

A BOOK REPORT
“THE RISE AND FALL OF DISPENSATIONALISM/HOW THE EVANGELICAL BATTLE OVER THE END TIMES
SHAPED A NATION”

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TITLE OF BOOK: “The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism/*How the Evangelical Battle Over the End Times Shaped a Nation*”

AUTHOR: Daniel G. Hummel, an Historian of U.S. Religion, who works at Upper House, a Christian Study Center located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin, and who is an author who also wrote *Covenant of Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews and U.S.-Israeli Relations*.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

This is a difficult Book Report to prepare. In most cases, when I, your Reviewer, assemble a Book Report or Review I like to leave the Reader with something of an outline of the Book’s contents, or a Summary of What the Author is Doing With What the Author is Saying. I have found it impossible to provide such an outline or summary for this book. No fault can be found with the Author’s writing style (which is excellent) or his extensive, scholarly research (which is wonderful), or his conclusions (which are very well documented and supported with extensive, scholarly research). Perhaps, if fault is to be found with this book, it is a conclusion of fault which arises from the assumption (which might itself be faulty) with which I approached this book. I approached it with an assumption (perhaps a faulty one) that the Author was going to provide us with a clearly delineated historical outline or narrative which describes the historical evolution of, and the spread, rise and fall within the U.S. of that theology which we now know as “Dispensationalism”. I assumed that the Author’s outline or narrative would take us, in a clearly understandable form, from the first “invention”, if you will, or the first conception of the theology which we now know as “Dispensationalism”, through its advent or introduction in the U.S., its gaining of popularity in the U.S., its spread in the U.S., the attacks or disagreements from its dissenters, and, eventually, to a status of some popularity in American Evangelical circles, and then to its eventual fall from that position of popularity. The Author actually achieves these goals, but, in my opinion, he does not do so in a manner that is clearly laid out and is clearly understandable. As a result, I found it very difficult to track the “history” of Dispensationalism in the U.S. through this book. In this respect, I was disappointed in this book.

I, your Reviewer, found this book to be very informative, but to be very difficult to absorb. In fact, I sort of slogged through it. Since the version of this book which I reviewed is not owned by me, but is owned by a library, I did not feel free to underline or highlight parts of it for future reference. I, nevertheless, wanted to at least grasp its contents to the point where I could provide you, the Reader, with a pretty clear understanding of those contents. Therefore, I made over 20 pages of Notes, as I read this book. I then went back and read and re-read those Notes, and I went back and reviewed some parts of the book which I had highlighted in my notes, and I still found myself asking questions like: 1) Who is This?, 2) When did This Happen?, 3) How did This Fit into the Overall Historical Narrative?, 4) What Does This Term Mean (and I ended up doing Google searches of a number of terms, such as, by way of Example, “Brothern”, “Exclusive Brothern”, “Open Brothern”, etc.)? 5) What did This Person Do?, and so forth. In some respects, I found that reading this book was comparable to reading a Russian Novel. In order to read such a Novell one has to keep notes of each character of the Novel, and of when and where he or

she appears, because there will be future references to this character without any information as to who he or she is, etc. All of these problems might well have been my fault or to have been caused by my inadequate knowledge base, but believe me I really “worked” with this book as I wanted to understand it, and give you, the Reader, at least some understanding of its contents so that you can make a rational decision as to whether to invest time or money into acquiring or reading this book. No matter how well a book is written, or how well its contents are researched, or how scholarly it might be, a Reader should not have to fight to get a pretty good understanding as to how the Author/We go from Point A to Point B. I cannot say that this book fulfills this requirement.

I think that the problems I have experienced with this book are with the manner in which its contents are arranged. While I would consider it to be an Historical Book, tracing the History of Dispensationalism in the U.S. it does not appear to be arranged historically or chronologically. Rather it appears to be arranged in a more topical manner. So, in one Part of the Book, and its chapters, various individuals who impacted Dispensationalism are identified and their actions and the results of those actions are described (sometimes without any clear date or chronological reference) and then, in another part of the Book, and its chapters, the same individuals and their actions (again, sometimes, without any date or chronological reference) are referred to, forcing the reader to try to recall just who this person was, what he or she did, and when he or she did it, etc. To put it bluntly, I found myself, as a Reader, to be in somewhat of a state of constant confusion.

I have been saddened by my problems with this book. The Author has to have spent thousands of hours in conducting research for his book. The contents are truly amazing! The information contained in this book is remarkably informative, and I think that it is remarkably important. I just wish that all of this wonderful information was arranged in a manner which makes the book more readily understandable. So, what do I think the Author might have done to help Readers like me who are probably deficient readers in a number of respects. My suggestions would be:

- 1) Greatly expand the Limited Glossary of terms which appears at the end of this book (the current Glossary is helpful but far too limited. It would be helpful for the Author to have expanded it in order to include terms which he thinks “everyone should understand”, as not all of us do.).
- 2) Provide an identifying list of (and accompanying identifying information for) the many congregations, denominations, organizations, entities and individuals who are mentioned in the book.
- 3) Provide a chronological chart, showing the chronology of the events, acts, actions, etc., which are referred to in the book. (The reader can then, from time to time as he or she reads the book, refer to this chart in order to understand where they are in the historical narratives of the book). This chart might also clearly describe the various chronological evolution or changes in Dispensationalism.
- 4) Put more complete Introductions at the beginning of each Part and Chapter and More complete Conclusions at the end of each such Part and Chapter, summarizing what the Reader will find in that Part or Chapter and what has been stated in each such Part or Chapter, and label these as “introductions” and “Conclusions”.

I tried to prepare such charts for myself, but I fear that I was woefully deficient in my efforts. The Author might argue that I am a “lazy reader” and want him to do my work for me. I think that, if he looked at the extensive Notes I made while reading this book, he would know that I am anything but a lazy reader. I am

very interested in the contents of this book. I just wanted to be able to understand them much more readily than I found to be the case.

I now want to make some further initial observations about this book. I don't think that any American, Protestant Evangelical or even any American Christian can read this book and come away with anything but feelings of dismay, disappointment or even sadness. I found it to be quite simply remarkable to see how some, if not many of the very prominent Christian leaders whose actions are referred to in this book tore into each other, and each other's theologies and theological conclusions (many times without knowing what they were talking about, or with limited knowledge of the subjects of which they spoke), using terms like "heretic" or "apostasy" without any justification whatsoever for such vitriol or polemics. If you, the Reader, want to get some idea about why there exists the fracturing of the American Evangelical movement that we now see, then just read this book. We have to learn to discuss, and even disagree about theological views, using an "umbrella" of Grace and Respect. All of us want to better understand the Bible, God's Holy Word, and to apply that understanding. Doing so are not easy things to do. There is room for legitimate, respectful disagreement. You will find a lot of a lack of such respect in the pages of this book. In classes on Biblical Hermeneutics, which I have taught, we have always emphasized that some theological issues are "million dollar issues", fundamental issues, as to which we can never compromise, but that other theological issues are not "million dollar issues", but are ones as to which reasonable minds might disagree, even if we are fully persuaded that our views on such issues are correct. In my opinion (and I admit that this is simply my personal opinion) many of the "learned individuals" mentioned in the narrative of the history of Dispensationalism have allowed arguments over non-million dollar theological issues to tear at the very fabric at evangelical Christianity.

WHAT IS THE AUTHOR DOING WITH WHAT THE AUTHOR IS SAYING

For the reasons set forth above, this is a very difficult section of this Rook Report to prepare. I would normally try to set forth in this section a general summary or outline of the book's contents. I cannot do that here for this book. In fact (true confession) I found myself often wondering "Why Am I Doing This?". Just trying to do the Author (who did a whole lot of work and research to write this book) justice, and to try to give the contents of this book the justice they deserve, provided me with a huge struggle. I think (and the operative word here is "think") that my struggles with this book were very worthwhile. I think that I learned a lot from this book, but outlining the contents of this book has proven to be for me an impossible task. What I can do are two things: 1) I can give you a very general outline or statement of what the Author is doing with this book, and 2) I can provide you with an outline of my Notes of this book's contents. That outline, which appears below as unnumbered paragraphs, is simply a compilation of my Notes. That outline, the following numbered paragraphs which appear below in this Section of this Review, was prepared by me FOR MY USE, AND TO HELP ME TRY TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK, and to try to understand it so that I could somehow write this Review (which has been a very difficult task to perform). In practical fact the outline (the numbered paragraphs which appear below) is a PERSONAL DOCUMENT. You, the Reader, and our Author might find my Notes to be wrong or deficient in a number of respects. There might even be typographical errors in those numbered paragraphs, and there will most certainly be grammatical errors or poor phraseology in such paragraphs. Again, I say that my Notes, which are outlined in such paragraphs, were prepared for me. If such outline helps you, the Reader, great. If you think that reading this outline will be of no benefit to you, the Reader, then skip the following numbered paragraphs. Reading this book is not an easy task. You might wonder, as I did from time to time, why you are even undertaking that task. That said, if you have any interest in the subject matter of this book, then I think that whatever struggles you experience in reading it will prove to be struggles that were worthwhile to undertake.

So, in general, what is the Author doing with this book. He traces and describes, using exhaustive research, the evolution of, the introduction into U.S. Christian culture and denominations (particularly into fundamentalism and evangelicalism) of, the rise in acceptance of, and the fall from acceptance of, and some enduring impacts on American Christianity, and American culture, society and politics of that theological system (a system for systematic interpretation and application of the Bible) which was named in 1927 (long after it came into existence and popularity) as “Dispensationalism” by Philip Mauro, a St. Louis lawyer, who was initially an ardent dispensationalist and who later became a hugely critical opponent of dispensationalism. The Author traces (although in a format which is not all that chronologically clear) the impacts of that theological system which came to be known as “Dispensationalism” on the American church, and the so-called fundamentalists and particularly upon Evangelicals. Ultimately, this system impacted not just theology, but some of the very core fiber of American culture. This system consisted of a theological tradition which eventually brought about a large network encompassing ideas, institutions and individuals. It came to dominate, and eventually divide, the American fundamentalist school of theological thought, and it eventually fell from grace in the fundamentalist school of theological thought.

The Author presents a 200 year history of Dispensationalism, and of its rise and fall within, and its acceptance and eventual rejection among fundamentalist and evangelical leaders and scholars. He argues that this rise and fall contributed greatly to problems experienced by, and continuing to cause divisions in American Evangelicalism. The “system” of Dispensationalism brought to the fore the interdependent relationship between theology and cultures, which has shaped American evangelicalism. In the Author’s opinion, a study of Dispensationalism helps to illuminate contemporary trends towards a polarization that has plagued and continues to plague American Evangelicalism.

MY NOTES OUTLINED

As noted above, it is not possible, or certainly not practicable to summarize or outline the extensive, extremely well researched and well written contents of this book. The best I can do is to simply highlight a few of the highlights of these contents. Such highlights are as follows:

REVIEWER’S NOTE AND CAUTION: THE FOLLOWING NUMBERED PARAGRAPHS ARE TAKEN FROM MY EXTENSIVE NOTES. THESE PARAGRAPHS ARE SET FORTH MORE FOR MY BENEFIT THAN FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE. I DO NOT VOUCH FOR THEIR ACCURACY. IN FACT, UNLESS THE READER HAS A STRONG INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT MATTER OF DISPENSATIONALISM AND WHAT HAS HAPPED TO IT IN AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL CIRCLES, I WOULD SUGGEST THAT HE OR SHE SKIP THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS AND SIMPLY READ THE INTRODUCTION THAT APPEARS IN THE BOOK, WHICH SHOULD ENABLE HIM OR HER TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT HE OR SHE HAS THE STRONG INTEREST WHICH IS REQUIRED TO READ THIS BOOK. IF HE OR SHE DETERMINES THAT SUCH AN INTEREST EXISTS, THEN, AT SOME POINT, A REVIEW OF THE FOLLOWING NUMBERED PARAGRAPHS MIGHT BE BENEFICIAL.

- 1) The basics of that “System” which came to be known as “Dispensationalism” were developed in the 1830s by a group of Irish and English Protestant dissenters, which eventually came to be known as “the Brethren” (which later divided into the “Open Brethren” and “Exclusive Brethren”) that was, at some point, led by an English man who was educated in Ireland, John Nelson Darby (hereinafter referred to as “Darby”), who lived from 1800 to 1881. This group congregated in the Irish city of Plymouth, and eventually came to be known as the “Plymouth

- Brethren". Darby can be referred to as the Father of Dispensationalism. The Brethren/Darby theorized and taught that all of history, particularly all of Biblical history, was divided into 7 separate and distinct periods of time known as "dispensations", with the world currently being in the 6th dispensation. In their view each dispensation represented a separate time of God's "testing" of humanity, and of humanity's failure of that test. While humanity failed the test of each dispensation, God's Love continued to the next dispensation. Each dispensation, in effect, stood alone, without continuity from one dispensation to the next, meaning that each dispensation represented (represents) a separate test of humanity and failure of that test. In the view of Darby and the Brethren the world was/is in the 6th dispensation. They believed and taught that the 6th dispensation, the current dispensation (remember that this started in the early to mid 1800s) was/is near its end, and that it shows a complete failure of organized Christianity and that the current churches and societies would/will soon be destroyed. They believed that the close of the current dispensation, the 6th dispensation was/is upon us, and that its end will be marked by the rapture, a sudden taking of the Christian Elect into the air to meet Jesus, after which God will unleash 7 years of judgment upon the earth as a part of God's plan for world redemption, with, at the climax of this 7 years, the battle of Armageddon will see the victory of Jesus and the return of a raptured church led by Jesus. While there are various degrees of belief in these teachings on the part of those who characterize themselves as "Dispensationalists", these beliefs and teachings (in varying degrees) have accompanied Dispensationalism throughout its history.
- 2) A key part of the early dispensational teachings, and what would become the overwhelmingly key aspect of Dispensationalism are the beliefs/teachings that the end is upon us, that the return of Jesus is imminent, and that the "elect Christians" will be "raptured" into heaven to join Jesus upon His return BEFORE THE TRIBULATION PROMISED BY REVELATION. The beliefs and teachings of: 1) the organized churches and society and of the "world system" are corrupt and will be destroyed, 2) the end times are upon us, right around the corner, 3) Christ's second coming is imminent, 4) The elect will be "raptured" before the tribulation, and 5) the Millenium, Christ's 1000 year reign, will occur upon Christ's return. So, the Brethren came to be known as "premillennialists", the title by which they were known until a St. Louis lawyer, Philip Mauro coined the term "Dispensationalism" in 1927, at a time when he had become strongly opposed to this "system". Arguments over the rapture, premillennialism, Christ's Second Coming and its timing, and the imminence of the tribulation, all key parts of what came to be known as "dispensationalism" have continued to this day. In fact, if you read this book you will likely conclude that the dispensationalist beliefs about: 1) premillennialism, 2) the imminence of the end times, 3) the tribulations, 4) the rapture, and 5) whether the rapture will precede the tribulation, have formed the basis of what is now known as (or what the Author refers to as) "Pop Dispensationalism", which has impacted and continues to impact American culture, and have formed the basis for many of the attacks by church leaders and theologians upon Dispensationalism.
 - 3) The Brethren and Darby came to North America, initially to Canada and the Great Lakes Basin. Eventually Revivalism returned to North America in roughly the 1850s, and the Brethren/Darby capitalized on this trend, and sought to show that Dispensationalism provided a bridge between Calvinism (which emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the authority of the Bible), and the Wesleyan tradition (which emphasized personal faith and holiness) and the spirit of revival, which centered on the individual and the individual's soul and the works of the Holy Spirit. The Brethren/Darby sought to, in effect, hitchhike upon revivalism, although, in their view (and Darby's strong view) the revivalist emphasis of the individual and individual conversions and the individual's soul and personal, spiritual

- experiences, was wrong, as they/he believed that the emphasis should be on the fallen, corrupt nature of the church. The Brethren/Darby largely opposed, strongly opposed organized religion. They believed that the Church, as it then existed, was corrupt and likely beyond redemption. In addition, there were some disagreements about the nature of the steps which a person would need to take in order to be saved. These disagreements revolved around the concept of "Free Grace". Wesley preached that individuals could simply accept Christ and His grace, by mental assent, and that they would thereby be saved, and that the Holy Spirit would then lead them to a state of perfection in Christ. Darby strongly opposed this view, which might be referred to as "Free Grace". Strangely enough, some Dispensationalists later espoused the "Free Grace" view, which was opposed by other fundamentalists who argued that more than just "mental assent" is required for salvation, as that mental assent must be accompanied by true repentance from sin.
- 4) Darby developed a "Bible Reading Method" which was based on the 7 dispensations, although it doesn't appear that he ever personally used this Method or System. This Method/System was based on a "consistent literal hermeneutic", with every word of Scripture to be read and understood based upon its plain meaning. Later premillennialists argued for a "consistent literal hermeneutic", although Darby and many premillennialists were drawn to a Brethren teaching which sought to merge a literal and typological method, with virtually every passage of the Old Testament being given something of a figurative or symbolic fulfillment in the New Testament. For reasons which are not clear, many if not all dispensationalists abandoned this figurative or typological reading of the Bible in favor of a consistent literal hermeneutic, with the intention being to try to ascertain the true meanings or intentions of the original Biblical authors based upon the plain meanings of their words, taken in connection with the literal and historical context which existed at the times when they wrote or spoke their words. In other words, an author could not have intended his words to mean something of which he could not have known or understood at the time when he wrote them or spoke them. The concept that passages in the Old Testament could be construed or given additional meaning by the authors of the New Testament was rejected.
 - 5) The Author argues that widespread agreement and belief in favor of "post-millennialism" existed between and among both Northern and Southern churches before the American Civil War. That agreement was that there was and would be a lockstep progression of the church and the American Nation to a status of unity and continuity, and a better society, and an eventual return of Jesus. This belief was shattered in the 1860s by the Civil War. After the Civil War some American seminaries and universities began to teach "higher criticism" of the Bible, together with Darwinism. The onset of so-called "modernity" or Liberalism" was perceived by fundamentalists and some denominations, and particularly those of a pre-millennial and dispensational orientation to be infecting the universities, some seminaries and some mainline congregations. Enter the so-called "fundamentalists" and a sub-set of the fundamentalists, the premillennialists, later known as dispensationalists. This was particularly true in the Border States, including Missouri. James H. Brookes (hereinafter referred to as "Brookes"), who was a pastor of a St. Louis Presbyterian church, became a strong advocate for, and leader in what became known as "dispensationalism". By the 1870s this sub-set of American Fundamentalism, sometimes known as the "new premillennialists" embraced or borrowed part of the Brethren's pre-millennial tradition for: 1) understanding the over arching narrative of the Bible, 2) the progression of the dispensations over time, 3) a unified, consistent literal reading of the Biblical text, 3) the duality of heaven and earth, 4) the separation of Israel and the Church, 5) the centrality of Israel to Prophecy.

- 6) Jumping a bit out of order at this point, it would seem to be helpful to now list some of the theological beliefs or teachings which have, over the long history of Dispensationalism (formerly known as “new-dispensationalism”), been held or taught (in varying degrees and not without some disagreements and challenges) as a part of the Dispensational theological system:
- a. Pre-millennialism: Pre-millennialism rests at the very heart of Dispensational theology.
 - b. Seven, separate divisions of historical and Biblical time, known as “dispensations”, with each representing a separate test of humanity by God, and a failure of by humanity (primarily the Israelites and later the church) to pass those tests, with each dispensation representing a separate, distinct time period and period of testing. (Until late in the history of dispensationalism, it was held that there was no continuity from one dispensation to the next. In much more recent history, scholars at the Dallas Theological Seminary (“DTS”) have promulgated sort of a “soft dispensationalism”, and have proposed that there is continuity between dispensations, and between the Old and New Testaments. Some have argued that this change among DTS (which was a leader in scholastic or academic dispensationalism) sounded the death knell for dispensationalism.
 - c. The Rapture: A key part of the theology from its very beginning
 - d. The Current Dispensation (the 6th Dispensation) is about to end and will end soon, with the destruction, by the tribulation, of the current society and its institutions and the current worldly church, all of which are corrupt. (Note: This belief has been held since the beginning in the 1800s of dispensationalism/new-premillennialism, although the term “dispensationalism” did not come into existence until it was coined by the anti-dispensationalist, St. Louis lawyer, Phillip Mauro, in 1927.
 - e. The tribulation will be a period of 7years, during which God will bring judgment on the earth as a part of His plan for redemption of His creation.
 - f. The Rapture will occur before the tribulation (a somewhat controversial timing) and Elect Christians will be Raptured into the sky to meet Jesus prior to the tribulation.
 - g. At the conclusion of the tribulation, Jesus and raptured elect will return to earth and will reign for 1000 years
 - h. The battle of Armageddon will then occur.
 - i. There is a separation, a division or dichotomy if you will, between Israel and the Church, and the Prophecies as to Israel will, at the end times be literally fulfilled, meaning that the Land Promises and Davidic promises will be literally fulfilled, with there being a separate covenantal fulfillment for the Church, although the earthly church will have been destroyed, as it is corrupt.
 - j. There is a duality or separation between heaven and earth, with God working separately for the fulfillment of the heavenly church and the earthly church.
 - k. Free Grace: Free Grace, the belief that salvation is achieved simply by mental assent to Christ, and mentally accepting his saving gift and lordship. (As opposed to a belief by many fundamentalists and some dispensationalists, possibly including Darby himself that such mental assent is not sufficient for salvation but must be joined with an actual repentance from sin and the ways of the world.)
 - l. Cessation of Spiritual Gifts, including Speaking in Tongues, meaning that such gifts are no longer present and are certainly not required for salvation (Somewhat contrary to some Pentecostal beliefs that a separate baptism by the Holy Spirit and the providing of some Spiritual Gifts by the Spirit are required for salvation.)

- m. People are divided into three categories, Israel, the elect true Christians of the church and the nations (the nations consisting of all people other than Israel and the church. (At the end times, the earthly church will cease to exist and God's heavenly church will be fulfilled, and there will then be three peoples, Israel, the Church and the Nations.)
- n. God is separately working in heaven and on earth, and there is a duality between heaven and earth.
- o. Some dispensationalists held a position of supersessionism, meaning that the church completely replaces Israel, although this was certainly not the predominate belief of dispensationalists.
- p. While, at the outset, there was an attempt to read the Bible both literally and figuratively, with there being strong typology between the Old Testament (the types) and the New Testament (the anti-types, primarily Jesus) the dispensational view grew to be one that accepted a "consistent literal hermeneutic". The goal of a consistent literal hermeneutic, in the eyes of most dispensationalists, was/is to ascertain that which the Biblical authors would clearly have intended to mean by their words, attaching to those words their usual, customary, literal meaning at the time they were written or spoken, taking into account the literal and historical context of the times when those words were first written or spoken. This further meant that, with only some rare exceptions, the Old Testament was to be read and interpreted, literally, without any resort to the New Testament.
- q. There were two Godly kingdoms, the "Kingdom of God" (meaning God's universal dominion) and "the Kingdom of Heaven" (meaning the prophesied reign of peace on earth that would only come in the future, sometimes only through Israel).
- r. The "true church" versus the "visible church", with the visible church being viewed as being in ruins (with many dispensationalists being strongly opposed to organized religion).
- s. At the outset of dispensationalism, and for a substantial period of time, there was a strong opposition to intellectualism or any academic approach to theology. This anti-intellectual approach changed, over time, and a number of Bible Institutes, and Seminaries were formed. Dallas Theological Institutes (DTS) and Talbot Seminary and others became fountainheads for so called "Scholastic Dispensationalism". A softer or more "progressive dispensationalism" eventually develop in the mid to late 1900s at DTS and Talbot.
- t. Biblical Inerrancy: The Bible is completely inerrant, in every respect and with respect to every fact. (Eventually, arguments over just what is meant by "Bible Inerrancy" among hard dispensational, and more "progressive" faculty members at the west coast institution, Fuller Theological Seminary, led to a rupture among that faculty, which became increasingly less and less dispensationalists.)
- u. Dispensationalists have opposed what they view as the "World System", a system that is dominated by capitalism, trade, industrial, business and economic concerns, and which encourages the "consolidation of smaller units into large units", and the domination of the large over the small, and which will eventually lead to "one world government", something which dispensationalists have strongly feared and opposed, and have included, in their opposition, the consolidation of the churches, and the absence of what they have referred to as 'diversity". Dispensationalists have opposed what they refer to as "the current state of the world".

- v. Dispensationalists have opposed (sometimes being joined by others, including pentecostals and other fundamentalists) what they have viewed as modernist, liberal proponents of a “new theology” one which promulgates a new “social gospel”, modern science, ecumenism, the merging of smaller units into larger aggregates, sometimes world government and Darwinism.
- 7) As noted above various individual Dispensationalists have held these beliefs principles set forth in a. through v. above (or, in the case of some dispensationalist, some of such beliefs or principle, them, in varying degrees, some of which were modified or even rejected over time). Dispensationalism can, therefore, be currently viewed along a scale or line from Traditional Dispensationalism (sometimes referred to as “hard dispensationalism”) moving towards a more moderate position (sometimes referred to as “soft dispensationalism” or “progressive dispensationalism”, a term used at DTS, including by one of its scholars, Darrell Bock who often moderates the DTS Podcast production, “The Table”). Dispensationalism can be contrasted with the more “Reformed views” of “Covenantalism, but that is a subject for other discussions. It appears from the Author’s research that a substantial degree of instability among dispensationalists existed with respect to some of these beliefs or positions, and that this instability, together with 20th and 21st century attacks, and continuing attacks on dispensationalism in general (as being “modernist” and an “invention of men and not of God”, and as being “heretical”) by many fundamentalists, scholars of the Reformed schools, Covenantalists, Pentecostals, “new or neo-evangelists” (such as Billy Graham who wanted to include all Christians in a big tent) and even some scholarly dispensationalists (such as those at DTS and Talbot, including Darrell Bock) and “reformed or converted dispensationalists (sometimes thought to have begun with the St. Louis lawyer and a leading dispensationalist, Philip Mauro, who actually coined the term “Dispensationalism” in 1927) led to what the Author has described as the “Fall of Dispensationalism” which occurred in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.
 - 8) The Exclusive Brethren joined with the American Revivalist movement, including the “Moody Network” initiated by a foremost evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, which eventually consisted of a network of a substantial number of Bible Institutes (e.g. The Moody Bible Institute), seminaries, large convocations and meetings, and publications, all of which was substantially Dispensational in theology, although Moody himself, one of the foremost American evangelists, likely did not take the time to learn much about dispensationalism or theology for that matter. As the dispensational movement spread from the Great Lakes Basin, and upper Midwest, into the South, it finally reached the West Coast. BIOLA (the Bible Institute of Los Angeles) was formed, with a heavy emphasis on dispensationalism and Pentecostalism.
 - 9) Dispensationalists joined with fundamentalists, pentecostals and others to oppose the encroachment of “modernism” or “liberalism”, including “Biblical Higher Criticism” and “Darwinism” which was being used in some mainline denominations and colleges and universities and all of them joined in opposition to the teaching of Darwinism in public schools, and a battle for the so called “soul of the public schools” ensued.
 - 10) In the 1910-1915 time period Fundamentalists (Christian leaders who feared that liberalism or modernity influences in the mainline denominations was leading to a loss of the fundamentals of the Christian Faith) many of whom were Dispensationalist or Dispensational in their theological leanings, published a 12 volume work title “*The Fundamentals*”. Many of the editors and contributors to such work were certainly Dispensational in their theological leanings. This work was, to some extent, an extension of the then 50 year old Moody evangelical movement, and of revivalist evangelicalism. 3 million copies of *The Fundamentals* were published. The fundamentalists, who viewed themselves as the true inheritors of

primitive and Reformational Christianity and saw themselves as an antimodernist front within and across denominational lines which opposed Biblical higher criticism, Darwinian evolution and what they called the “new theology”. They confessed to 5 theological fundamentals, those being: The Divinity of Jesus, The Virgin Birth, The Resurrection, The Second Coming, and the Inerrancy of Scripture. They opposed centralization and institutional consolidation in economics, politics and religion.

- 11) The Fundamentalists split into two groups, although there was no clear line of demarcation between the groups. These were the “denominational fundamentalists”, who sought to take over the mainline denominations, primarily the northern Presbyterians and northern Baptists (an effort at which they failed) and the “nationalist fundamentalists”, who eschewed any denominational connection, and sought to separate themselves from the denominations which they viewed as incurably corrupt, modernist and liberal, and who were motivated by a view of Christian nationalism for American society and politics. They agitated for a new fusion of Christianity and American Civic life, with the belief that the Bible is authority for both right religion and right citizenship. The nationalist fundamentalists were dominated by premillennialists and by many with a dispensational theological leaning. They eventually joined with Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists, an alliance which was fragile from the beginning and eventually broke apart. The pentecostals were led by Aimee Semple McPherson, pastor of the Angeles Temple of Los Angeles, and one of the initiators of BIOLA. While the alliance lasted, Fundamentalists of all stripes and denominations, including Aimee Semple McPherson’s Pentecostals, joined in the World Christian Fundamentalists Association (“WCFA”) to oppose modernity and liberalism in Protestant denominations. Theological differences and tensions led to a splintering of this alliance.
- 12) In the late 1920s and early 1930s the origin of what was/is known as “Scholastic Dispensationalism” ensued, to some extent because of the breakdown of the WCFA. Some institutions or seminaries or schools were formed with the goal of training new generations of pastors and ministers schooled in premillennialism and dispensationalism. That seminary which later came to be known as, and which is today known as “Dallas Theological Seminary” (“DTS”) was formed in 1926. Our author views the founding and history of DTS as being that event and that history which are MOST CONSEQUENTIAL IN THE HISTORY OF DISPENSATIONALISM. DTS and its faculty became the fountainhead for the training of scholars who later populated the faculties of other seminaries and Bible Institutes, and also became the fountainhead for the writing and publishing of scholastic/academic articles and literature relating to dispensationalism. As noted above, some of the younger faculty of DTS, including Darrell Bock of The Table Podcast, broke away from older faculty members and began to espouse a modified or progressive form of dispensationalism, which, among other things, found greater continuity among and between the dispensationalist periods and between the Old Testament and the New Testament, views which were closer to “covenantalism”.
- 13) Philip Mauro, originally an ardent premillennialist and dispensationalist, converted to a position of complete anti-dispensationalism, and in 1927 coined what he thought was a disparaging term, “dispensationalism” , a system which he argued was heretical at its core, and a development of modernity, and of men, not God. By 1936 the term “dispensationalism” was widely held in disrepute. The faculty of DTS, including the then head of DTS, Lewis Sperry Chafer, rose to defend dispensationalism by way of a series of scholastic writings. Chafer authored an 8 volume text titled “*Systematic Theology*” in which he defined “dispensationalism” and sought to identify the systematic differences between so called “conservative dispensationalists” and “true dispensationalists” (including himself) and

“partial dispensationalists”. In his view God is pursuing two distinct purposes, one related to earthly people, and one related to heavenly people, and there is also an “objective dualism” which differentiates the church and Israel. This work is a staple in the libraries of many Christian seminaries and Bible Institutes. Dispensationalists have viewed this work of Chafer and the *Schofield Reference Bible* (original and revised format) as the sources for much of their scholarly research and efforts.

- 14) Dispensationalism became a sort of sub-set of fundamentalism and a contender for the soul of fundamentalism. A schism/rift developed in fundamentalist circles in the later 1930s. This rift was between dispensationalists and those opposing dispensationalism. Each side had its scholastic literary contributors, with those in support of dispensationalism being located at DTS and what might be referred to as its progeny institutions, including the Talbot Theological Seminary of BIOLA (“Talbot”), which, with DTS, formed a bulwark for the scholarly dispensational writings until the rift between the younger and older faculty members of DTS, as described above, developed. Each side (those supporting and advocating dispensationalism and those opposed to dispensationalism) went on the attack and the defense. Attacks became very vitriolic and intense, and included charges against dispensationalism of heresy, apostasy, inventions of man and not God, a modernist invention, etc. 3 distinct groups of fundamentalists evolved, those being dispensationalists, those opposing dispensationalism, and the so-called “neo-evangelists” (including Billy Graham) who sought to bridge the gap between dispensationalists and covenantalists. These groups ended up fighting as much among themselves as they did in opposing modernity and liberalism. It appears that they were more interested in locating and identifying heretics in their own numbers as they were in furthering the Christian Faith. There were full-fledged attacks on dispensationalism beginning with Philip Mauro and carried on by countless others.
- 15) DTS was becoming something of an outcast by the late 1930s. Moody Bible Institute was seeking to separate itself from dispensationalism. A Southern Presbyterian council rejected the views of dispensationalism as being “heretical”. DTS shifted its position and began to accept student body from denominations, including presbyterian, independents and Baptists. DTS separated itself from what it called “ultra dispensationalism” and became pretty much denominationally independent.
- 16) DTS acquired the oldest theological journal/periodical, *“Bibliotheca Sacra”*, a journal which became synonymous with dispensationalism. A number of dispensationalist publishing houses came into being, including Zondervan. DTS joined, in 1952, with the Talbot Theological Seminary of BIOLA (“Talbot”). Covenantalists and Dispensationalists locked themselves in a theological war.
- 17) Neo-evangelists, including Billy Graham, sought to claim a middle ground between fundamentalists and modernists and dispensationalists and covenantalists, and tried to bring everyone under a large evangelical tent. “We all need to work together” became something of their motto. Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California (“Fuller”) became sort of the intellectual center for neo-evangelism, although it ironically became a hotbed of anti-dispensational scholarship, and sought to distance itself from scholastic dispensationalism. Among other sources of controversy and even outright hostile conflict among faculty of Fuller were almost bitter arguments about what is meant by “Biblical Inerrancy” with Dispensationalists and many if not most Fundamentalists standing for the proposition that the Bible is absolutely true and without error in all respects, factual and otherwise.
- 18) While many Christians, including myself, are of the opinion that the scholastic, academic arguments (sometimes hostile) between the dispensationalist scholars, and some fundamentalist scholars, and scholars of the more Reformed Traditions of Calvinists and

Presbyterians and some Baptists were and are meaningless or seem to represent arguments about rather insignificant details, our Author strongly disagrees with these opinions. In his judgment these arguments represented more than just ivory tower sniping, and were about significant matters, and did not represent heated arguments over minor details, but rather were arguments which had and have a strong impact on fundamentalist and evangelical churches, and are arguments which impacted and continue to impact the manner in which the churches and their pastors, ministers and congregants viewed and view culture, society and politics. In his view the power in the fundamentalist and evangelical communities was determined (and in some cases splintered) as much by these scholastic debates as by any other causes.

- 19) A debate ensued between some dispensationalists and some neo-evangelicals, with the neo-evangelicals contending that dispensationalism ignores the so called "social gospel" and the awful state of the current world and of all its poor and disadvantaged people and all of its misery in favor of concerns over other worldly, not of this world matters, including the view of some dispensationalists (starting with the Brethren) about the perceived apostasy of the church, and the view of some dispensationalists that the visible church (the worldly church) and true church (God's heavenly church) are different, and in favor of a position that the Rapture is imminent and the tribulation is upon us, and that the Rapture represents an "escape" from the world's misery and the pending tribulation so there is no need to concentrate on the current state of social or worldly affairs.
- 20) The Nationalist Fundamentalists sought to focus on current specifics of culture, world affairs and politics and sought to organize some political movements, and to become active in politics.
- 21) Traditional Dispensationalists hold literalistic views of Prophecy and of Israel, and believe that the Promises made by God to Abraham, David and Israel (including the land promise, and the Davidic Kingdom promise) must be literally fulfilled at the end times. These views have led some dispensationalists to strongly advocate for the State of Israel.
- 22) Most dispensational leaders, ministers and scholars eventually adopted a definition of the "consistent literal hermeneutic", a hermeneutic which, by and large, crowded out any allegorical, symbolic or typological reading of the Bible. That definition was authored by a BIOLA scholar, David Cooper, in 1942 and came into pretty wide acceptance. That definition was: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Therefore, take every word of the Bible in its primary, ordinary, usual and literal meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths clearly indicate otherwise". This definition, sometimes with slight revisions, was taught over and over in dispensationalist seminaries. It was taught with an emphasis on an historical and grammatical analysis of the text which sought to identify the original authorial meaning of the written words, meaning what did the author intend his words to mean, taking into account his historical and cultural context. Therefore, an Old Testament Author could not have meant, with his words construed literally, as described above, something of which he could have had no knowledge, and further meaning that, almost universally, the Old Testament must stand alone and it is not modified or construed by way of the New Testament. This method stood in stark contrast to the critical source and form analysis (so called "Higher Criticism") favored by modernists and liberalists and taught in some seminaries and many universities and colleges, and it was also opposed to the addition of some allegorical and symbolic interpretations favored by many covenantalists. Unlike many of their pre-millennialist forebearers, many dispensationalists built their identity on a full-throated commitment to a consistent literal interpretation across all of

Scripture. In some respects, literal hermeneutics became identified with dispensationalism. With some, so-called “ultra dispensationalists”, this consistent literal hermeneutic seems to have led to some rather extreme conclusions, such as, for example, “scorpions in Revelation meant ‘scorpions’ in fact”.

- 23) The embrace of the consistent literal hermeneutic led some dispensationalists to adopt a “young-earth creationist” belief, in spite of all evidence to the contrary.
- 24) By the 1960s dispensationalism, primarily its beliefs in the imminent pending of the Rapture and the Tribulation and the ultimate end times began to inject itself, full-throated, into popular culture, with such movement into the culture being sometimes referred to as “POP DISPENSATIONALISM”. A number of “radio preachers” or evangelists preached of the current evils and apostasy of the culture, and the pending doom of the current culture. Many of them graduated to TV, including Pat Robertson (the 700 club), Jimmy Swaggert, Jerry Falwell and others. A 1962 graduate of DTS, Hal Lindsey, wrote a book entitled “*The Late Great Planet Earth*”, which was published in 1970. Lindsey, and this book, and subsequent books which he authored achieved a huge popular following and an enormous economic success. Lindsey very loosely used (to put it charitably) dispensational teachings in his books, and the same can be said for other authors and popular figures, who achieved huge economic success built on a rather loose use of dispensational teachings about the end times, the rapture, the tribulation, etc.. Many of these authors aimed their books at a popular audience and commercial success, and not so much at a goal of broadening Christianity, and they acquired large economic empires. Alvin Tofler wrote *Future Shock*, and a Stanford “theologian” wrote *The Population Bomb*, and Erich Von Danikwen wrote *Chariot of the Gods*. *Late Great Planet Earth* was initially published by Zondervan, but Bantam Books picked up an option which allowed it to publish and circulate a widely read paperback version of the book. A large number of books of a comparable “loose dispensationalist” genre (primarily an end times, rapture pending tribulation, destruction of the earth genre) followed, together with TV shows and movies. Pop-Dispensationalism was an enormous economic success, and many of its writers and artists achieved huge economic success.
- 25) While many of the pop-dispensational products catered to habits of consumption and entertainment, there were also flesh and blood communities which embodied the implications of impending judgment and social upheaval, including the “Jesus People”, later referred to as the so-called *Jesus Freaks* of California, which originated in Southern California (Lindsey’s backyard). Dispensational critiques of the “world system”, and its skepticism of global institutions and established authority and modernist thought led to the creation of some so called “Contemporary Christian Music”, and a number of pop songs, and to a good substantial amount of literature, a number of movies and TV shows, and some art. So it is impossible to say that dispensationalism, through the genre of so called “pop dispensationalism”, primarily dealing with the end times, the tribulation and rapture and world destruction has not had a huge impact on American culture.
- 26) Pop-dispensationalism, with its embrace of apocalyptic theology helped to undermine Scholastic Dispensationalism through the diversion of resources and a lot of adverse public opinion. Strangely enough a scholastic interest in popularizing dispensational eschatology came about (and can you blame them-money talks). Among other ongoing scholastic dispensational efforts *The New Scofield Reference Bible* was produced by nine dispensational scholars. Among some of the changes made in it (as opposed to the original *Scofield Reference Bible*, a longtime source for a lot of dispensational research) was an integration of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 into the Bible’s prophetic foreknowledge, with a note that referred to God’s promise to Abraham, *I will curse those who*

- curse you*, with a contention that the warning of this curse was literally fulfilled by the creation of the state of Israel as a result of the persecution of the Jews (with an additional warning that those who persecute Jews will be punished).
- 27) A number of Scholars, some within the scholarly dispensationalist community (including those at DTS and Talbot) began to partially withdraw from some of the views of dispensationalism. Certainly, external attacks on dispensationalism continued to be asserted by other scholars. Some dispensationalists rejected the idea of the imminent Rapture. A rupture in academic dialogue between dispensational scholars and other fundamentalist and evangelical scholars developed, and attacks, over and back, were launched. Eventually, a rupture or split developed among dispensationalist scholars and institutions, and their various faculties.
- 28) Ultimately scholastic dispensationalism faced a huge existential crisis when a “revisionist school of thought” developed at the vary citadels of scholastic dispensationalism, DTS, and Talbot. A younger group of young dispensational scholars broke with the older generation and joined the broader evangelical consensus on issues of covenants, eschatology and salvation, with their views becoming known as “Progressive Dispensation”. By the 1990s progressive dispensationalism had become a full-fledged school of thought. Included among its proponents were 3 DTS professors, including Darrell Bock, and one Talbot professor. They sought, among other things, to redefine the relationship between the dispensations, especially regarding the current dispensation, and to refute a view held by some dispensationalists that the current dispensation represents a “parenthesis” in God’s redemptive history that postpones the kingdom. The progressives argued for a progression or continuity from one dispensation to the next, which forced huge shifts in dispensational views or teachings about: 1) the consistent literal hermeneutic, and 2) the nature of the division between heaven and earth, and 3) the duality between heaven and earth, and 4) the duality between the visible church and the true church, and 5) the views about two separate Godly kingdoms, the “kingdom of God” vs. “the Kingdom of Heaven” (the Kingdom of God being the spiritual rule emanating from heaven and the Kingdom of Heaven being the material; Davidic Kingdom promised to Israel, with the Kingdom of God being the destiny of the church and the Kingdom of Heaven being the destiny of Israel). The progressive dispensationalists produced a host of scholarly writings, including some from scholars at *Westminster Seminary*, where its scholars of all stripes were drawn into the conversation, on both sides (for and against dispensationalism), including arguments for covenantalism versus any form of dispensationalism.
- 29) By the early 2000s, progressive dispensationalism replaced traditional dispensationalism at DTS and Talbot and Grace Seminaries, as well as at many Bible colleges, including Moody Bible Institute. Traditional Dispensationalism has essentially collapsed, and is no longer an organizing principle for religious institutions. However, the echoes of dispensationalism, primarily its views on the impending Rapture and the end times, have had a dramatic impact on American culture and continue to do so, and the political activist views of its sometimes allies, the Nationalist Fundamentalists, continue to have appreciable impacts in some evangelical and fundamentalist circles.

Again, note that paragraphs 1) through 20) above are merely summaries of my personal notes, which I made while reading this book. They do not (unfortunately much like the book itself) appear in any historically chronological order, a fact which likely emphasizes the reasons why I have had difficulties with this book. However, I do think, or at least hope that I have summarized many of the Author’s important thoughts about American Dispensationalism.

FINAL THOUGHTS

You, the Reader, won't have to guess very hard do conclude that there were many times when I wondered why on earth I had undertaken to read this book, much less review it. I fear that my attempt to review it has been woefully inadequate. All of this said, and all of what I have said above, I think that I learned from our Author's laborious research and excellent writing how the proponents of differing (perhaps you might say "competing") theologies can tear apart, not just the proponents of a theology which differs from theirs but the very heart of calm, reasoned, respectful theological efforts and discussions and some denominations and congregations. Reading, interpreting, understanding, and finding in the Bible God's revealed truth, and then applying that truth are all hard work. None of us, and I mean None Of Us, lay persons, ministers or scholars, has a monopoly on correct Scriptural interpretation or application. For any of us to tear at, much less call "heretical" or "apostasy" the good faith efforts of others to reasonably interpret Scripture is to engage in an action which tears at the very heart of our Evangelical Heritage. Can we disagree? Most certainly. Can we put forward our disagreements in a respectful fashion? Most Certainly, and we should do so. But to use a phrase, "we don't want to throw out the baby with the bathwater". What I think that this book's extensive history of the rise and fall of dispensationalism shows is how the power- hungry egos of some individuals (or worse yet, the desire of some individuals for personal economic benefit) have been allowed to infect American Evangelical Theological discourse. That saddens me. Let's spend less time and efforts in trying to find "heretics" in our own Evangelical ranks, and more time in engaging in calm, respectful, reasoned theological discussion and efforts to meet each other half way and to do what Billy Graham and the neo-evangelicals urged, "work together", while keeping our own, possibly divergent, theological views.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Candidly, I would not try to read this book unless you have a strong interest in its subject matter. If you think you might have such an interest, then read its Introduction. Reading that Introduction, which is very good and pretty well all- inclusive of the book's entire contents, should give you a real good idea about whether or not the book is one of interest to you. Normally, I would also advise you, the Reader, that you can skim read a book by reading its Conclusion, and the Conclusion which appears at the end of each Chapter. There are no such Conclusions at the end of each Chapter, and there are not, in most instances, a good Introductory Paragraph at the beginning of each Chapter. These are, in my opinion, unfortunate deficiencies in an otherwise well written book. I have noted my opinions about other deficiencies (no chronological charts, an inadequate Glossary, etc.) at the opening of this Review. So, just read the Introduction and then, if you find that you have an interest in the subject matter, read the book. If you get to that point, then I hope that my Notes which are outlined above might help you.

IS THIS BOOK SUITABLE FOR TEI?

Yes, but only as a reference book held in the Library. I can't see how it would be of any help in any TEI or ECLI Class.

Thank You
Dan Simon

