Eschatology Presentation – Part 2

Why an Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 2

Focus: The need for Israel and the Church to be distinct is in part created by the assumption that the land promised to the patriarchs was never inherited and so must still be fulfilled. But there are certain indications in Scripture that might suggest the land promises actually were fulfilled – what if that turns out to be the case?

In the first installment of this series, I talked about how certain systems of eschatology need the New Testament to distinguish between the Church and national Israel for certain elements of their eschatological system to work. Let me unpack that a bit again here by way of review.

Certain systems of eschatology (standard premillennialism, any view of a rapture) need Israel and the Church distinguished. For the premillennialist, national Israel must be distinct from the church so that the promise of a literal land (and so, literal millennial kingdom on earth) is still "out there" – a prophecy yet unfulfilled. It needs to be yet unfulfilled or there is no point to waiting for a literal millennium. If Israel got the land promised to them in the era of the OT, then one cannot use the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15:1-6) as the basis for saying "there's a literal kingdom in the Land still coming." All rapture positions except the post-trib version need a distinction between Israel and the Church because they see the Church removed from the earth in Revelation 4 – and then it is argued that all the bad stuff in Revelation, the tribulation period, corresponds to "the time of Jacob's trouble" in the OT – specific curses yet remaining on ISRAEL (not the Church). Then the Jewish Messiah returns to save ISRAEL and usher in the literal millennial kingdom.

(Post-tribbers have the Church enduring the trouble with Israel, but still distinguish the Church and Israel because of its need to have a literal millennial kingdom). Daniel's 70 weeks which are prophesied with respect to Jerusalem and Israel are thought to make this distinction clear. Since these "weeks" (actually periods of seven years) are dtermined upon Israel, and since a 70th week is presumed to still be yet future, there must be a prophetic role for national Israel. The missing 70th week is thought to be the seven year tribulation period noted above (but there is no actual verse in the Bible that makes that equation – we'll get to that in future posts).

So, the need for a distinction is apparent. The need is fed (and argued) by certain assumptions: Israel never got the land promise fulfilled to it, so it's still out there. And the land promises *need* to be fulfilled else God failed. Daniel's prophecy forces a distinction between Israel and the Church. Several clear NT passages mar the neatness of all this. I focused a bit on Galatians 3, which explicitly has the Church as the inheritor of the promises to Abraham, thus replacing national Israel as the recipient of those promises. Paul's statment that Christians (including non-Jews) are inheritors of the promises of Abraham ths raises the spectre that national Israel is displaced by the Church. It is usually objected "well, when did the Church get the promised land?" That's actually easy to answer by proponents of an Israel=Church equation. They argue:

(1) the paramters of the kingdom of Solomon match the parameters of the land promises given to Abraham, so Israel *did* receive that promise;

(2) the land was promised not only as a place for the people of God to live, but a place for the presence of Yahweh to reside with his people (in a tabernacle and then the temple). The NT is clear that this place is now the whole world. How? The Spirit of Christ (who is Yahweh) descended at Pentecost

(Acts 2) and now indwells every believer (Eph 2:22; 2 Tim 1:4; James 4:5; Romans 8:9-11). Each believer is the temple of Yahweh now (temple of the Holy Spirit) as is the entire Body of Christ (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). That means wherever Christians are Yahweh is. And Christians have overspread the earth. This was the point of the great commission – to reclaim the nations for Yahweh. The Promised Land is now the whole earth, not just a plot the size of New Jersey. And the people of God inhabit that land. The Church has inherited the promises given to Abraham. God's plan was fulfilled.

And if the above is all true, on what basis should we anticipate a literal earthly millennium? Isn't the kingdom of the whole earth good enough?

Now, there are ways to still argue or justify a literal millennium, but my point isn't to argue for that. It's only to show that *that* position is *far* from being self-evident.

Next up: the covenants. One of the defenses of distinguishing Israel and the Church is, as we've already seen, the Abrahamic covenant. Those who keep Israel and the Church separate argue their position on the basis that Israel never got the land. Why is that important? Because, it is argued, the covenant with Abraham giving Israel the Land was unconditional – it was promised no matter what. God also made a covenant with David, that his dynastic line would never end (or, that one would ever sit on the throne of Israel who was not David's descendant). That covenant was also uncondtional. Hence, it is argued, Israel MUST still get the land, and a descendant of David MUST sit on the literal throne in a literal kingdom in that literal land for these promises to be fulfilled. It is argued that the land and the throne promises remain unfulfilled – so we look to the future for all that.

The land part of this, as we have seen, is undermined by Galatians 3. It would also be undermined (potentially) of the covenant was *conditional*. Many theologians argue the

covenant came with obedience conditions, conditions that were broken by Israel’s apostasy. Hence the promises are null and void (actually, they got passed on to the CHurch in this view through the New Covenant of Jer 31). It is also argued that Jesus has already fulfilled the “Davidic dynasty rule” promise of the Davidic covenant. No need for that in the future in a literal sense. So who’s right? Are the covenants conditional? Is the throne of David already occupied by the messiah?

In other words, is there more than one way to look at all this, so that no prophetic system is self evident (i.e., has the claim to being “biblical”)? Well, you know I’m going to answer yes to that, but why?

Stay tuned.