The Hope of Israel and the Nations

Preface — *By Gary DeMar*

Eschatology, the study of Bible prophecy, is very popular. Thousands of books have been written on the topic through the centuries. The 20th century was a hotbed of prophetic speculation with the rise of atheistic Communism, two world wars, and the reestablishment of Israel as a nation. The 21st century is no different with the advance of Islam and seemingly unbridled secularism. While there is consensus on a few eschatological topics, there remains much disagreement and wild speculation including claims that the "rapture" or a series of last days events are certainly near because certain signs attest to the claim.

Can one more book, two books since this publication is the first volume of the two-volume set of *The Hope of Israel and the Nations,* make any difference? I believe they can. As a long-time student of the subject, I've learned that there are fundamental principles that students of the Bible acknowledge but often forget or may never have learned. Too many Christians (and even non-Christians) read the Bible in bits and pieces or in terms of what we've been told the Bible says on this or that topic. This is not unusual since Jesus and the new testament writers experienced the same problem.

First, the Bible is the best interpreter of itself. While there are 66 books, in terms of the Holy Spirit's role in bringing the Bible into existence, it's one book, a seamless garment that needs to be understood as a single revelation of what God wants us to know even though it is made up of many parts.

Second, we should expect to find agreement throughout the Bible. For example, what we read in Isaiah 65-66, Ezekiel 37-39, and Daniel 9 should mesh with what we read, for example, in Matthew 24, 1 Thessalonians 4, and the book of Revelation. Jesus made this clear when He responded to the tempter, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4), and Paul wrote "all Scripture is God breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16), and Peter stated, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1: 20). The old and new testament constitute a single story.

Third, when prophetic material is under discussion, it's important to note time references and audience relevance. Understanding when something is said to happen and to whom they are to happen are crucial interpretive principles in the Bible. They serve as the starting point of interpretation. The same is true for everyday speech. Who you are talking about and when something is going to happen are necessary starting points to understand the narrative. This is especially true when prophetic material is the discussion.

Fourth, it's important not to read into Scripture concepts and preconceptions that aren't present, no matter how popular they may be. Jesus used the phrases *"you have heard that the ancients were told"* (Matthew 5:21, Matthew 5:33, and *"you've heard it said"* (Matthew 5:27, Matthew 5:31, Matthew 5:38, Matthew 5:43), but *"I say unto you"* (Matthew 5:22, Matthew 5:28, Matthew 5:34, Matthew 5:39, Matthew 5:44). Jesus also mentioned that sometimes *"traditions"* get in the way of properly understanding what the Bible says and means to the point that God's commandment is neglected because of man-made traditions, thus, *"invalidating the word of God"* (Mark 7:8, Mark 7:13). There are many eschatological traditions that need to be searched, studied, and corrected (Acts 17:11).

Fifth, we should not be fearful to scrutinize doctrinal formulations even if they have a long pedigree. One of the finest doctrinal statements to come out of the post-

Reformation era is the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647. It states the following:

> *The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (1:10). – See below added scripture.*
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> *Matthew 22:29 – "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." –– Matthew 22:31 – "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying." –– Ephesians 2:20 – "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." –– Acts 28:25 – "And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers"*

The WCF and other subordinate standards are subject to the Word of God.

Sixth, it is not wrong to ask questions about a doctrine like eschatology, even if some of the questions call into question certain creedal and confessional beliefs. In the end, the Bible is the standard. We are bound to take the road where the Bible leads us, but we must do so only when the road signs are clearly labeled in Scripture.

A major step took place with 25 podcasts titled *"Covenant Hermeneutics and Biblical Eschatology"* with Kim Burgess produced by American Vision. I've known Kim for more than 40 years. This wasn't the first time we discussed eschatology together. We have done so for decades by way of phone conversations and countless text and e-mail messages.

We were students at Reformed Theological Seminary(RTS) (Jackson, Mississippi) in the 1970s when Dr. Greg Bahnsen was a professor and other students like James Jordan, Kenneth Gentry, and David Chilton were present and have written on eschatology. Eschatology was the talk of the town because of prophetic pot boilers like Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* that was published in 1970 and became the best-selling non-fiction book of the decade to the tune of around 26 million copies. There were other writers like Jack Van Impe, Chuck Smith, and more traditional writers like Dwight J. Pentecost, John F. Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie. Dispensational premillennialism was the prevailing view of the 20th century.

Dr. Bahnsen taught an adult Sunday School class on the book of Revelation at St. Paul Presbyterian Church (PCA) where many RTS students, including Kim and I, attended. Dr. Gary North had published a "Symposium on the Millennium" in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Winter 1976-1977) that included the following articles.

- Norman Shepherd, "From Justice to Victory:'
- Gary North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law:'
- Greg L. Bahnsen, "The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Post millennialism:'
- James B. Jordan, "A Survey of Southern Presbyterian Millennial Views Before 1930:'
- Rousas J. Rushdoony, "Postmillennialism vs. Impotent Religion:'

Kim and I have kept in touch over the years as we discussed the topic of Bible prophecy. For years I have tried to get him to publish his 40+ years of study. I finally convinced him to do a series of podcasts (mentioned above) on his many years of study. The result is *The Hope of Israel and the Nations: New Testament Eschatology Accomplished and Applied.*

I've described Kim's work as a "Drone's Eye View" of Biblical eschatology. While it's important to study and interpret Ezekiel 38, Ezekiel 39; Zechariah 12, Zechariah 13, Zechariah 14, the Olivet Discourse, 2 Thessalonians 2, and other prophetic parts of Scripture as I have done, it's important to gain an understanding of the organic unity or connectedness of Scripture. We need to see the whole (the one) as we study the individual parts (the many). They must fit hand-in-glove.

This is where Kim's important work comes in. Ever since his RTS days and then his further graduate work at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the early 1980s, Kim has deliberately sought to work in what is called "Biblical theology" as opposed to that of traditional historical studies and Systematic theologies. I will leave it to him to explain what the science and the exegetical methodology of Biblical theology is (but, for starters, see his Introduction). It is this hermeneutical approach, organically rooted in the Bible's own redemptive-historical and covenant-structured narrative, that has made all the difference in Kim's perspective on what new testament eschatology is-and, just as importantly, what it isn't. His detailed work in the following twelve Episodes in this first volume provides the basis for the re-construction of the historical context in the Apostolic era in which the whole subject matter of Biblical eschatology, by the Bible's own warrant, is properly to be studied and understood.

As expected, the podcasts have been edited for print publication. The oral episodes were transcribed, edited to make them more conducive for reading, and additional content added where necessary. I have also added an appendix from the work of John Lightfoot (1602-1675) who was one of the original members of the Westminster Assembly.