taught that the land had now become irrelevant in the same way as had the ceremonial law. God's people living in the land were now a part of God's covenant people living in and as a universal community which had no particular attachment to any special piece of earthly territory (Chapman: 150).

It would appear that the concept of being 'in Christ' had now effectively replaced being 'in the land' in the life of God's people.

The following quotation assists in one's understanding of this issue: "The horizons of the land have been shaped by the revelation of Jesus Christ. [Paul's] previous Jewish focus on a particularistic fulfillment has been transformed into a Christian universalism focused on the new creation. Just as in Christ the temple had become a universal dwelling-place and the seed of Abraham had been transformed into a universal people, so the promise of the land already embraces the world." (Holwerda: 104).

In the light of the birth of the Church, the land could no longer function as a key symbol of identity for the people of God. The very make-up of the Church rendered such a symbolism unworkable because now the Covenant people of God consisted of regenerated Jews, Greeks, barbarians and etceteras. As such, there was no sense in which one piece of physical territory could possess more significance than any other piece.

Moreover, nowhere in the New Testament writings, or those of the post-Apostolic Fathers, was any mention made of an eagerness to define or even defend what has become known as a "holy land" (Chapman: 151).

Dispensationalism's interpretation of the prophecy of Seventy Weeks depends on its sharp and definite distinction between Israel and the Church. To the dispensationalist mind-set this is basic to any correct understanding of Scripture (Erickson: 115).

This view is based on the assumption that God made a special covenant with Israel (originally with Abraham) which is unconditional. Regardless of the response of Israel, they will remain God's special people and ultimately receive His blessing.

There are several lines of evidence used in an attempt to support this interpretation. The dispensationalist believes that national Israel and the Gentiles are contrasted in the New Testament after the Church was established (Acts 3:12; 4:8&10; 5:21, 31&35; 21:28). In Romans 10:1, Paul prayed for Israel. They claim that Paul made clear reference to Israel as a natural people distinct from and outside the Church (Erickson: 116).

The Church and national Israel are claimed to be separate from one another on the basis of such Scriptures as I Corinthians 10:32. Dispensationalists pose the following question: If the Jewish people were the same as the Gentiles or the Church, what is the point of the distinction made in the verse?

The implication of all such arguments is that Israel is always to be seen in the most literal sense possible and never in a spiritualized sense, namely the Church. Therefore, this rule of interpretation demands the literal fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and his seed, i.e. natural Israel (Erickson: 117).

The Church was completely unseen in the Old Testament, as it was not prophesied by the prophets in any way. The Church is nothing more than a parenthesis occurring between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel (Mathison: 18). There has been no fulfillment of prophecy since the time of Christ, as the prophetic clock stopped ticking at Pentecost.

This parenthesis claimed by the dispensationalist involves the postponement of the Kingdom. The Jews, the chosen covenant people, rejected the offer of this earthly Kingdom. Subsequently God offered the Kingdom to the Church. Therefore, the Church was a substitute for Israel during this period of postponement as the Kingdom of Israel would be offered again to God's special people after the time of the Gentiles was complete (Erickson: 119).

Dispensationalism teaches that the Seventy Weeks of Daniel ran until the rejection of Christ as the Messiah by natural Israel at the end of the 69th Week after which God dealt with the Gentiles. This period, known as the Church age, ends with the Rapture. The Rapture immediately precedes the Great Tribulation that will last seven years and will be, according to Dispensationalism, the Seventieth Week of Daniel (Schwarz: 335).

The Church, as achieved through salvation in Christ, has both a continuity and a discontinuity with Paul's Jewish heritage. Continuity resides in God still 'saving a people for His name', a people who fulfill the covenant of Abraham (Genesis 12:2&3). Discontinuity lies in the fact that the people of God are no longer so on the basis of 'nation', but on the basis of individual entry through faith in Christ (Fee: 64).

For a period of one and a half millennia, God had kept Israel as a separate and holy nation during which time He worked exclusively with and through His

covenant people to bring about His plan of salvation for the world. The Old Covenant became obsolete at the moment of Jesus' death and the sacrifice system gave way to a far more effective and permanent sacrifice made once and for all – for all mankind.

All those who lived prior to the coming of the Messiah and who had faith in His coming to redeem them from sin were justified by their faith in Him in the same way as those who lived after His coming and so believed (Cohen: 79).

When one considers that the focus of the prophecy is entirely Christologica, it becomes disturbingly clear that any other interpretation takes away from the centrality of Christ and thus negatively impacts the plan of salvation. “It must be constantly borne in mind that Jesus Christ is the central figure in redemptive history and eschatology.” (Riddlebarger: 149).

CHAPTER FOUR

An analysis of the negative impact of Premillennial Dispensationalist belief on societal issues.

The dispensational mindset, particularly that of the premillennial persuasion, has become the most influential eschatological doctrine in the Evangelical world. While many Evangelicals do not subscribe to this view, the dispensationalist school has mastered the art of propagating its standpoint to a greater degree than any other eschatological school. This is reflected in the eschatology shelves of popular Christian bookshops in Cape Town where one would be hard put to find a volume that disagrees with the Premillennial theology of the “Left Behind” series written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.

In every generation the alleged apostasy of the Church and the alleged corruption of the world are standing “signs of the times” with which Premillennial Dispensationalists prove that “the end is near” and that the Coming of Christ is “at hand” or “imminent” (Boettner: 350).

Darbyite Premillennialism has proven to be one of the most resilient and widely held beliefs to have ever gripped the American religious imagination. It was Darby’s unique version of Premillennialism nurtured in the British Isles and then exported by Darby to American shores after the devastation of the Civil War that helped to form the doctrinal core of virtually all fundamentalist, and many evangelical, churches (Wacker: 1994).

Premillennial Dispensationalism has become a theological system in its own right. One only needs to watch Christian television or peruse the eschatology shelves in Christian bookstores to be convinced of this. After beginning in humble circumstances and continuing for much of its early life as an unrecognized system, Premillennial Dispensationalism has now achieved the ability to shape the religious, and to some extent the political, presuppositions of a broad swathe of American Christianity. It has become, in all probability, the majority report among current American Evangelicals (Gerstner: 50). This

conclusion has serious ramifications in South Africa considering the huge influence of American Christianity in this country.

Given the profound influence that the American Church has upon the South African Christian psyche, one can assume that Premillennial Dispensationalism, with its attendant 'parenthesis theology', is to the same extent the predominant report in this nation as well. The majority of programmes, by some margin, on Christian television presented by the two major networks, Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and the God Channel, on a typical Sunday are American in origin. American programmes account for 88% of the schedule on TBN. On the God Channel, American programming is approximately 65%. The balance comprises shows from the U.K., Australia, Canada, and South Africa¹.

These major Christian television channels are overtly Premillennial and Dispensationalist. Most, if not all, of their presenters are of the same stock. Pat Buchanan, Jack van Impe, and Hal Lindsey, for example, are but three of the most influential speakers and authors in this field who currently hold slots on both channels.

Such is the impact of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' twelve-book saga, the 'Left Behind' series, with sales in 2004 surpassing sixty million copies (Byassee: 5), that they have overtaken the likes of John Grisham as popular authors. While many Christian leaders may not read such books, it is evident that millions of Christians do. The entire premise of the Left Behind series is based upon the Premillennial Dispensationalist interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel, with the so-called Church Age – the parenthesis between the sixty ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel – being the final chapter before the Great Tribulation.

Joseph Hough, president of Union Theological Seminary, told the New York Times that the 'Left Behind' series and the apocalyptic theology it is based on

¹ The God T.V. Guide June/July 2005 & Trinity July 2005.

represent a “serious distortion of Scripture” (Buchanan: 3). Such a distortion cannot go unchallenged.

If Hough’s allegation is so, and I believe it is, then there has to be an informed response from Christian leaders within the Body of Christ. Such a response is necessary from the pastors up and down the land who are in day-to-day contact with congregants, many of whom may be reading, or at the very least are influenced by, the eschatology and theology of writers such as La Haye and Jenkins.

What are Christian leaders to do in such a climate where millions of people are buying, reading, enjoying and, more often than not, believing in an imminent secret Rapture of the Church and the Great Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon? At the very least, those who do not subscribe to such a view should be able to give a clear explanation of the tenets of Premillennial Dispensationalism, with particular reference to its interpretation of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. In addition, such leaders should have an appreciation of the social disengagement potential of Premillennial Dispensationalism.

There has been an avalanche of books concerning such predictions since the early 1970s. Occultic, secular and Christian publishing in this field has become a growth industry (Kyle: 16). The fundamentalist world has consistently maintained that the coming of Christ is imminent, as is the subsequent bloodbath of the Great Tribulation and Armageddon.

Therefore, it has become necessary for leaders to become acquainted with the factors underpinning such a mindset in order to recognize the inherent dangers in the Premillennial system.

1. What lies behind the Western fascination with the end of the world?

Such a question defies a simple answer. Many factors are involved in the phenomena so no one theory can claim to account for the ongoing

fascination. Within the Western world, there are cultural and historical conditions that are particularly influential (Kyle: 17).

1.1 The lack of a Scriptural timetable gives rise to wild speculation.

Many alternative religions have their doomsday theories, but a near obsession with the end time has been most persistent within Western Christianity (Kyle: 10). While there is a great deal of debate concerning when the Second Advent will occur, all concerned agree that Jesus Christ is coming again. Scripture, however, does not spell out a specific timetable and this has resulted in all kinds of wild speculation concerning the timing of the Perousia. Such guesswork has even greater scope and licence due to the rise of parenthesis theology and its role in the interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel.

1.2 The role of Western thought.

Western thought, as influenced by classical Christian teaching, has produced, in varying degrees, an expectation of an apocalyptic Divine judgement. The Biblical record of the universal flood loosed by God in judgement upon a sinful world is one such influential account that exists in many religions and ancient cultures (Ramm: 164). It is not my intention to debate the historicity of the Noahic Flood, but, “what we believe is going to happen in the future is profoundly influenced by what we believe has already happened in the past” (Cohen: 57).

1.3 The classical views of history.

The Western view of history has been, and continues to be, a highly influential factor.

There are two classic models of history:

- The cyclical view.
- The linear view (predominantly Western).

1.3.1 The cyclical view of history.

The cyclical view exists in most Eastern religions and ancient cultures. This view claims that all human events happen in cycles. While the names, dates, and persons involved will change, the same events will happen repeatedly. Such cyclical thought may discourage the expectation of one ultimate cataclysmic end to the world. However, some ancient cultures do include the concept of a number of cataclysms and rebirths.

1.3.2 The linear view of history.

The linear view of history began with the Hebrews and their near-neighbours and subsequently gained strength in the Christian tradition. While this system does tolerate some repetition, it views history as generally moving in one direction towards a particular event. In other words, history moves from one event to the other until it reaches its final consummation.

1.4 Optimism and determinism.

The cyclical historical view is, largely, pessimistic. On the other hand, Western apocalyptic thinking predicts disasters but optimistically sees the cataclysmic followed by heaven or a utopia.

Apocalyptic thinking is, by its very nature, terminal and thus deterministic. It views events of this nature as governed by a force or forces outside of its control, usually God. With the die cast, society is doomed because of rampant sin and rebellion, and judgement is inevitable (Kyle: 23). Such an apocalyptic mind-set allows for doomsday prediction of the worst kind but is able to lubricate them with promises of eternal bliss. Therefore the Premillennial Dispensationalists are able to speak of great terrors to come to punish

the wicked while the righteous are to be insulated from such suffering in heaven in the full assurance of eternal bliss.

2. The Premillennial Dispensationalist parenthesis as a part of apocalyptic thinking.

The arch-Premillennial Dispensational apologist of modern times, as far as popular culture is concerned, is without doubt the Dallas Theological Seminary graduate, Hal Lindsey. He neatly sums up the premillennialist reliance upon the parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel. He says that the imminence of the Great Tribulation, subsequent to the secret rapture, is crucial to the Premillennial Dispensationalist reading of Biblical prophecy (Sizer: 146).

2.1 Premillennial Dispensationalism rests on two basic assumptions:

- The necessity of the literal interpretation of the Bible.
- The relationship between 'Israel' (as understood in the Bible by Premillennial Dispensationalists) and the Christian Church.

It is essential to challenge both of these assumptions for the following reasons:

- It is difficult to support both of these positions from the evidence of the New Testament (Chapman: 279).
- The Premillennial Dispensationalist position concerning natural Israel is a major contributor to theological confusion surrounding the identity of the Israel of God. This confusion rests partly upon the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Premillennial Dispensationalism teaches that God has two separate and distinct plans for Jews and non-Jews. God's plan for the Gentiles is often referred to as the Church Age, i.e. the period between the Jewish rejection of Jesus Christ as Messiah and the secret Rapture. In short, Premillennial Dispensationalism is guilty of an error called

‘separation theology’ which occupies the opposite extreme from equally erroneous ‘replacement theology’. The truth of the matter is in what is termed ‘Israel of God theology’ (Galatians 6:14-16). This theology sees God as having one faithful Israel throughout history composed of true Israelites – both Jews and non-Jews – who believe in the Messiah. These true Israelites either looked forward in the Old Testament towards the Cross, or looked back through the New Testament to His propitiatory sacrifice (Wohlberg: 170).

- Premillennial Dispensationalists are careful to stress that the distinctiveness of the Church does not mean there were not people in right standing with God in the Old Testament or that Christ did not found the Church. What the Premillennial Dispensationalists are saying is that those baptized into Christ and are part of His Body (the Church) are distinct from the saints of the Old Testament and those of a time in the future. This belief system can be termed Parenthesis Theology.

Parenthesis Theology makes it clear that the Jewish rejection of the Kingdom caused God to postpone the Kingdom until the Second Advent and establish the Church as an interlude between these two advents. Premillennial Dispensationalism claims that the Church is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament and was not foreseen by any of the prophets. The Church Age is nothing more than a “parenthesis” appearing between the 69th and 70th Weeks of Daniel resulting in a postponement of the Kingdom. In addition, Parenthesis Theology teaches that there has been no fulfillment of prophecy since the time of Christ (Boettner: 229-236).

It is this postponement of the Kingdom that provides momentum for the Premillennial solidarity with national Israel

as this nation will provide the throne for the Messiah's earthly Millennial rule from Jerusalem.

The Church was in no sense a fulfillment of any Old Testament prophecy but something entirely new and revealed for the first time to the Apostle Paul. The nett result of such thinking is that Judaism remains intact as one of the true and acceptable ways of worshipping God. As such it does not give way before nor does it merge, or, for that matter be replaced by the New Testament Church (Boettner: 229-236). Such thinking is a direct contradiction with what Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by Me." The writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that the old system was passing away and no longer relevant to the salvation of mankind (Hebrews 8:13).

3. The roles and interaction of Zionism and Dispensational doctrine.

The nation of Israel occupies a central position in the thinking of many within Premillennial Dispensationalism. Israel and its status before God exerts great influence on the form of evangelistic message proclaimed to the world.

The nation of Israel is centre stage in Premillennial Dispensationalist hermeneutics and is a prophetic time clock for the plotting and predicting of eschatological events. Israel and its status before God is a key issue in the Premillennial Dispensationalist understanding of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel that is dependent upon the ongoing favour of God toward Israel as a nation (Wohlberg: 160). To err in terms of interpretation at this point, as Premillennial Dispensationalists have done, makes it necessary, therefore, to clearly appreciate the potential negative impact of a misunderstanding concerning the role of natural Israel in politics, theology, prophecy, and eschatology, within South Africa. In order to accomplish this, one must comprehend something of the role of secular Zionism and its quasi-religious outlook on the Middle East.

The rise of Zionism

For centuries, Jews across the world had uttered the prayer of hope at Passover that said, "Next year in Jerusalem". This prayer expressed the hope that one day the Jews would return to what they considered their rightful homeland. Many if not most, Jews did not really believe that such would or could ever happen.

After the emancipation of the Jews in nineteenth century Western Europe, the Jewish philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, among others, began to work towards the revival of Jewish communities struggling in Palestine. Subsequently the pogroms among Jewish communities in Western Russia occurred and led to an upsurge of nationalistic feeling (Chapman: 49).

A significant voice in this upsurge was that of Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843 – 1910), a Russian Jew. He identified what he felt to be the central issue concerning the Jewish struggle: Jews felt like strangers in the lands of their birth. It was his belief that Europe had once again entered the Middle Ages with the sole difference that nationality and race were the distinguishing factors between stranger and native and not religion. A Jew born in Germany was a son of Shem and not a German and thus a stranger in whatever was the land of his birth. To his mind, there was only one escape route from this predicament: Jews must cease to be strangers and achieving this was the challenge (Vital: 128).

Therefore, there were only two options: The assimilation of the Jews into the countries where they lived, or a return to Eretz-Israel. Lilienblum rejected the first option out of hand, so the only workable one was the latter. "[Eretz-Israel], to which we have a historic right which was not lost with our (lost) rule of the country, any more than the people of the Balkans lost their rights to their lands when they lost their rule over them" (Vital: 128).

Leon Pinsker (1821 – 1891) was influenced by Lilienblum's writings and wrote a very significant book entitled 'Auto-emancipation'. He argued that the only

way the issue could be resolved was for the Jew to live as a nation in a homeland that belonged to them.

Like Lilienblum, Pinsker saw the Jews as a people who had maintained their identity in spite of not belonging. It was this ability, he held, that had led to the severe distortion of reality concerning Jews. He believed that wherever emancipation of the Jew existed, it was a great achievement but only on a legal level, and did not have the essential social acceptance. His solution was territorial. Unlike Lilienblum, Pinsker said that it was not necessarily the Holy Land that the Jews needed but a land. It was the fact of territory that was crucial (Chapman: 51).

A Hungarian Jew by the name of Theodor Herzl (1860 – 1904) drew together the many strands of Zionistic thought and made them a coherent political movement. His experience as a ‘stranger’ reflected the Jewish dilemma. At eighteen, he moved with his parents to Vienna where he studied law. Upon finding that, as a Jew, he could not practise law, he became a civil servant. He subsequently started to write and after moving to Paris in 1891, he became a correspondent for a Viennese newspaper. He reported on a military legal case involving a Captain Alfred Dreyfus of the French Army. Dreyfus was charged with passing military secrets to the Germans in 1894. His defence failed because of the effective presentation of false evidence with an anti-Semitic slant. That a Jew should betray the Republic in such a manner outraged the French public. The affair profoundly effected Herzl.

In the wake of the Dreyfus affair, he wrote a book entitled ‘The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution to the Jewish Question’. This work, published in 1896, outlined a purely political solution to the problems faced by Jews in Europe.

In his book, Herzl proposed that Jews create their own state as a way of solving their problems. He called for the granting of sovereignty over a territory large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation. The rest “we shall manage for ourselves” (Chapman: 53).

He suggested two options: A cessation of territory in Argentina, or sovereignty over Palestine. The latter would obviously attract, to his mind, Jews with “a force of marvellous potency”. He stated that the sanctuaries of Christendom would be secure, by assigning them extra-territorial status.

Herzl’s work was so enthusiastically received that he organized the Zionist Congress in Basle in August 1897. This Congress although attended by only two hundred Jews from all over Europe, should not be underestimated. The Congress formally adopted the Basle Program, which stated, “Zionism strives for the establishment of a publicly and legally secured home in Palestine for the Jewish people” (Chapman: 55).

The second great leader of Zionism was Chaim Weizmann, a Russian Jew who settled in England in 1904. After some years teaching chemistry at Manchester University, he moved to London in 1916 where he began work for the Admiralty under the supervision of Lord Balfour. During his time there he did a great deal to champion the cause of a Jewish homeland in Palestine by lobbying officials of the British Government. Consequently, he became one of the main architects of the Balfour Declaration (Briggs: 589).

Zionism recreated the Jews as a political nation. The Zionist mindset was concerned with the condition of the Jews as a people rather than the spiritual crisis in Judaism which at the time was the interest of Ahad Ha’Am (“One of the people”), among others (Vital: 89).

So, at the very root of Zionism lies the secular issue that provides it with momentum and requires no spiritual/religious agenda. It is from this secular root that the modern state of Israel has sprung.

4. Christian Zionism and Premillennial Dispensationalism.

Christian Zionism would suggest a group of two separate, yet sympathetic, streams of thought - Christianity and Zionism is simply Christian support for Zionism based on theological reasons. Christian Zionism weds religion with

politics and interprets Biblical faithfulness in terms of fidelity to Israel's future² and has a particular political philosophy and strategy (Presbytery of Chicago: AD 2004).

The Christian Zionist believes that the establishment of the Jewish State is a very significant part of God's plan for both the Jewish people and the world. Not all Premillennial Dispensationalists are Christian Zionists, or vice-versa.

Christian Zionism sees itself as a defender and apologist for the Jewish people and, in particular, the State of Israel. Their support involves opposing those deemed to be critical of, or hostile towards Israel (Sizer: 9). Therefore, it stands to reason that all those who do not subscribe to the tenets of parenthesis theology are opponents of Israel and, in turn, enemies of God.

This definition of Christian Zionism would exclude those who recognize the need for a Jewish homeland but see the importance of having both a Jewish and a Palestinian State within the borders of Palestine/Israel. The basis for such a view is political rather than solely theological and consequently unacceptable to the Christian Zionist position.

Without doubt, Christian Zionism gained strength during the twentieth century by building upon its nineteenth century foundations. The construction of that foundation coincided with the rise of Premillennial Dispensationalism (Chapman: 275).

There have been, and continue to be, disputes among Christian Zionists over the details of how history will unfold. There is one fact that all Christian Zionists do agree upon, Israel's divine right to the land. The Jews have a right to the land at all times, as it belongs to the Jews through the promises made to Abraham.

² <http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/159>.

The Third International Christian Zionist Congress of 1996 made it clear that according to God's distribution of nations, the land of Israel was given by God to the Jewish people as an everlasting possession. As such, the Jewish people have an absolute right to dwell in the land that encompasses Samaria, Judea, Gaza, and Golan (Chapman: 277).

5. Some implications of the Christian Zionist and Premillennial Dispensationalist position.

The Christian Zionist/Premillennial Dispensationalist position pays no particular regard to the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians. The Christian Zionist thinks about the Middle East situation in largely Biblical and theological terms. If God has said that the Jews are to possess the land then such will be so without particular regard to any of the underlying issues such as human rights, politics, religion or the suffering of other committed Palestinian Christians in the region.

Christian Zionism produces a very one-sided political stance. It was reported that in nineteenth century USA, evangelical Christians were more keen for Jews to return to Palestine than were many European Jews, such was their support for the ideas of Herzl and Weisman. Such a mindset has persisted to the present day among American evangelicals, many of whom would describe themselves as fundamentalists, being totally, and almost blindly, committed to the support of the nation of Israel (Sizer : 71&72).

The reason for this is modern Israel and Premillennial Eschatology. The modern State of Israel is a catalyst for the prophetic end-time countdown. If these are the last days, then we should expect an unravelling of civilisation, the rise of evil, the loss of international peace and equilibrium, a coming Antichrist, and tests of faithfulness to Israel. Above all, political alignments today will determine our position on the fateful day of Armageddon. Since the crisis of 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it has been easy to

persuade the public that history is unravelling precisely as Premillennial Dispensationalism predicted³.

The overall message communicated to the Palestinian population seems to be that the injustices they have suffered have been largely self-inflicted. The Palestinians would have been blessed had they not resisted God's plan for the Jews and thus they would not have suffered in the way that they have. Given the sizeable Muslim population in South Africa, the Church faces a challenge in terms of effective evangelism. The Church cannot effectively present to the full spectrum of South African society a Gospel that in any way would seem to uphold such a view.

The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem believes that Christians are called to 'comfort Zion', and not bear witness to Jesus as Messiah. This may not be a wholly representative view, if so premillennial Christians need to distance themselves from it. A proclamation made in 1988 at the end of the Second Christian Zionist Congress held in Jerusalem called for strong support of Israeli policies in the occupied territories. It made no call whatsoever for any form of Christian witness to the Jews, stating that God has His own way of dealing with the Jews and bringing them to salvation which is completely different from the manner employed to reach the Gentiles (Chapman: 286).

John Hagee is a popular television preacher, pastor, author, and Christian Zionist leader. In 1988 he gave \$1 million to Israel⁴ and defended a parallel and enduring covenant with the Jews: "I believe that every Jewish person who lives in the light of the Torah, which is the word of God, has a relationship with God and will come to redemption."⁵

The message to the Muslim world is clear. They are descendents of Ishmael and their religion is of the devil. God's chosen people are the Jews and His plan is to bless the world through the nation of Israel alone. If one is an enemy

³ <http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/159>.

⁴ (<http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/159>)

⁵ Houston Chronicle, April 30, 1988, sec. 6, pg. 1.

of Israel, then one is an enemy of God. To be an enemy of Israel is to expose oneself to Divine judgement. Such a point of view presents an impassible 'road-block' for Muslims regarding their ability to hear the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. So a Muslim's ability to hear the Gospel effectively is marred by the erection of an additional barrier that asserts that in order to be right with God one must accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and the role of secular Israel in the world today.

When the Muslim world sees millions of 'Bible-believing Christians' openly supporting the policies of Israel, they reject the message of Jesus Christ out of hand. Consequently, millions of Muslims are unwilling to listen to any Christians who may wish to present the message of love in Jesus Christ (Chapman: 286).

The Christian Zionist and the Premillennial Dispensationalist are so concerned with their prophecies of the future that they have no meaningful prophecy or message of hope for the world in the here and now. They believe that human history is following a predetermined course or a divine script and they and Israel are simply playing their defined roles.

In fact, within Premillennial Dispensationalism, horrific prophetic schemes are about to befall the Jews. According to two prominent dispensationalists, Demar and Leithart, "A holocaust indescribably more savage and widespread than any vision of carnage that could have been generated in Adolf Hitler's criminal mind" (Sizer: 147).

Colin Chapman offers the most succinct summing up of the issue by saying, "It is so much easier, of course, to watch what amounts to a kind of 'video of the future', and to accept the pre-packaged predictions of what is to happen in the future than to attempt to analyze the complexities of history and politics in the past and in the present, or to relate to real people, most of whom belong to faiths other than Christianity, in the actual situations in which they live and suffer today" (Chapman: 287).

The secular media, such as Newsweek in their 1st September 1999 issue, knowingly or otherwise, helped to perpetuate the view that [all] Christians believe that the predominate issue in Christian prophecy is the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. Ground zero for apocalyptic zealotry thus remains the city of Jerusalem (Wohlberg: 142).

Such zealots are not fearful for they will not be present when the hammer falls, so to speak. Premillennial Dispensationalism holds that all those raptured away will watch the desolation of the earth from heaven, observing the tribulation poured out on those left behind (Byassee: 21).

The Christian Zionist/Premillennial Dispensational worldview forces a theocratic and ethnocentric nationalism on the Middle East and on those who follow such teachings. Christian Zionism does nothing less than promote the interests of political Zionism and identifies the Gospel with the ideology of success and militarism. It places the emphasis on events leading up to the end of the age, rather than living out an effective witness of Christ in the pursuit of love and justice in the here and now (Sizer: 166).

Perhaps such an outlook would sicken the average Jew, who is more than likely to be secular. On the other hand, they may choose to ignore these schemes given the support Israel receives from so many Christians. After all, Benjamin Netanyahu, the former Prime Minister of Israel, once said, "American Evangelicals are the best friends Israel has" (Chapman: 286).

Such an ideology is evident in such questions and answers as, "But why does no one succeed in driving the Jews out of Palestine?" "Because God gave the land to Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 28:13)" (Mathie: 18).

From an evangelistic point of view, the South African Church is expected to effectively communicate the Gospel to all creeds, i.e. people groups, religions, societies and communities (Matthew 28:18-20). While it is definitely not necessary for the Gospel to be palatable to the sinner (it often is not) that

should not deflect the Church from its mission. To include factors within the Gospel presentation task that are unnecessary and untrue is both foolish and obstructive.

This is definitely the case with the Premillennial Dispensationalist view allied to Christian Zionism. At one fell swoop, the Islamic community is beyond the reach of the evangelist. Their refusal to listen to Christian claims is due, more often than not, to their perception that all Christians have as a central belief the right for a secular Israel to exist at the expense of all others in the region.

Too often, the opinion of Christian belief - held by those who are not Christians - is that it is sympathetic to American thinking. Consequently, when American foreign policy decisions impact upon various regions around the globe, many hold that their position is also that of the Christian community. The Israeli Prime Minister speaking telephonically with President George W. Bush in the wake of the 9/11 atrocities is quoted as saying, "America is the very best friend that we have." When this remark became public, it made the aftermath of 9/11 appear to be an issue of Christian America and Jewish Israel against Islam. It was, and remains, a free civilized world versus terrorism issue - albeit religion fuelled terrorism. Such is the effect of Premillennial Dispensationalist religion upon the American political mindset that the former is the view of much of the Christian and non-Christian world.

What holds true in the international arena influences, to a greater or lesser extent, what takes place in the South African domestic scene. The blanket blame Islam assumed in the wake of 9/11 proved outrageous to most Muslims. It was as if all Muslims were suicide bombers in waiting. When one considers that American support of Israel lies at the root of much of the Islamic anger against America, it becomes clear how unworkable the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ must sound to Islamic ears.

Consequently, much of the South African Muslim community now lies beyond the ability of the Church to effectively reach it. It is not the Gospel itself that is

unpalatable to the searching and the lost of Islam, but the perceived Christian Church connections with Zionism and the occupation of Palestine.

How does the average Muslim react to the connections between Christianity and the overwhelming influence of American fundamentalism?

During May 2005 in Cape Town, the Muslim Judicial Council (Cape) mounted a protest march to Parliament to present to the Minister of Foreign Affairs a memorandum entitled, 'Al-Aqsa in danger'. [This document appears in full in the appendix of this thesis].

The issue at stake was the restriction of unfettered access to the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and as such is not within the parameters of this discussion. However, issues raised in the document clearly illustrate local Muslim feelings towards the government policy of the USA.

The document's authors expressed alarm at the involvement of the USA in the underpinning of, what they called the Zionist regime in Jerusalem. What appears to be a discomfiting alliance between Zionism and Premillennial Dispensationalism, and the apparent influence of Premillennial Dispensationalism upon American political thought, indicates how the local Muslim population may view with suspicion the actions of the Christian Church.

The Christian Zionist message jams the airwaves every day on Christian radio and television and follows a theological approach to the Bible that is Premillennial Dispensationalism.

The 1995 novel 'Left Behind' by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, and the subsequent series of novels found a profitable market among millions of North American readers, thereby gaining popular but largely uninformed support.

The South African Christian scene appears to match that of the USA. A brief survey of 31 Bible students undertaken by this author indicates that 70.8% of

respondents believed in the secret Rapture. As to the timing of the Rapture and such issues as the Great Tribulation, around 40% of respondents had no clear understanding of the issues at hand.

Influential members of the current U.S. government endorse Christian Zionist positions as a basis for U. S. foreign policy. Christian Zionists who are aligned with the minority Jewish settler group, take positions on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict which oppose a two-state solution and they support transfer of all Arabs out of Palestine. Premillennialist interpretations that underlie Christian Zionism ultimately exclude any validity of the continuity of efficacy of God's covenant with the Jewish people themselves, and ultimately are anti-Semitic (Presbytery of Chicago: AD 2004).

Premillennial Dispensationalism makes much of a claimed distinction between national Israel and the Church. Modern day national Israel is very aware of the issue of race and genealogy. Zionism holds to a doctrine of racial exclusivity regarding who can be a Jew and who cannot. Classification by racial descent is a defence mechanism within Jewish thinking (Chapman: 238).

Even in the Old Testament, one's identity before God was not racially defined. Israel left Egypt in the Book of Exodus as a mixed multitude. The Mosaic Law made provision for the foreigner. Furthermore, Caleb, the receiver of the double portion along with Joshua, had ancestry among the sworn enemies of Israel. Admission into Israel, the people of God, has always been based upon faithfulness to God. There has never been more than one people of God – the faithful remnant and such has held true in the transition from one covenant to another (Isaiah 56:3ff).

The South African church is in something of a unique position in the world given the history of this Republic and its transition from Apartheid politics to democracy in 1994. Given that the Church in this country lived under and experienced the gross injustices and inhumanity of enforced segregation policies based on racial genealogy, the Church in South Africa has much to say to the Western world, led by America, that ignores the same racially

based injustices perpetrated by Israel upon the Palestinian population. Within the largely Muslim population of Palestine exist many committed Christians who are faithfully serving God. It is somewhat ironic that a confessing Christian with a Jewish grand-father can claim the 'right of return' to Israel on the basis of racial descent and displace a Christian Palestinian. It is then ironic to consider that if a Jew becomes a Christian he will lose his 'right of return' regardless of racial descent.

Such an appalling injustice is not dissimilar to that suffered by believers of colour here in South Africa before 1994. Premillennial Dispensationalism with its unquestioning solidarity with Israel and its policies is giving tacit support to the very thing that many worked so hard to abolish here in South Africa.

6. A brief historical survey of the consequences of Premillennial Dispensational-style thinking.

Apocalyptic themes today generally rest on the theology of Protestant fundamentalism, especially the dispensational ones. However, not all fundamentalists are dispensational nor vice versa (Kyle: 100).

Premillennial Dispensationalism's belief in a secret rapture has been the blue touch paper for date setting the Second Coming. The dispensationalist position is that there is nothing more to occur before the Rapture as we who are living in the 21st century are now within the last days of the parenthesis between the 69th and 70th Weeks of Daniel.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the declaration of the nation of Israel in 1948 as the beginning point of the final countdown to the Rapture, Great Tribulation and Armageddon. It would be fair to say that in the twentieth century as a whole end-time watching reached epic proportions.

The first half of the twentieth century saw the world standing on the very brink of Armageddon. World War One, the war to end all wars, preceded a second global conflict and then the so-called 'police action' in Korea.

In 1913, a year before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, R.A. Torrey said, “All our present peace plans will end in the most awful of wars and conflicts this old world ever saw” (Kyle: 107).

World War One grabbed the attention of prophecy buffs. Among other things, it raised the level of eschatological expectancy and resulted in Premillennialism receiving its largest audience since its 19th century birth. To all intents and purposes, it appeared that Premillennialism had a script for the last days and current events seemed to be following that script. Some Premillennialists saw World War One as the opening shot of the prophetic Armageddon. In fact, C.I. Scofield saw it as the death struggle of the world system with the Kingdom of God to follow (Kyle: 108).

From the outbreak of World War One onwards, Premillennial Dispensationalism received a tremendous boost. The century was witnessing tragedy upon tragedy. The basic prophetic outlook of nineteenth century Premillennial Dispensationalism began to take on a concrete form. The older the century became, so the evidence seemed to pile up: Two world wars, the intervening Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the economic depression of the 1930's, the Holocaust, the Cold War, the rise of Stalinism in China, the advent of television and computers, the return of the Jews to Palestine, and the ultimate horror – the prospect of nuclear annihilation.

All of these events, as they progressively built upon one another, enabled Premillennial Dispensationalism to take solid root in the evangelical sub-culture of the Western world, particularly the USA.

With the gradual build up to the prospect of impending horror, the premillennial tenet of the secret rapture prevailed over all other variants on the eschatological landscape. In fact, in Pentecostalism and early Fundamentalism, Premillennial Dispensationalism had taken a firm hold (Kyle: 107) as it offered hope through deliverance from a frightening and disintegrating world.

Out of this grew a separatist fundamentalism with its own churches, schools, mission agencies, seminaries and publishing houses. Premillennial Dispensationalism now had a subculture and an institutional structure to perpetuate itself (Gerstner: 52).

The issue of the distinctiveness of Israel from the Church is central to Premillennial Dispensationalism. Therefore, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 served to heighten expectations of a Jewish return to the so-called Holy Land. This return was necessary for the eschatological plan of God, as perceived by Premillennial Dispensationalists, to reach its fulfillment.

As has already been mentioned, Theodor Herzl founded the Zionist movement that promoted the return of the Jews to Palestine. Most Premillennial Dispensationalists supported this secular Zionism because it embraced a central plank of their eschatology (Kyle: 109).

After the occupation of Jerusalem in 1917 by British troops under General Allenby, without firing a shot, shock waves vibrated through the Premillennial Dispensationalist community. Responding to the fact that Jerusalem was now in 'Christian' hands for the first time since the Middle Ages, Scofield wrote, "Now for the first time we have a real prophetic sign".

So great was the impact of the Balfour Declaration that a leading premillennialist by the name of A.B. Simpson sobbed as he read the declaration to his congregation (Kyle: 109). How worrying it is that seemingly Godly men would be so taken with such overtly secular documents and decisions, which were the product of organizations that were overtly non-religious, not just non-Christian.

The 1920's saw a lull in end-time speculations. This was the 'Roaring Twenties' a time of elation after the Great War. The Western world was at peace and rather pleased with itself.

Even so, there was great social, political and economic turmoil that came in the wake of the stock market crash in 1929 and the Great Depression that followed.

Premillennial Dispensationalists interpreted these events prophetically to the point of viewing the League of Nations as an instrument of Western European confederacy that would evolve into a ten-nation confederacy consistent with the prophecies of Daniel. The rise of atheistic communism in Russia embodied the very spirit of the Antichrist.

The subsequent rise of totalitarian regimes in Japan, Italy, and Germany served to focus the minds of the Premillennial Dispensationalists. Although many premillennialists held to the golden rule of not making specific predictions, some could not resist. The late thirties seemed to be the time of the old Roman Empire taking shape in Western Europe. All that remained was the identification of the Antichrist. The obvious candidates were Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin (Kyle: 112).

The period 1914–1940 catapulted Premillennial Dispensationalism into a strong position within the evangelical community. However, outside of this subculture, few were aware of its existence.

All of this would change in the 1970s and 80s. Evangelical publishers began to distribute a deluge of prophecy books. The most influential of these was Hal Lindsey's 'Late Great Planet Earth'. This book alone sold over twenty-five million copies. The New York Times declared Lindsey as the best-selling author of the 1970s (Kyle: 115). In the wake of that book, dispensationalist funds produced Hollywood-style movies supporting Lindsey's views for use in churches.

Television provided Premillennialism with its next great boost. Nearly all of the big names of the electronic church preached a Premillennial Dispensationalist message. Most of these preachers were household names and served to take

Premillennial Dispensationalist thinking from within the confines of a sub-culture to the world at large.

By now, Premillennial Dispensationalism was on a rampant advance through the landscape of Christianity. Given its apocalyptic flavour, it stood to reason that the temptation for 'date-setting' predictions of the Perousia would be difficult to resist. As if it were attempting to give a warning of the consequences of such an error, an event in American religious history cries out with the clarity of an Old Testament prophet. The so-called 'Great Disappointment' of 1844 serves as a case study on the risks of being 'imminency obsessed'.

6.1 The great date-setting trap.

Perhaps the best-known millennialists in the United States were the Millerites, who took their name from their leader, William Miller. Miller's study of the Bible led him to predict the return of Jesus in 1843, and he managed to persuade about 50,000 people to prepare for the end of the world. Some of Miller's followers abandoned their crops, quit their jobs and homes. Many were destitute when the prediction did not come to pass.

After 1843 passed uneventfully, leaders of the Millerite movement changed the date to October 22, 1844. A memoir of one movement leader, Hiram Edson, summarizes the anguish that many Millerites felt after the fateful day arrived and passed. Edson spent October 22 in prayer and fellowship with other Millerites. He later wrote movingly of 'The Great Disappointment': "Our expectations were raised high, and thus we looked for the coming of the Lord till the clock tolled 12 at midnight. The day had then passed and our disappointment became a certainty. Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn."

Edson's experience is a dramatic but typical example of both the build-up of tension before a millennial or apocalyptic moment and of the emotional let-down when a prophesied event fails to occur. Many people who expected some form of salvation in the year 2000 experienced similar disappointment to Edson's.

The humiliating public failure of Millerism served as a cautionary example to subsequent generations of 'prophets'. Others since Miller have predicted specific dates for the end of the world, but none have succeeded in gathering such a large popular following. The story of the Millerites also shows that apocalyptic beliefs are strong and resilient, and that they can survive even the most explicit evidence against them. Despite the Great Disappointment, the Millerite movement did not collapse. Some of Miller's followers reinterpreted his prophecy and went on to found the Seventh-day Adventist church, which today has millions of members, is expanding rapidly, and is represented on Christian television networks.

Through the centuries, the one common feature of all end-of-the-world scenarios is that they have been wrong. This trend held, and those who expected the end of world or the dawning of a new age in the year 2000 had to come to terms with the fact that human predictions are always prone to error.⁶

Therefore, as shall be seen in the concluding chapter, the Premillennial Dispensationalist fixation with imminency and the resultant disengagement from the world allows for date setting - exact and by broad estimations. Such a looking to the skies leaves the Church with very little to say that would bring about the promotion of Christian values in society. The resultant betterment of that society, no matter how much time there may be left to us in this present creation, would be an undeniable testimony to the veracity of Christianity.

⁶ Microsoft® Encarta® Reference Library 2003. © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation.

The business of date setting seems to be a fatal fascination for Premillennial, preachers, presenters and teachers. One would struggle to find a Premillennial book that does not record the conviction of the writer that the time of the coming of Christ is near. However, contemporary writers have learned from their earlier brethren in that they seldom set exact dates for the Lord's Coming. They say the Second Advent is near but do not chance to say how near. The setting of the approximate date is the same in principle as exact date setting and makes it evident that those who do it would fix an exact date if they could, or dared. (Boettner: 324)

Much harm and discredit has come upon the precious truth of the Second Coming by such foolishness perpetrated by Premillennialism, particularly in its Dispensational form.

7. The pessimism of Premillennial Dispensationalism.

Premillennial Dispensationalists display a basic pessimism concerning history and the role played by the Church therein. Despite the efforts of the Church in evangelism and social action, where it exists, all will be for nought as the rise of the Antichrist brings about a traumatic period of Great Tribulation that will end with the destructive battle of Armageddon. Only the return of the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming will bring the reign of God and the glorious age of blessedness and peace (Grenz: 618).

Such pessimism has the capacity to discourage any meaningful social action on the part of the Church. After all, the world is getting worse and worse, soon the Antichrist will rise and seize control. Of course, there are those who undertake such social action because they see it as a means to evangelism. Any work done to improve society will be for nothing in the greater scheme of things so the focus should be on an aggressive ingathering of sinners before the Great Tribulation. While it is true that it is only in the Age to come where

true blessedness will prevail, the Church cannot exempt itself from manifesting the Kingdom in the present age.

One of the results of the Premillennial Dispensationalist doctrine is that the establishment of the Church as an interim agency followed the rejection of the Kingdom. During the present age the Gospel is to be preached only as a “witness” or a “testimony” into all the nations (Matthew 24:14), without any thought that it shall be in any way successful in societal terms. With both the King and the Kingdom absent, the Church is looked upon as a reserve option, a ‘plan B’ if you will, to which Christ resorted for the present age. There is no expectation that any permanent betterment or final victory will result. The preaching of the Gospel will achieve results among only a minority of individuals. It is in fact expected to do little more than complete the Body of Christ’s elect, and its primary purpose is to bring in those who are to be associated with Him during the Millennium. (Boettner: 350)

There is a popular cartoon depicting a person holding a sign that says, “The end is near”. A man in a business-suit says: “Have I got time for a cup of coffee?” It is one of those pictures that really is worth ten thousand words.

Premillennial Dispensationalism is like the fellow with the sign, and modern humanistic society takes its message just about as seriously as does the man in the business-suit. A movement that believes the message of that sign is not going to produce a comprehensive and cohesive challenge that is meaningful or even plausible to the business-suits of this world, or to any other rational and thoughtful person who is open to entertaining meaningful messages concerning the state of the world and the way forward, predetermined or otherwise.

People who promote the idea that the unsaved world have time only for a cup of coffee and reading a gospel tract have nothing much to offer a civilization in crisis.

The Christian Church, which follows Christ’s mission in the world, must follow Christ’s example of compassion. It has as its nature the Body of the crucified

and risen Saviour only where, in specific acts of service, it is obedient to its mission to the world.

The Bible teaches that we are not to permit the world to squeeze us into its mould (Phillips: 271). In other words, we are to resist conformity. We as individual Christians in concert with the corporate Body of Christ are to transform in opposition to the status quo where such contradicts the Word of God. The Church exists in the midst of this world and its systems; therefore, we should impact it with our lived out faith, beliefs, hopes and loves.

While the Gospel stands opposed to much of what the secular world expects and demands it nonetheless offers a liberating dynamic for the overall enhancement of the practical and factual life of mankind. One only needs to observe the transformation in our own lives since Christ entered by the Holy Spirit to be convinced of the transforming power that the Gospel offers to society at large (Moltmann: 330); after all, the Body of Christ has received a mandate to offer solid Bible-based answers to real problems that confront, and threaten to overwhelm, our post-modern world.

Daniel drew much solace from the Prophet Jeremiah, and so can the post-modern Christian. Like the exiled Jews of the Babylonian era, the Church of the twenty-first century, like its comrades of the previous twenty finds itself in exile. The essential meaning of exile is that one finds oneself where one does not want to be. The Church is not at home and such a separation can lead to feelings of dislocation and strangeness. The violence of the Babylonian exile left the average Jew with the feeling that they no longer fitted, they were now superfluous to requirements. Babylon was a place of incomprehensible language with amoral traditions and customs. The exiles of Judah, like the Church, were very much "strangers in a strange land".

It was into this atmosphere of exile that Jeremiah sent his message of hope (Jeremiah 29:4-14). The prophet made it clear that God had plans for His exiled people that did not include evil. Even in the place of exile, He wanted to give His people a future and a hope.

In what appears to be a strange parallel there were those among the exiles who spoke of an imminent return to Jerusalem. They encouraged a frame of mind that asked why should anyone undertake the backbreaking work of digging foundations, building houses and cultivating fields with such thoughts of imminency in mind.

It was such a mindset that God called Jeremiah to address. The exiles had to understand that they were not on a brief excursion, this was to be their home, so they might as well make themselves at home. God encouraged them to develop the very best environment for themselves that they possibly could. If all they were going to do was to sit around and pine for the time that they would return to Jerusalem, their lives would be well below what God intended for them. In short, Jeremiah's message to the exiles was build a Babylonian house and live in it as best as you are able.

Living was not the only challenge. The Divine mandate stretched to cultivating gardens that meant an entry into the economy of Babylon. In seeking the welfare of the city, Judah would find its own welfare well served. In other words, they were to contribute to the needed wholeness of the city and its society. They were to bring the vibrating health of a society that pulses with Divinely directed purpose and surges with life transforming love.

Eugene Peterson sums up the essence of Jeremiah's prophecy as follows: "Quit sitting around feeling sorry for yourselves. The aim of the person of faith is not to be as comfortable as possible but to live as deeply and thoroughly as possible – to deal with the reality of life, discover truth, create beauty, act out love" (Peterson: 154).

The Church is to settle down to find out what it means to be God's people in the place where it does not want to be – in the world. When the Hebrew exiles adopted that mind-set, the result was that that period became the most creative period in the entire sweep of Hebrew history. They did not lose their identity, they discovered it. Jeremiah's call was not to assimilate with Babylon.

They were to embrace the everyday, but not to become absorbed in it (Peterson: 157).

American society entered a season of unprecedented and fundamental challenge and change in the wake of the J.F. Kennedy assassination in November 1963. That event largely brought the curtain down on an era of confidence that had gripped America in the wake of World War Two. America entered a period of campus riots, anti-war movements, erupting racial tensions, and other social forces not seen before. For the best part of eight years, American society turned upside down. The advent of the 'me decade', the Seventies, marked yet more change. At a time ripe for the Gospel's counter claims so necessary for a society in disarray, a Dallas Theological Seminary graduate named Hal Lindsay published; 'The Late Great Planet Earth'.

This book announced the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ to secretly rapture His Church from this world. Lindsay made it clear that time was short. So short, in fact that any attempt to reform society was to prove pointless and doomed to failure. Many Christians, faced with a deteriorating world, saw Lindsay's words as a comfort and sought to position themselves for the secret catching away. In one fell swoop, millions of Christians ran the risk of completely disengaging from this world as effective and practical witnesses of the Gospel (North: 1990).

Thirty or so years later we live with the legacy of Lindsay's book. Many in the Church have little or no motivation, let alone involvement, in effective social ministry with a view of reforming society for the benefit of all for whatever time there may be left before the Second Coming (see survey results in the following chapter).

The Christian Church should not be a people seeking to flee this world, perhaps this was a valid attitude prior to the Reformation. While the Church remains in this world, it should be effectively and convincingly engaged in

manifesting Biblical solutions to or, at the very least, relief from this world's problems (Moltmann: 331).

In the secular world, universities and other institutions of higher learning often offer guidance and advice on matters of great import to society. Dallas Theological Seminary was given such an opportunity in 1973 when the US Supreme Court handed down the Roe v. Wade decision, legalizing abortion on demand.

Gary North asserts that Dallas Theological Seminary, the bastion of Premillennial Dispensationalist Fundamentalism, issued no paper on abortion, suggested no programme of legitimate Christian protest, and did not call the nation to repentance (North, 1990). Why should it, when such demands for reform would be a mere waste of time given the imminent Rapture of the Church?.

Martin Luther said that if he knew the world was to end the next day, he would plant a tree. It is this attitude that gives some indication of the true eschatological insight that ought to press Christians into deeper, more loving, even more mundane dealings with God's world (Byassee: 22).

The Premillennial Dispensationalist school has the tendency to make Divine election absolute at the expense of human free will. Man's divinely installed free will is lost in the detailed chart of established future events. As a result of this sort thinking the Christian has a somewhat fatalistic approach to the needs of society. Any betterment of any given community will be temporary at best and therefore, in the greater scheme of things, pointless.

In April 1994, South Africa changed as the world watched. The South African Church was given an unprecedented opportunity to confront this insecure culture with the counter claims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was, and is, our obligation to offer solid Bible-based answers to real world problems.

It is time to tie a vision of victory in history to the doctrine of the Bible that offers specific answers to social problems. Premillennialism has never developed an independent social theory.

Although Gary North is considered a reconstructionist (i.e the Dominion Movement, an expression of Postmillennialism (Kyle: 188)) – a view that does not enjoy wide acceptance among scholars – his views concerning Premillennial Dispensationalism’s lack of an independent social theory do bear scrutiny. Social theory is the view that men adopt to explain how society works, how it holds together. Every social theory incorporates theories of sovereignty, of order and authority, of laws, of rewards and punishments, and of cultural change and progress over time. The Bible offers a unique version of such a theory. Unfortunately Premillennial Dispensationalism has rejected the Biblical view of law and history, and thus has not produced an explicitly Biblical social theory (North: 1990).

8. Why is pessimistic Premillennial Dispensationalism so attractive to so many?

Premillennial Dispensationalism, with its concept of a secret rapture, as part of its interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel, seems to attract the curious and frightened minds of many. The doom mongering of the media coupled with the apocalyptic preaching of the television evangelists make for a depressing cocktail of fear and hopelessness akin to a ‘siege mentality’.

Premillennial Dispensationalism has the ability to accommodate the affairs and events of the modern world to the prophetic Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. Such a practice has not been restricted to the dispensational schools alone. In fact, many millennial movements of the past have done this with different levels of success.

Premillennial Dispensationalism seems eminently logical because it was rooted in an authoritative document and seemingly confirmed repeatedly in the daily newspaper. The system appears both elegant and comprehensive.

The simplicity that made it less than rational to outsiders was the very quality that made it compelling to insiders.

Furthermore, it offered an explanation for everything. There were no loose ends; its capacious arms embrace every aspect of the natural and human worlds, past, present and future (Wacker: 1994).

None of this meant, however, that Premillennial Dispensationalism was uncomplicated. Partisans worked with a jigsaw of hundreds, even thousands of Biblical verses that required painstaking assembly and readjustment as the world changed. Thus the system evolved in complex ways, as converts kept one foot anchored on the (seemingly) stable rock of the Bible interpretation and the other immersed in the rushing, turbulent river of current events. The possibilities were endless. Was the ten-toed colossus of Daniel's dream a prefiguration of the ten nations of the European Common Market? Was Isaiah's allusion to the "land shadowing with wings" a bow to the American eagle and the U.S. aircraft industry? Was Revelation's reference to an army of 200 million fulfilled in Chairman Mao's boast that he could field a force of exactly that number? Almost anything could occupy the parenthetical Church Age prior to the dawning of Daniel's Seventieth Week.

In just about any age one wishes to choose, the people of that time would more than likely have declared that their world was far worse than ever before. Perhaps contemporary commentators are more justified in such an assertion. However, Premillennial Dispensationalism does place a 'benediction' on the whole mess.

Premillennial Dispensationalism offers a perverse kind of joy in the face of every approaching calamity, for calamity demands Perousia. As tragic as the events of 9/11 or the Boxing Day 2004 Tsunami may have been, they were, to the Premillennial Dispensationalist, a sure sign of the times.

An antiseptic rationality pervades the system. Using a strictly defined Biblical text, with no subtexts, and hermeneutics more like a home repair manual than

an intuitive art, a set of rules for applying textbook formulas to problematic situations marks out the Premillennial Dispensationalist hermeneutic.

Though apocalypticism has been around for millennia, it is worth noting that Darbyism, the peculiarly rigid and florid form that arose in the late 19th century, accompanied the birth and growth of Darwinism, Biblical higher criticism, and the fledgling awareness of world religions (Wacker: 1994).

Finally, Premillennial Dispensationalism eliminates social responsibility other than a Christian's duty in national citizenship (Schwarz: 333). After all, why plant a tree today, when the Divinely mandated nuclear holocaust may hit tomorrow? Emotional certainty may be the most obvious appeal.

The shaping of the social ethic of the Church is by the love of God as revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. This social ethic is not dependent upon ideal circumstances or a promise of a tomorrow. The love of Christ functions within the place of need without any promise of a natural deliverance, for His Kingdom is not of this world.

During the Seventy-Year exile in Babylon the exiles were encouraged to build houses and establish enterprises that would benefit the nation and, in turn, themselves. In the same way, we, as Christians, live as 'exiles' in this world awaiting deliverance. While we wait should we not be actively and positively working towards the betterment of the society although, like the Jews of the Exile, we know that deliverance is at hand? (Jeremiah 29:4ff; Romans 13 & Second Corinthians 5:1ff).

9. Some concluding thoughts on the social impact of Premillennial Dispensationalist theology.

The Premillennial Dispensationalists have based much of their theology on the unfolding events in Israel since the founding of that nation in 1948. The increasing crisis there has been coming to a head over recent years and, in so doing is bringing Zionism to a moment of truth. Because of the Premillennial

Dispensationalists alliance with Zionism, through Christian Zionism, it too should be bringing both Christian groups to a moment of truth.

As with any theology that wishes to interact with those it is seeking to reach, Premillennial Dispensationalism has to accept how its hermeneutic works out in practice on the ground.

Throughout history we have witnessed those who would seek to gain an advantage through religious manipulation and an interpretation of Scripture. It is beyond dispute that the belief system of Premillennial Dispensationalism is being used to support Israeli government policy and actions in Jerusalem (Chapman: 289). Such use of theology is not restricted to government, but also provides fuel for extremism and fundamentalism on the West Bank and the other so-called “occupied territories”.

This form of interpretation of eschatology inevitably leads to a very one-sided political stance, as reflected in conservative American politics. Such one-sidedness inevitably leads to acute suffering on the ground among all Palestinians (both Muslim and Christians), not to mention the Jewish casualties from terrorist outrages.

The Premillennial Dispensationalist interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel has no choice but to undergird the existence of Israel, as the existence of that nation is a central plank of its theology and hermeneutics. With that in view it is impossible for it to make statements or act in any way that would undermine the Israeli programme on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean Sea.

Christianity, in its Premillennial Dispensationalist clothing is now the servant of secular politics. Such a trap is obvious once one’s eyes are open to the fact.

However, traps of greater subtlety exist in the South African arena. The Premillennial Dispensationalist view of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel may not lead to government high-handedness, but can encourage a social

disengagement by focussing all eyes on Israel as the prophetic time clock of prophecy and eschatology.

Many Christians, from various traditions, have been disassociating themselves from the Christian Zionist and Premillennial Dispensationalist belief systems over the years. Most Christians in the Middle East have called for such a disavowal to be made more strongly and with clarity (Chapman: 289). In order for this corrective call not to be drowned out the time has come for more and more Bible believing Christians to reject the tenets of Christian Zionism and Premillennial Dispensationalism.

Prior to 1994 South Africans of every colour and creed took up the call for freedom from government policies of injustice and inhumanity. Such policies found their basis in the misuse of Scripture (Venter: 112). The same scenario is now being played out in modern day secular Israel. The Church in South Africa cannot afford to be blinded to human need by the glare of incorrect hermeneutics based upon unsound theology. If Premillennial Dispensationalism is found to be deeply flawed, and if Christian Zionism is seen to be lending support to a system that is inhumane and unjust, has the time not then come for all Christians in South Africa to stand up and reject this theology and distance themselves from the views that it perpetuates? In so doing, the South African Church will become more engaged in the social needs of this nation as the call to serve God vigorously, while being acutely aware that Jesus Christ is indeed coming again, is heard from heaven.

Throughout history the true Church has never been the blind servant of politics. More often than not, it has been very much the opposite. In fact, the following Dietrich Bonhoeffer quote is relevant here, "In the first place [the Church] can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and in accordance with its character as state, i.e., it can throw the state back on its responsibilities. Secondly, it can aid the victims of state action. The Church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. The third possibility is not

just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself.” (Wind: 1).

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

1. A brief summary of the key issues.

Premillennial Dispensationalism as a widely held belief system within the domestic Church environment represents a huge challenge to South African Biblical Christianity and its overall credibility.

The basic premise of this thesis has been that the sole authority of the Church must be Scripture and not subjective experience or fanciful interpretations of Scripture based on newspaper headlines or Middle Eastern politics. The Premillennial Dispensationalist interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel receives particular attention.

This prophecy is a primary pillar of the Premillennial Dispensational system and therefore a correct understanding of the issues at stake is both vital and essential.

Premillennialism is the primary driving force behind the end-time thinking that has gripped the United States of America over the past one hundred years or so. Given the profound influence of American Christianity upon the South African Church's psyche one can conclude that Premillennialism is the majority report here in South Africa too.

The Premillennial Dispensationalist position asserts that times of upheaval are a sign that things are going from bad to worse and the way is being cleared for the rise of the Antichrist preceded by the imminent secret Rapture as a precursor to the Great Tribulation.

The result of such thinking is social disengagement in varying degrees as Christians 'hunker down' and wait for the 'trumpet to sound'. Such escapism is at odds with Biblical Christianity. The true Christian is to be effectively

engaged in the necessary attack upon secularization and to be involved in service to the world.

Premillennial Dispensationalism's interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel revolves around 'Parenthesis Theology'. This theological position speaks of a postponement of the Kingdom as a consequence of the Jews rejecting Christ as the Messiah. Due to this rejection, God has inserted the Church Age, for the sake of the Gentiles, between the 69th Week and the 70th Week of Daniel's prophecy. Therefore, this parenthesis has persisted since the Jewish rejection of the Messiah and will continue to do so until the secret Rapture that immediately precedes the seven year Great Tribulation, i.e. Daniel's Seventieth Week in Premillennial parlance.

If, as the Premillennial Dispensationalists claim, the Kingdom has been postponed, then Jesus is not King of the Kingdom now. Such a position clearly negates the Church's claims of authority as ambassadors of that Kingdom. If Jesus Christ is not King now, who is?

If the Church has no authoritative King who reigns now, the result is a diminished potential to be effective in contributing to society in terms of bringing transformation and the resultant betterment of society as a whole. A Church with no enthroned King has only the ability to patiently wait for the moment of His enthronement. Once this occurs there is nothing for the Church to do as the crowned Christ will put down all opposition Himself with a rod of iron. All that is left is to faithfully preach the Gospel and gather in the small remnant that chooses to serve God.

2. The issue of social disengagement

Christians ought to live as if Jesus were coming in the next few seconds, but plan as if His coming were a thousand years away. Such an attitude would bring balance and social engagement on a meaningful level. The lives of Christians governed by expectancy yet regulated by Kingdom responsibility would be an asset to the Kingdom and this ailing world.

Since it is not for us to know the time of the Second Advent, we must always be both ready and active. However, in our activity we must remain always watchful. If we knew for certain that the return of the Lord was far off in the future, the chances are that we would become careless and indifferent about moral and spiritual values, both personal and societal. On the other hand, if we knew His Coming was imminent we would become frenzied and excited, neglecting our assigned task of going into the world and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom through word and action. In either event, we would fall very far short of the abundant life that has been provided for us and live thoroughly abnormal lives (Boettner: 329).

The belief in an imminent secret Rapture, as the first part in a two-stage Second Advent, has many believers in the position of living in a frenzied excitement resulting in what amounts to social disengagement, albeit in varying degrees.

Social disengagement is favoured over social responsibility when Christians are singularly focused on the promise of eternity to come and view this world as a necessary yet unpleasant and even inconvenient holding area. The Premillennial Dispensational idea that the Church will be raptured seven years before the end of the Seventieth Week and miss the Great Tribulation has to resort to some amazing manipulations of clear Biblical passages to the contrary. This encourages a most irresponsible attitude towards human society. Why be concerned about issues of social justice if we are all about to disappear and leave the remainder of the human race to suffer the Great Tribulation (Morphew: 167)?

It is true that as Christians we are in this world but not of it. However, we cannot allow ourselves to assume a 'refugee camp' mentality that looks to its own welfare alone. To do so would render the Church unable to effectively impact the world around it.

Connected with this belief of imminency is the notion that the world will grow worse and worse until Christ comes. This depressing outlook is to culminate

in the rise and rule of the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation – the Seventieth Week of Daniel in Premillennial Dispensationalist theology. While this expectancy of a deteriorating world system may be so, it does not excuse the Church from labouring for the betterment of society, as is its ambassadorial role. Surely, it is incumbent upon the Body of Christ to reveal the advantages of the Kingdom, through word and deed, to those who remain captive in the darkness of a lost world.

The world is not a pleasant place with its degradation and lack of compassion. The world system lacks the political will but not the ability and resources to right many wrongs. It is foolish to expect a system governed by the god of this world, Satan, to display any form of meaningful compassion and action. The Kingdom of God as manifested by the Church is the only ‘system’ that can effectively engage with the needs of humanity. It cannot rise to that challenge when it is taught, if not directly, then through intimation, that there is nothing to be gained by proclaiming the Kingdom in this day and age.

Defeatist Christianity sees the Kingdom as a future event; in this world we suffer and are defeated (Morphew: 113).

Jesus clearly laid out the Great Commission to His disciples. Nowhere within that declaration was there any hint of how long such efforts should continue. What Jesus did say was that He would be with His Church right up to the end of the age. From that it is possible to deduce that the Church, His Body, is to labour in the world until the end of the age (Matthew 28:19&20).

In a seeming contradiction of that Great Commission, C.I. Scofield said “The Kingdom is to be established by power, not by persuasion.” Another Premillennial Dispensationalist, G.N.H. Peters, stated the following: “The Kingdom shall be established, not as men vainly imagine by the preaching of the Gospel, but by the iron rod that shall smite down all opposition and make the enemies of Christ like broken pieces of a potter’s vessel” (Boettner: 350).

Such reasoning removes all motivation to minister the Gospel of the Kingdom which addresses man's need holistically, i.e. spirit, soul and body. The ministry to the soul - the seat of the mind, will and emotions - and the body demands attention be paid to the societal needs of man.

Every Christian is to go into the entire world, preach the Gospel, and make disciples through teaching. At no time did Jesus hint that such activities should cease because the time was late in terms of eschatology. Our ambassadorial representation of the Kingdom of God must prevail so that we will be about our Master's business when He comes.

Furthermore, such a belief system would cause the believer to feel that the proclamation of the Gospel achieves little over and above the salvation of a precious few individuals. Beyond that it would appear that no change for the better, no matter how temporary, can be expected until the Second Advent because only then will the Kingdom be established and that by the application of the rod of iron.

The basic logic in believing that the Church only exists as a parenthesis with no Kingdom authority, as Jesus Christ has yet to be crowned King and Lord causes one to be pessimistic. If one believes that the whole secular order is doomed (and it is) and that God has no further interest in it (although He does), then one would feel no responsibility towards the world and its needs. The sooner evil reaches its climax the better, for then it will all be over. This is nothing less than social disengagement which is the natural outflow of Premillennial Dispensationalism's interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel.

To believe that the preaching of the Gospel under the 'dispensation' of the Holy Spirit can never gain more than a limited success must inevitably paralyze effort both domestically and in international missions. This heavenly mindedness can have no other outworking than the neglect of the here and now. "It is only by happy inconsistency that Premillennial Dispensationalists holding those views can take any deep interest in social reform movements. It

has to be said however that most such Premillennial Dispensationalists do work energetically for social progress and community betterment” (Boettner: 353).

Premillennial Dispensationalists go on to impose their pessimistic outlook upon the Church by using such parables as the tares, the drag-net and the leaven in an attempt to underpin their position. They teach that evil will triumph and the professing Church will be completely apostate before the Second Coming.

An apostate Church will be one that is not acting as an ambassador of the Kingdom of God. If this is to be so then the light of the offer of salvation is to go out long before the Return of Christ. One can only conclude that Satan was not defeated at Calvary and subsequently bound. This scenario can lead to only one conclusion: Calvary accomplished nothing in terms of victory over sin and all must wait until the Second Coming for such a victory to be secured.

Those who see this ‘Church Age’ as an unforeseen parenthesis look upon the preaching of the Gospel as a failure as far as conversion of the world is concerned, and see no hope for the world during the present dispensation. The Church is essentially bankrupt and doomed to failure as each of the five preceding dispensations supposedly has ended in failure (Boettner: 352).

In order to be effective in our call to societal engagement it is necessary to have a healthy and effective Church. To believe that a growing apostasy, Laodicean style, has possessed the Body of Christ and is growing irreversibly is to discourage any sort of Kingdom outreach. After all, if the Church is as bankrupt as this world’s system in terms of answers for man, what hope is there other than to state, “Jesus is coming soon”?

Great frustration and apathy can be the only results of such a mind-set. This seems to be borne out by some of the survey results gleaned from the student body at the Bible Alive Teaching Ministry Centre of Learning:

96.7% of the sample felt it was worthwhile for the Church to be involved in social issues as a Christian witness and as an act of love. However, only 25.8% said that they were actively involved as individuals in addressing social needs. When this statistic is viewed against the backdrop of only 9.6% of the sample believing that the Church is doing enough for the poor, one is forced to draw certain conclusions concerning a somewhat apathetic state of mind.

Although a quarter of the sample was actively involved in social action, over 90% of those surveyed claimed that not enough was being done in the sphere of social involvement. The need then is tangibly obvious, but the motivation to address that need is distressingly absent.

Although the Church is not doing enough, some 88% believed that the Church was capable of combating such issues as violence and sexual depravity. Confirmation came from 96.7% believing that the Church must stand against pornography and abortion. Although these percentages were high there seemed to be an expectancy that someone else should be addressing the issue and not the respondents themselves.

Such statistics may seem impressive, but there is a massive fall from being convinced that the Church ought to be involved with societal needs and those who physically reach out to the poor for instance, namely 9.6%.

It would seem then that being a vocal witness of the Gospel of the Kingdom who is aware of the societal needs prevalent in Cape Town does not necessarily lead one to be actively involved in those societal issues.

80.6% of respondents acknowledged that their awareness of societal issues developed since their salvation experience. This would support the idea that the entry of the Holy Spirit at regeneration sensitizes the penitent to societal need. The question then arises, why sensitize the believer if there is no point in acting upon such?

In the light of such statistics, we as modern Christians must then ask the same question asked by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Are we still of any use?"

Bonhoeffer asked this question in the wake of the confessing Church in Germany doing all it could to resist Nazism. Many of its leaders languished in prison and the world was ablaze. With Biblical Christianity outlawed and the witnesses silenced through imprisonment, deportation and death, could the Church still be of any use to their God or Germany.

The South African Church may not be facing the evil of Nazism but it does face an equally fierce opponent, apathy.

70.8% of respondents believe in the doctrine of the Rapture while 61.2% believed in a coming Great Tribulation. Therefore, one can assume that the respondents are awaiting an any moment Rapture that may explain the relative apathy reflected in the figures discussed. In other words, this relatively high expectation of an 'any moment Rapture' seems to correlate with the low count regarding active personal involvement in societal issues.

As to the timing of the secret Rapture, the respondents seemed largely uninformed of the issues involved. Around 40% of the respondents had no clear idea of the meaning of the terms 'pre', 'mid' or 'post tribulation' Rapture. This seems to support the idea that the respondents were expecting an any moment Rapture and had not considered the possibility of any other event before the Rapture. A similar level of ignorance concerning the Millennium was detected through a failure to respond to the questions posed.

As far as the status of Israel is concerned, just over a quarter of respondents believed that Israel had an unalienable right to the land of Palestine, while 22.5% believed that Israel was still God's chosen nation. With 60% of respondents claiming to have a burden for the Muslim community, one can see a potential for problems given Muslim feelings towards Israel and the American support for that nation.

22.5 % believe that God is in fact operating a programme for the nation of Israel that is separate from that of the Church.

While the Church in South Africa does not (currently) face the challenges of Bonhoeffer's confessing Church in 1940's Nazi Germany, it must face the same question uttered by Bonhoeffer. Can the Church in South Africa be of any use to this nation if all we have to offer is the message that "Jesus is coming soon"? A sidelined Church is a useless and ineffective Church. A group of Christians who feel this way will more than likely isolate themselves and become increasingly insular and blind to the needs of the world.

If the South African Church can offer nothing more than an indeterminate wait for the Second Coming, there can be little point in striving for the betterment of society through the applying of Kingdom principles, standards and methodology to the lives of individuals and communities. The poor must continue to languish in squalor because the stop-gap Church is not the Kingdom and, as such, cannot meaningfully manifest the nature of the Kingdom through example and application.

Now that South Africa has moved into an era of democratic freedom, is the Church in this nation still of any use? Do we now leave everything to the government, as the benefits of civilization that have been brought about through the influence of the Church are only illusory, and all this will be swept away when Christ comes, according to the Premillennial Dispensationalist belief system? Alternatively, do we have a real and relevant role to play in the rebuilding of this society as Christians have done throughout history? The Church can have a great and positive effect on society when sufficiently motivated by way of correct teaching.

When one considers that the Bible has the answers to such pressing issues as the redistribution of wealth, family dynamics, education, racial harmony, gender equality and interaction, it is a shame that the Church is so ineffective at manifesting such in its own ranks as an ambassadorial function to this world.

The Church that is unshackled from a defeatist mentality will see that it has a vital role to play in all aspects of South African society. The dawn of South African democracy in April 1994 created something of a vacuum in society. Vacuums are eventually filled, and the Church needs to be a part, at the very least, of filling that vacuum. To fail to do so will permit the filling of the vacuum by who knows what, or whom, and who or what will profit?

By occupying the void vacated by the philosophy of struggle, the Church can effectively shape society with values and standards that are genuinely good for all. To do so the Church must place itself in a position to translate Biblical values into workable societal assets and, in so doing, bring lasting transformation to South Africa, no matter how temporary in the eternal scheme of things. (Venter: 238). The Church cannot sit by and watch South Africa fall victim to every whim of sin while we retain the only true alternative, the Kingdom of God.

It is necessary that the Church consciously and intentionally evaluate the Premillennial Dispensationalist position that by and large grips the Christian mind-set within South Africa. If not, then the Premillennial Dispensationalist system will remain the accepted view by default. Those believers who are Premillennial Dispensationalist are shaped by the expectation of an imminent secret Rapture and disintegration of society from relative calm to total horrific chaos. This is so because the parenthesis between the Jewish rejection of Christ as Messiah until the secret Rapture represents a time that is not a priority to God. His concern is the return to the primary plan concerning the chosen people Israel.

“As God’s colony on earth, we have a unique responsibility and calling for society’s salvation and transformation. We are called to transform, and then transfigure, not only ourselves (where it begins), but society and creation (where it ends – the eschaton or God’s goal for creation)” (Venter: 239).

The Church is here to clearly spell out the way of salvation but not to stop there. A people who are born again are themselves transformed from within,

and therefore it stands to reason that such a transformation has to affect the environment around the one so transformed.

The Church must be proactive by being clear in its thinking and engagement with the issues that challenge society. As Christians, we need to be involved proactively in the process of nation building and societal transformation. The challenge facing the Church is the formalization of a mature societal strategy based on and growing out of a Biblical social theology. The formalization of such is beyond the scope of this thesis. What this thesis can do is point to that necessity and the need for further research to facilitate such a programme. The impartation of clear guidance on these social issues is crucial so that the Church can fruitfully fulfil its role with diligence and conviction. It is not enough for the Church to merely react to societal issues as they arise - it must be in a position to be proactive. Such ability requires that transformed believers be in positions of influence so that the Church can act conscientiously, continuously and consistently.

3. A suggested methodology for the correction of the practical problems identified.

While it is not our task to debate the veracity of political claims in the Middle East, the Church must take cognizance of the ramifications of alliances that contradict the character of the Kingdom.

Therefore, it comes as a surprise to read of a speech made by Kenneth Meshoe, leader of the A.C.D.P. at an 'Israel Rally for Solidarity' in May 2002.

Meshoe stated that he had attended the Rally for several reasons, one being to show his support for Israel (Jewish Report - 24 May to 31 May 2002).

Meshoe lived under the ravages of a viciously racist system; it is surprising that he should now show support for a nation that perpetrates the same racial crimes upon Palestinians, among whom are many committed Christians like himself. Such is the blinding power of Premillennial Dispensationalism.

Racism has cut deep into the heart of our nation. We cannot afford to “dress the wound lightly”. The wound of racism will continue to fester and hurt us all, until we cut deep enough to remove the cancer of past hurts and hatred (Venter: 83). The Church empowered by the certain knowledge that Jesus Christ is King now, and that the Gospel of the Kingdom is the only means of true and lasting reconciliation is the only means of success. The Gospel of the Kingdom alone presents the only workable dynamics of truly sustainable relationships.

Given the history of South Africa, the Church must face the issue of racism squarely. After all, the Bible clearly teaches against the making of judgements on racial grounds. The miracle of the removal of enmity, the wall of division, between those born Jewish and those Gentiles who came to Christ is proof positive of the Gospel’s ability to change the hearts of men with regard to race.

The Church must lead the way in this matter. If not, racism will continually bedevil and derail us as citizens – let alone just Christians of all colours (Venter: 84).

History will hold the South African church accountable. All will look back to this post-1994 era and know whether the Church in South Africa rose to the challenge or not. For the South African Church to fail in this regard is unthinkable. The one major consequence of such a failure would be a secular solution fraudulently filling the vacuum that the Gospel of the Kingdom should have filled.

Imagine a growing movement of racially and economically reconciled and integrated small groups and congregations, churches rich with cultural diversity, filled with God’s love and joy, bubbling over into society with reconciliation and healing. The local Church is the hope of the world (Venter: 88).

Such groups scattered over the length and breadth of South African society would command attention but would also require great effort and much time. Such time is not available if the Premillennial Dispensationalist view of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel maintains its stifling hold on the mind of the South African Church. Furthermore, if the Church is merely an unforeseen parenthesis inserted into the real plan of God, why bother with issues that will not exist during the earthly millenium governed from Jerusalem in Israel by a newly crowned King?

The Church is the primary instrument of God in society. If there is a problem in society, one should look to see what the Church is or is not doing and where it has failed (I Peter 4:17) (Venter: 90). The Church is God's Embassy on earth and each believer is an ambassador of the Kingdom of God.

It is not possible for the true Bible-believing Christian to remain neutral when secular government attempts to rule in ways that are anti-Biblical. However, a decision to not remain neutral in opinion does not always guarantee an end to apathy with regard to action, as was clearly demonstrated in the survey conducted among the student body of Bible Alive Teaching Ministry.

A comprehensive social theology would undergird and address social engagement for the Christian (besides evangelism and church planting). Full social engagement by the Church would include effective, multi-cultural evangelism, Church planting and a comprehensive social theology. Andre Venter suggests that such a comprehensive social theology would include:

- ❖ Mercy Ministry - Caring for the immediate needs of people by alleviating the symptoms of pain and poverty. This would take various forms of relief work like feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.
- ❖ Justice Ministry - Engaging in the causes of social pain and poverty. This would mean dealing with public policy, working for human rights and conflict resolution.

- ❖ Development Ministry – Building up a community in various ways by addressing the brokenness in that society. This would mean building infrastructure, education and basic skills training, helping people start businesses and general holistic development work.

Venter goes on to suggest that each Church as a whole, and Christians as individuals, need to evaluate their level of effectiveness in the three areas above. Doing church cannot first be about church growth and all that that entails with a 'back order' of clothing and feeding the poor (Venter: 241).

Christians liberated from the constraints of imminency, are able, if they so choose to go beyond preaching the gospel and planting congregations.

One area of South African society that desperately requires the Kingdom of God to be manifest is the poor.

It is widely accepted that unemployment and poverty are among the greatest problems facing South Africa. The most pressing question for the Church in South Africa is how to confront this problem and effectively deal with it. It is impossible for the Church to remain cocooned in a series of sermons about faith and heaven. Christianity never was, and never can be, a solely private spiritual affair (Hendricks: 130).

The Church has the message and the method to play an essential role in offering inspiration and vision to the poor. Such vision will empower them to improve their own situation and thereby freeing them from the strictures of poverty (Pieterse: ix).

The impact of the South African Church begins with its preaching. Not a preaching that is so spiritual that it is devoid of physical application, but a preaching that teaches, in the case of the under-privileged, how to fish not merely how to receive fish.

If the Church in South Africa wishes to bring about change, if it wants to communicate God's love and grace, it will have to do so by way of physical acts that demand meaningful involvement. The essence of the Church becomes manifest in the extent to which it directs its efforts to serve the cause of the Gospel (Van der Ven 1993:432).

Proclaiming the Gospel in South Africa requires witness in deed and word – and the two are inseparable (Pieterse: 112). A Church that is motivated can only meaningfully undertake such action. Such a motivation springs from a correct understanding of what the Church truly is in the plan of God.

The credible presence of the Church brought about by its effective impact in and upon society will be the most effective means of “being prophetic”. Actions speak louder than words. The necessary authority to speak to society comes when the Church is doing what the Bible declares. By being reconciled and united, by caring for AIDS orphans, feeding the hungry and seeking justice for the oppressed, we have integrity of witness and can influence our world (Venter: 242).

The effective and fruitful communication of the Gospel must proceed from a platform of earned authority and credibility. Such is the reward for the Church's considered impact upon society.

Africa is in desperate need of political stability and economic development. While South Africa is considered the ‘economic powerhouse’ of Africa, the majority of the population still live below the poverty line with huge proportions of people largely uneducated and unemployed. Such are the ingredients for political instability.

The South African Church finds itself, whether it realizes it or not, in much the same place as the American Church. America, the last credible ‘super-power’, lends the Church open doors around the world. In much the same way, South Africa is the only credible ‘super-power’ on the African continent. As such the Church in South Africa is positioned to have a profound impact

upon Africa as a whole. When the Church effectively impacts the South African scene through meaningful societal theology allied to dynamic evangelism and Church planting, then the African nations beyond the Limpopo will clearly see the truth of the claims of the Kingdom of God in action. Such an activity is necessary to counter the lies and manipulations of Islam and Communism. The former is on a 'tsunami' advance over the continent of Africa while the latter maintains a tenacious hold on the hearts and minds of many.

The Church must find ways to assertively intervene in situations of injustice, deprivation, education and mercy needs. Given South Africa's tragic past, this nation does not have the luxury of placing blame on colonialism or the Western nations. Over the past twenty years, there has been an explosion of Church growth in South Africa. Such growth cannot be allowed to waste away in terms of ineffectiveness by the eschatological theology of Premillennial Dispensationalism which threatens to anaesthetize even those veterans of the 'struggle' who have come to Christ.

The Church is to be a strong and clear prophetic witness, and it is to challenge our South African politicians to integrity, servanthood and genuine democratic values. As Christians, we need to be sensitive and credible. A fear-mongering theology that offers no scheme for the betterment of society, no matter how temporary, cannot function prophetically in the corridors of power, as the prophets of old once did.

A Church with a clear prophetic voice amplified by action requires leadership from men and women of personal and highly visible integrity.

It is such a leadership of the South African Church that must set an example by renouncing positions, titles, the pursuit of power and financial enrichment, and lead from integrity and self-sacrificial service. Politicians must then either follow suit or persecute Christian leaders to keep them quiet (Venter: 259).

From a sociological point of view, the definition of the basic functions or purposes of the Christian Church are the same as those applied by theologians. A congregation is a community (unity) which refers to its Lord in word (witness) and deed (ministry) both internal and external. Word and deed should not be divorced but conveyed in an interrelated way by such a community (Hendricks 1990:130).

God's intervention always brings liberty: from slavery in the Exodus, from wandering in the desert and from foreign oppression before King David. The Kingdom brings the rule of justice. Knowing God means living under His wise and righteous administration rather than an oppressive rule (Psalm 96:10). God upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. He sets the prisoner free, watches over the alien, and sustains the orphan and the widow. God's rule encompasses our entire lives. We must avoid all attempts to reduce the rule of Jesus to a purely 'spiritual' and personal experience. If the Kingdom had such massive scope for ancient Israel, how much more should the reign of Jesus fill His Church (Morphew: 23). Premillennial Dispensationalist theology postpones the Kingdom until a future physical millennium. To such, the lessons learned from the accounts of God-given liberty in the Old Testament have no relevance in this parenthetical period.

The Church is a structure of human relationships: brothers and sisters, shepherds and sheep, teachers and pupils, servants, exhorters, leaders and followers created wherever the Kingdom breaks into society. The life of the Kingdom brings the Church into being; the resulting network of human relationships must seek to contain, express and transmit the presence of the Kingdom. (Morphew: 99).

4. A suggested methodology for the correction of the doctrinal problems identified.

Given the fact that Premillennialism, in its Dispensational form, grew in influence along with the power of the American media industry, it stands to

reason that it has assumed a position of dominance in eschatological thinking in the Western world. This being the case, it will be very difficult to dislodge from its position of influence and power.

Perhaps stage one in the process of reversal will be the establishing of seminaries and the like that carry no particular brief for Premillennial Dispensationalism. In so doing, it would begin to produce graduates free from the tenets of Premillennial Dispensationalism. Such seminaries should exist to offer training in two forms: one by attendance learning and the other by extension. Both forms of training are workable through outcome-based education. This, in turn, would have a knock-on effect, as those graduates would exert, where needed, a corrective influence as well as educating new believers correctly in matters of eschatology.

Many Christians desirous of accredited training, are in no position financially or socially to be able to attend full-time school. Into such a niche institutions like the South African Theological Seminary could ably fit with courses in eschatology effectively presented as a part of their overall curriculum.

The South African Theological Seminary's method of outcome-based distance learning education could quickly disseminate correct doctrine far and wide across the African continent.

The need for more effective teaching and training in the area of eschatology is clear from the survey results. 70.8% of the sample claim knowledge of the Rapture. However, only 40% of the sample had no clear understanding of the possible timing of such an event. In other words, the respondents in question had no clear idea of the meaning of the terms pretribulation, midtribulation or posttribulation and their relationship to the concept of the Rapture.

While it would not be our aim to train students to become Premillennial Dispensationalists, the above figures do betray a general ignorance of things eschatological. In order to become able apologists of classic eschatological

understanding the students would need to clearly understand the other positions within the debate.

Somewhere in the process, publishers should receive the work of local authors, who carry no brief for Premillennial Dispensationalism. Although this would be difficult as most non-Premillennial Dispensationalists are possibly not high profile enough to be marketable in the popular arena.

The organizing of conferences and seminars to initiate discussion and debate should prove effective as it would make most Premillennial Dispensational followers, who are largely ignorant of their position and its roots and ramifications, aware that there is a problem with the hermeneutics of Premillennial Dispensationalism and the resultant doctrine.

“Rome was not built in a day”, so it would take time before the benefits of correct understanding worked their way down to street level, as it were. The investment and the wait for a return would nevertheless be worthwhile.

5. The necessity of further research.

The survey conducted for the purpose of this thesis could not address this subject exhaustively. First, the survey sample was far too small for anything other than identifying some of the issues in question. What the survey did accomplish was the possible identification of the apathy that grips Christians influenced by Premillennial Dispensationalism or sit under the preaching and teaching of those so influenced.

Most of the respondents recognized the needs prevalent within their local communities. They also affirmed that the Church should address such issues and that they as individuals ought to be involved. However, comparatively few are effectively involved.

Any future research should obviously be larger in terms of survey sample and should be broader in terms of its participants. The sample used for this thesis

comprised thirty-one individuals. Eleven were white, while the balance came from the coloured community. There was only one graduate among the sample and no full time Christian workers. Any future sample should include various levels of educational accomplishment from the most basic to the post-graduate level. Furthermore, one should strive to make the sample more ethnically representative.

For results based on better-educated and trained Christians, then the sample should include both students and graduates of accredited Seminaries and Bible Schools across South Africa. A great understanding of the doctrinal issues at stake would definitely influence the results in terms of quality.

Furthermore, the polling of members of faculties of various accredited theological institutions should prove revealing. In addition, senior leaders of the various denominations and other church groupings across South Africa should form part of any further survey on this issue.

6. Concluding thoughts.

As with many issues in theology extremism in interpretation has caused many problems. As an example of this one can see that Premillennial Dispensationalism has over-emphasised the 'not-yet' dimension and seen it as exclusively future. On the other hand, political postmillennialists such as Gary North have over emphasised the 'now' aspect.

The Premillennial position has led to a sharp distinction between Jewish and Christian destinies and an unbalanced emphasis on the former in the overall plan of God.

However, in terms of this thesis, Premillennial Dispensationalism has produced a high motivation for evangelism but reaches the lowest motivation in terms of social action. The combined beliefs of an imminent Rapture and a Jewish Millennium have siphoned much meaningful desire to try and make this world a better place. Premillennial Dispensationalist attention is focussed

upon heaven almost exclusively. After all, it must be asked, what is the point of making any meaningful contribution to the world when Jesus and a saved Israel will be putting it right? (Pawson:266).

Perhaps the initiation of meaningful debate on the issues raised in this thesis will contribute to the recovery of balance between the two aspects of our mission: The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the demonstration of the Kingdom itself.

According to the New Testament, eschatological hope does not allow the believer to simply sit back and wait for God's future. In fact, Paul made a very clear pronouncement on this issue in II Thessalonians 3:6-13.

It goes without saying that all true believers wait eagerly for the Lord's return, but it is an active waiting to which we are called. This active waiting manifests in a hopeful, and thus positive, living. Motivated by such hope we are to fulfill our Divine mandate in the world through the presentation of the Gospel of the Kingdom by both word and deed (Grenz: 656).

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APPENDIX 1

Raw data for survey conducted.

N.B. Survey sample size thirty one (31). Each question specifies how many out of thirty one (31) responded.

SECTION A

Respond to each question honestly by ticking only one of the boxes marked **YES** or **NO**.

- 1) You are an active vocal witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 2) You are aware of the societal needs prevalent in Cape Town.
- 3) You are actively involved in working towards the addressing of such societal needs.
- 4) You are burdened for the local Muslim community.
- 5) You believe that the Church in Cape Town is doing enough for the poor.
- 6) You believe that the Church in Cape Town can effectively combat violence and sexual depravity.
- 7) You are actively involved in programs designed to address the issues of domestic violence and sexual depravity.
- 8) You believe that it is worthwhile for the Church to be involved in social endeavours both as a witness and as an act of love.
- 9) You believe that Christians should be actively involved in politics at both the local and national level.
- 10) You believe that local government must do more for the needy of society instead of the Church, after all, they receive millions in rates and taxes.
- 11) You believe that the Church must stand against abortion and pornography.

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Totals	31/31	31/31	31/31	28/31	31/31	31/31	31/31	30/31	31/31	30/31	31/31
Yes Response	83.8%	83.8%	25.8%	60%	9.6%	88%	6.45%	96.7%	83.8%	54.8%	96.7%

SECTION B

Respond to each question honestly by ticking only one of the boxes marked **YES** or **NO**.

- 1) Your awareness of social issues predates your salvation experience.
- 2) Your awareness of social issues has developed since your salvation experience.
- 3) Your involvement in social issues predates your salvation experience.
- 4) Your involvement in social issues developed since your salvation experience.
- 5) You are not involved in social issues because you do not have the time.
- 6) You are not involved in social issues because you cannot see the point.

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
Totals	30/31	29/31	28/31	28/31	30/31	30/31
Yes Response	58%	80.6%	32.2%	51.6%	38.7%	12.9%

SECTION C

Respond to each question honestly by ticking only one of the boxes numbered A-E.

- A) *I clearly understand and can clearly explain the concept.*
 - B) *I believe in but do not clearly understand the concept.*
 - C) *I have no view as I do not understand the concept.*
 - D) *I do not believe and do not clearly understand the concept.*
 - E) *I do not believe but I can clearly explain the concept.*
-
- 1) You clearly understand what is meant by the term ‘The Rapture.’
 - 2) You clearly understand what is meant by the term “The Great Tribulation.”
 - 3) You believe in a Pre-tribulation Rapture.
 - 4) You believe in a Mid-tribulation Rapture.
 - 5) You believe in a Post-tribulation Rapture.
 - 6) You do not believe in a literal Great Tribulation.
 - 7) You believe that the Second Coming of Christ will take place before the Millennium.
 - 8) You believe that the Second Coming of Christ will take place after the Millennium.
 - 9) You do not believe in a literal Millennium.
 - 10) You believe that modern day Israel is God’s chosen nation.
 - 11) You believe that modern day Israel has an unalienable right to the land of Palestine.
 - 12) You believe that the world is steadily getting worse with no hope of improvement.
 - 13) You believe in the view that states that there will be a One-World Government headed, eventually, by the Antichrist.
 - 14) You believe the Book of Revelation, from chapter 4 onwards, speaks only of events yet to occur.
 - 15) You believe that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords now.
 - 16) You believe that Jesus Christ will be crowned King and Lord at His Second Coming.
 - 17) You believe that God has a program for Israel that is separate from the Church.

Question – Responses	<u>Response A</u>	<u>Response B</u>	<u>Response C</u>	<u>Response D</u>	<u>Response E</u>
1 – 31/31	48.3%	22.5%	19.3%	3.2%	6.4%
2 – 30/31	35.4%	25.8%	22.5%	3.2%	9.6%
3 – 30/31	16.1%	6.4%	38.7%	12.9%	22.5%
4 – 29/31	3.2%	-	41.9%	22.5%	25.8%
5 – 29/31	3.2%	-	41.9%	25.8%	22.5%
6 – 27/31	16.1%	12.9%	22.5%	19.3%	16.1%
7 – 28/31	19.3%	6.4%	16.1%	19.3%	25.8%
8 – 26/31	19.3%	9.6%	16.1%	12.9%	25.8%
9 – 26/31	9.6%	12.9%	22.5%	12.9%	25.8%
10 – 26/31	22.5%	9.6%	9.6%	12.9%	2%
11 – 25/31	25.8%	9.6%	12.9%	12.9%	19.3%
12 – 26/31	25.8%	6.4%	6.4%	19.3%	25.8%
13 – 27/31	22.5%	9.6%	16.1%	9.6%	29%
14 – 28/31	45.1%	3.2%	19.3%	3.2%	19.3%
15 – 28/31	74.1%	-	6.4%	3.2%	6.4%
16 – 28/31	46.4%	-	10.7%	3.5%	39.2%
17 – 26/31	22.5%	3.2%	16.1%	6.4%	35.4%

APPENDIX 2.



MUSLIM JUDICIAL COUNCIL (CAPE)

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MEMORANDUM

AL AQSA IN DANGER

HER EXCELLENCY
THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SOUTH AFRICA.

THE MUSLIM JUDICIAL COUNCIL [MJC] AND THE UNDERSIGNED REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA EXPRESS OUR SHOCK, ANGER AND DISMAY AT THE CONTINUED ATTEMPTS BY JEWISH ZEALOTS, AIDED AND ABETTED BY THE ZIONIST REGIME OF ISRAEL, TO UNDERMINE THE SACRED SOVEREIGNTY OF THE HARAM OF MASJID-UL-AQSA IN OCCUPIED JERUSALEM.

WE DEPLORE THE ONGOING VIOLATIONS OF THE NOBLE SANCTUARY BY THESE EXTREMISTS AND THE DENIAL OF ACCESS TO PALESTINIAN MUSLIMS TO AL-AQSA.

IN RECORDING OUR APPRECIATION FOR VARIOUS ACTS OF INTERVENTIONS MADE BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING THE SUBMISSIONS MADE AT THE HAGUE AGAINST THE ERECTION OF THE APARTHEID WALL, AND CONSISTENT SOLIDARITY WITH THE OPPRESSED PEOPLE OF PALESTINE, WE BELIEVE THAT MORE URGENT ACTIONS HAVE BECOME IMPERATIVE.

GIVEN SOUTH AFRICA'S OWN HISTORIC STRUGGLE AGAINST RACIST OPPRESSION AND APARTHEID, AND IN REGARD TO THE SUFFERING CURRENTLY EXPERIENCED BY PALESTINIANS, WE BELIEVE THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS A UNIQUE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY TO MOVE BEYOND MERE CONDEMNATIONS OF ISRAELI WAR CRIMES, BY LEADING AN INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO ISOLATE ISRAEL.

WE ALSO RECORD OUR EXTREME DISPLEASURE AND DISGUST AT THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

1. The USA has shielded Israel, an illegitimate creation of the hated colonial era, from any and all accountability to the international community at large;
2. The USA has allowed, encouraged and financed Israeli tyranny and pogroms against the Palestinians.
3. The USA has repeatedly used its veto power in the United Nations Security Council, unfairly and unjustly, thereby undermining hundreds of UN Resolutions critical of Israel;

The USA has actively supported and still condones the gross violation of international laws and human rights by the Zionist regime;

4. The USA has in violation of the United Nations' Charter on Human Rights, unjustly outlawed genuine and legitimate resistance movements such as HAMAS and ISLAMIC JIHAD, opposed to the Israeli regime and the iniquitous peace process as terrorist;
5. The USA has exploited the imposition of Israel in the heart of the Muslim World by perpetuating its political influence and optimizing economic benefits to itself;
6. The USA has in complete disregard of the rights of the Palestinians, ensured that the racist Israeli regime is fully armed, through the acquisition of horrific weapons of mass destruction as well as biological and nuclear armaments;

7. The USA has opposed all credible and legitimate movements desirous of restoring human rights in the Arab states, primarily to ensure that its hegemony in the Middle East remains unchallenged, thereby allowing Israel to operate as the main pillar of America's policy of exploitation, domination and control of all natural resources;

The USA has dismally failed to prevail on the Zionist state to relinquish its artificial status and restore full and unconditional sovereignty to the indigenous Palestinians over all of Palestine, including what is known as Israel;

Therefore we regard the government of the United States of America equally culpable in the criminal activities of the Israeli regime, whereby the colonial settler state has:

- Invaded and occupied sovereign territories in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine;
- Moved large segments of a Zionist settler population into occupied areas;
- Violated the sanctity of Masjid-ul-Aqsa and the Haram al-Sharif
- Imposed punitive measures such as confining Palestinians within the West Bank and Gaza;
- Detained, imprisoned and tortured Palestinians;



- Bulldozed countless homes and possessions of families suspected of harbouring so-called terrorists;
- Annihilated the indigenous culture and character of Palestine by systematically Judaizing the landscape and environment of the land;
- Waging a genocidal campaign against the Palestinians.

In addition, the Israeli regime has violated numerous International Conventions, particularly:

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- The Geneva Convention;
- The United Nations resolutions.

We therefore call on the South African government to impress upon the US government and the Zionist Israeli regime not to impede nor challenge the legal rights of the Palestinians.

We furthermore require of the South African government to demand that:

- ❖ The USA immediately terminates its immoral support of Israel;
- ❖ The Oslo Accords, and all former treaties which betrayed the inalienable rights of the Palestinians be annulled;
- ❖ The USA urgently suspends all financial and military aid to the illegal regime;
- ❖ The USA compels Israel to release all political prisoners unconditionally;
- ❖ Punitive sanctions be imposed upon the Zionist Israeli regime until it relinquishes every inch of Palestinian land and foregoes its illegal statehood

We further demand that the South African Government takes immediate comprehensive measures to suspend all ties with Israel.

Since it is our considered opinion that the South African government has both the capacity and moral authority to isolate Israel, we demand that the following steps be taken as a matter of urgency:

1. An end to the Zionist occupation of Palestine and the desecration of holy places and destruction of homes of innocent people.
2. The right of all Palestinians to return to their places of origin.
3. This right of the return of all Palestinians is not negotiable.
4. That all Palestinians in exile be compensated for the lands and property, which the Zionist Israelis have confiscated.
5. That the United Nations (UN) implement all the Resolutions taken on the rights of Palestinians since 1947. The people of Palestine, including the millions who were terrorised and forced to flee from their homes and villages by Zionist gangs, are not bound by the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the UN Partition Plan of 1947, nor the Armistice Agreements of 1949.



6. That the sanctity and inviolability of the Al Quds City remains uncompromising.
7. That each Palestinian has free access, without any restrictions to observe prayer and other religious functions in the Al Aqsa Mosque.
8. That the repression and suppression of the Palestinian people and the maiming and killing of innocent people must cease forthwith.
9. Recall South Africa's ambassador to Israel;
10. Shut down the Israeli embassy in South Africa;
11. Initiate a campaign to impose sanctions against Israel;
12. Shut down all recruitment offices which facilitate mercenary activities by South African Jews in Israel;
13. Commence prosecution of South African mercenaries operating in Israel;
14. Halt South African Jewish settlement activities - especially of Modi'in - which is being marketed to local Jewish citizens in blatant violation of the Geneva Convention;
15. Investigate the conduct of the Jewish National Fund and it's funding of a recreation park on the ruins of the village of Luby, insultingly renamed as "South Africa Forest";
16. Suspend all arms exports to Israel;
17. Impose comprehensive sanctions against Israel;
18. Facilitate appropriate legal measures to have Ariel Sharon prosecuted and punished as a war criminal;
19. Mobilize all humanitarian efforts to provide urgent medical and other relief aid to the besieged Palestinians;
20. Unconditionally support *the intifada* (resistance), which is a legitimate freedom struggle under international law;
21. Commit the South African government to the pursuit of a single-state solution, which would embrace all current occupied territories as well as historic Palestine.

WE FURTHER DEMAND THAT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT SECURES THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE AFRICAN UNION, THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT AND ALL OTHER RELATED STRUCTURES IN PURSUANCE OF THE ISOLATION OF ISRAEL.

SIGNED BY:

MUSLIM JUDICIAL COUNCIL [MJC]
 UNITED ULEMA COUNCIL OF SA [UUCSA]
 AL-AQSA FOUNDATION OF SOUTH AFRICA
 THE ISLAMIC UNITY CONVENTION [IUC]
 JAMIATUL-ULEMA GAUTENG
 MEDIA REVIEW NETWORK [MRN]
 FRIENDS OF AL AQSA
 SULTAN BAHU CENTRE
 SUNNI ULEMA OF SA
 THE EASTERN CAPE MUSLIM CONGRESS
 THE ANTI-WAR COALITION
 ISLAMIC CRISIS CALL CENTRE
 DAARUT – TAWHEED
 SUNNI JAMIATUL ULAMA S.A.
 SALAAH-UD-DEEN MOVEMENT



Wednesday, 25th May 2005

