

Finish Faithful – Notes on Episode 10 – Church Age Overlap

Why should you care about this? Why care about theological labels and movements? Well, if you are out discussing these topics, you will run into people who know these things and you need to know, at least a little bit, of their vocabulary. If you listen to Bible teachers on the radio, or watch them on TV, it's helpful to understand why they think what they think and teach what they teach. Then you are in a better position to evaluate it against scripture and come to biblical conclusions. You'll hear what some of my conclusions are and why. You can do what the Bible says, "search the scripture diligently", "seek, knock and ask". God wants you to do this and He will grant understanding when you do.

Body of Christ revelation was not really followed. Jews and Gentiles were to be one body, no barriers between, growing together as a holy temple in the Lord, as Ephesians chapters 2 and 3 say. Paul taught that and exemplified it in the churches he visited around the Mediterranean, but we can see from his epistles, it was an uphill struggle even at the peak of Paul's influence. Think how different Jewish culture was from the pagan Gentiles and how much agape love and obedience it took to overcome that divide! It was much more comfortable for believers of a Jewish background to keep their customs with other believers who were like them, than to hang out with these people who, last year, were disgusting pagans. ("Oy, there goes the neighborhood", the Judean Christians probably thought). There was also the problem of them trying to teach Gentile Christians that they should keep the Law. It is not hard to imagine that, on a human level, it felt more comfortable for the believers of Jewish background and the believers of Gentile background to be separate—even though the Word of God written by Paul said they were to be one. In 70 AD, Jerusalem and Israel were destroyed and dispersed. Many understood this as God punishing them for rejecting Messiah and assumed God was done with Israel. It wasn't long before Gentiles Christian saw the Jews as either the legalizers or the Christ crucifiers. The church became great persecutors of Jews.

Think of how hard it must have been, from, say 100 AD to 1800 AD to conceive of God regathering Israel into the Promised Land and reconstituting them as a nation. The scripture passages that talked about that were viewed as symbolic or that the church has superseded Israel and is now the inheritor of all the covenant promised God made to Israel. The view that God will fulfill His promises to Israel by transferring them to the church is called "Supersessionism" or "Replacement Theology", where the church replaces Israel and the people of God.

Around the middle of the 1800's, it became possible to imagine Israel back in the land and a literal fulfillment. The Zionist movement began to sprout among the Jews. That caused another look at biblical prophecy. Perhaps it was not all symbolic and God's plan and promises for Israel might be viewed as literally talking about future events. In Christian theology, the Dispensationalists came along. John Nelson Darby wrote about a "new" viewpoint on the rapture passages. He was part of the Plymouth Brethren

movement. Other scholars and writers formed a theological movement called Dispensationalism. It focused on the 70 Weeks of Daniel, the gap between the 69th and 70th Week, God's plan for the church vs. God literally fulfilling His plan for Israel. Dispensationalism was very sensational! Basically, all discussion today of the rapture, the tribulation, end-times prophesy is in response to the theological conversation which they started. Names like Bullinger, Schofield, D.L. Moody, and Harry Ironside were important in the spread of Dispensationalism. are the well-known dispensationalist teachers and writers. Dallas Theological Seminary was founded to be a center for their teaching and it is very influential among the world of Bible-believing Christians with names like Ryrie, Pentecost, Walvoord having been on their faculty.

This theological movement of Dispensationalism has been very helpful to open discussion and understanding of the distinction between God's dealing with the Church of the body of Christ and his dealing with Israel and how He will fulfill his plan and promises to both. It reinvigorated the futurist perspective, meaning that, in the future, will come the literal fulfillment of the rapture, the 70th week of Daniel, the Millennial Kingdom, etc. Dispensationalism is an overall theological theory that is built on various scripture passages and explains a lot of other things in scripture. However, there is no chapter or section of the Bible that explicitly lays out Dispensationalism or tells us how it works. There are point of the theory that theologians have discussed, refined and sometimes disputed. Our priority must always be to believe and accept the clear teaching of scripture, and not to try to fit the scriptures into the assumptions of our theory. We all have certain assumptions in our mind when we read the Bible. In future episodes, we will look and some of those assumptions and measure them against what the Bible actually says.

Major statements of Dispensationalism

- Israel and the church of the body of Christ are two distinct peoples of God
- We are in the gap period now between the 69th and 70th week called the church age or the age of grace
- The church will be gathered at the rapture
- God will fulfill all his covenant plans and prophecies for Israel after the church is raptured. I say, why can't there be overlap. There was overlap during the life of Jesus. There was overlap until 70 AD. Rom 11 tells us God is now provoking Israel to jealousy through the Gentiles coming into the church.

It would be very tidy and slick if the church age started after the 69th week and ended before the 70th week. There's an attractive logic to that. Does that mean it must be true? There is not scriptural proof that the church cannot still be on earth during part of the 70th week. Some of the more extreme Dispensationalist say that the mystery of the church means that the entire church age was unknown to the prophets and even Jesus cannot have told about it because it was a secret until it was revealed to Paul. What about John 3:16, or worshipping God in spirit and in truth in John 4, or the comforter coming in John 14-17? These clearly apply to the church age.

Finish Faithful strongly disagrees with the idea that God must complete his dealings with the church before the prophetic clock of His plan for Israel can resume.

Where can you prove that from scripture? It is just a theory, just and unproven assumption or assertion.

- Jesus foretold and commanded that the gospel should go to all the nations.
- In Matt 8, he says many will come from east and west and sit down with the Abraham and Jacob in the kingdom of God.
- From Pentecost until the destruction of Jerusalem, God’s plans were simultaneously dealing with Israel and the time.
- Romans 9-11 tells us it is part of the plan for blindness to happen in part to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in.
- Romans 11 tells us that the Gentiles will provoke Israel to jealousy. This is now in its early stages.
- God’s plan for the church and Israel are not separate—they are interwoven.

CONCLUSION

What FF has been sharing with you is somewhere right about the middle of that chart. Had it not been for the Darby and those who studied this and thought about these issues, the futurist view that the rapture and the 70th week of Daniel are coming, might not be much known or discussed among Christians. Still Dispensationalism is a group of similar theories attempting to give a united overview of various statements and truths that are scattered throughout scripture. It is a work in progress and still under discussion and revision among theologians. Very helpful in understanding the Word of God, but the theory is not the Word of God. We mustn’t squeeze the Word into the theory. The Word speaks for itself and the theory is only valid inasmuch as it goes along with the Word.

