
This book was chosen by the student for a couple of reasons. First of all, it is a widely circulated, well-known and comprehensive work on classical premillennial dispensational eschatology.¹ As such, its content, properly assimilated, can either work foundationally as the basis of one’s classical dispensational eschatology or will serve veritably as the starting point at which to critique classical dispensationalism and take up an alternative, but related position such as progressive dispensationalism. Secondly, with the advent of the Left Behind novel series and the rise of popular interest in the end-times, the prospective pastor (me!) needs to have a robust and cohesive understanding of a whole system of eschatology in order to steer his hearers into a valid theology of the end times. Things to Come is a worthy guide, as long as one is content with the classical dispensational view. J. Dwight Pentecost is highly thought of in evangelical circles worldwide—and rightly so. Thus, his work merits careful attention.

The book begins by presenting a set of “debates” with Pentecost’s theological sparring partner, one Oswald T. Allis who represents the amillenialist view of eschatology. Because the

¹ Here, the term “classical premillennial dispensational theology,” is essentially Pentecost’s book. While it will be argued by many that Bock and Blaising’s progressive dispensational work Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) has pushed Things to Come somewhat off the center stage of premillennial eschatology, the fact is that enough people in high places in academia (particularly in DTS circles) have used Pentecost and Things to Come as their own baseline for further dispensational thought for many years and will continue to do so. DIC is certainly more recent. But despite the outcry—perhaps by Pentecost himself—DIC is not completely re-inventing the wheel of dispensational theology—particularly when it comes to eschatology. Thus it does not (and does not need to) repeat the great number of points (including Scripture references) in which the contributors agree and overlap with the classical premillennial position of Pentecost. Things to Come is the most recent whole support structure (with “broad shoulders” at that). Thus, for the foreseeable future—at least for the next decade or so, this work will still likely be thought of as the baseline when discussing premillennial dispensational theology and therefore still deserves acknowledgement as the standard bearer for classical premillennial dispensational theology. The student notes that at one time Pentecost’s “new” views were probably considered upstart for altering some of yesteryear’s venerable “classic” premillennial dispensationalist standard bearers’ positions. The point is, what is “classic” is a (slowly) moving target that each generation must discern and determine for themselves. Although the Word of God does not change, theological expression of it does change (and needs to as further process Scriptures written by an infinite God).
postmillenialist view had found its demise with advent of two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, as Pentecost explains, that view had been dismissed by most contemporary theologians (contemporary with Pentecost, at least, in the original 1958 date Things to Come was published) as historically untenable. Thus, Pentecost’s main theological antagonist became the amillenialist. The literary debate being brewed within the beginning of the book shows itself to be both spirited and sometimes poignant. The casual reader (if there be such a thing for a work of this magnitude!) will be taken aback by some of these comments that include a bit of sarcastic wit, jabbing away at the opponent. For instance, one charge states (5), “It would seem that the purpose of the allegorical method is not to interpret Scripture, but to pervert the true meaning of Scripture, albeit under the guise of seeking a deeper or more spiritual meaning.” It is perhaps a bit harsh and on the surface appears out of place in such a scholarly, professionally researched work as Things to Come (and would probably not have been thus said to the opponent in a face-to-face meeting!). While other comments regarding the amillenialist theologians are not quite as harsh, there does exist an overtone of negativity towards them throughout the book that one might not find if it was being published today for the first time. One does wonder retrospectively about the nature of the debate and how much mud had previously been slung

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2 Note: Pentecost states early in the book (pp 4-9) that the allegorical method goes hand in hand with the amillenialist way of engaging in hermeneutics, insisting (probably rightly so, in the mind of this student) that this is problematic in arriving at the proper interpretation of any Scriptural passage, especially one involving complicated eschatological concepts. Instead, the historical-grammatical method using a literal hermeneutic is advocated. It is what Jesus seemed to use (see body of the review below).

3 “. . . he gives the impression that his interpretation is the only possible one.” (137) Eeeek! References to the amillenialists persist throughout (113, 118, 372, 387-89, 482) and never positively.

4 The student has a mentor and elder in the faith who recently updated his theology text to include revised information concerning the emerging church movement that was somewhat vitriolic in tone. His publisher refused to publish the new addition without extensive changes due to the acerbic nature of this new material. Most certainly the body of Christ needs to put down the boxing gloves and reflect publically, at least, the love of Christ for those in the faith who disagree (as you have advocated in class, Dr. Burns—point well taken).
publicly slung between the two oppositional theologies that would cause such a sharp reactive undertone throughout the book.

After this early unpleasantness, we move on to more positive things. The rest of the introductory material (that which sets up discussion about a cohesive viewpoint of the eschaton) includes a veritable primer in the historical-literal method of Bible interpretation and then how one uses this method to interpret prophecy. All throughout the 128 pages of introductory material, nearly fifty pages of it is devoted to the endorsement of using valid, consistent hermeneutical principles. Pentecost rightly insists that the proper observation of the biblical text in its normal sense yields a valid, literal interpretation (mostly) of the Scriptures. All of this is helpful in getting the reader on board the train that is going to move down the tracks toward the destination of eschatological application of these hermeneutical principles.

Next, the author spends the rest of the introductory section on the importance of the major biblical covenants. These he shows were designed and presented by God in order to redeem man and all of creation and to recover at the end of the age what was lost in the beginning at Edenic revolt. The Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants are dealt with in a thorough enough manner that the reader sees the intent of each and how each one contributes to the Lord’s recovery plan. Pentecost synthesizes the whole covenant program of God by stating cohesively (p. 72) that, “... the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant are

5 “Mostly” because one must recognize textual examples of figures of speech such as clear anthropological or zoomorphic allusions, and/or hyperbolic language in Scripture, etc. as such and thus not treat them literally!

6 This student hopes that the title “The Palestinian Covenant” (Deut 30:1-10) will one day be supplanted by something less misleading and controversial. Upon hearing the title of this covenant, one is misled to believe that the covenant has something to do with the modern day controversy over the West Bank of Israel, that is, whether the Palestinian people (arguable if they even are a separate people!) have a right to the land on the west bank of the Jordan River taken in total by Israel in the Six Day War of 1967. Perhaps since the issue really is the land as promised to Israel in the Old Testament, this covenant should be more properly labeled “The Land Covenant.” Slaves to tradition that we are, we tend to hang on to the same old, well-worn, comfortable terminology, misleading and offensive as it may be.
developed in the Palestinian covenant, the seed promises are developed in the Davidic covenant, and the blessing promises are developed in the New covenant. This covenant, then, (my note: the Abrahamic) determines the whole future program for the nation Israel and is a major factor in Biblical Eschatology” (sic). This type of instruction from Dr. Pentecost guides the reader along and gives solid structure and strong biblical background to the classical premillennial dispensational eschatology that is being presented. He is not just grabbing eschatological ideas out of the wind and then re-packaging them. Next, the book explores (134) “the present age,” by which Pentecost means the age of the gap between “the rejection of the Messiah by Israel to His reception. . . at His second advent.” This gap he defines as (134) a “mystery, something which was not formerly revealed (my note: in the Old Testament Scriptures), and therefore unknown, but now is made known by God.” (my note: in the New Testament). Pentecost is quick to point out that there is more than one mystery which the Old Testament kept concealed (the church itself, the blindness of Israel, the entire New Testament salvation process—though hinted at by Old Testament foundations are a few others). This section (“The Prophecies of the present Age”) provides a bridge in the book between the Old and New Testaments. Now the book goes on to tackle couple of the difficult, somewhat controversial issues of dispensational eschatology. Among them are the various theories of the rapture (156-218) (as to timing) and events for the church following the rapture (219-228)(including the bema seat and just what that is—as a seat of rewards for church age believers in Christ).

The following section (“The Prophecies of the Tribulation Period.” 229-369) bring in further eschatological “footballs” such as what “The Day of the Lord” (230) involves (using a collective summary of NT and OT passages, Pentecost ably proves that this is the Tribulation period of seven years—using the historical-grammatical, literal hermeneutic he espouses) and
“The Seventy Weeks of Daniel” (weeks of years, “sevens,” 239-250). At this point, *Things to Come* gets very deep into the Tribulation period (251-339)(culminating [340-358] in the Armageddon campaign—for it is not just a single battle, as popularly depicted). If one is able to see that this is a highly detailed academic work carefully engineered for deep study, it is right here (359-581) that Pentecost’s thorough scholarship shines brightest. One gets (1) a complete assessment of the various salient events that occur in the book of Revelation (seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments; the great harlot of Babylon), (2) history of the doctrine of the second advent, (3) the different kinds of resurrections and the nature of their timing, (4) how Israel is to be judged, and finally (5) a complete treatment of the nature of the Millenial and Eternal Kingdoms. This student attempted to highlight in blue all the Bible book/chapter/verse references in the final two hundred pages of *Things to Come*. To Pentecost’s great credit (and the God who created him), some pages of the book are simply awash in blue highlight color! This is substantial—that there are Scripture verses galore—enough to keep any interested scholar, pastor, or serious lay Bible student actively mining the passages of Scripture that that have to do with premillennial dispensational eschatology.

Yet to the younger believers who have never referenced an English Bible translated in anachronistic English (the 1901 ASV is this, though produced nearly three-hundred years after the poster-child KJV, intentionally preserving much of the latter’s archaic Elizabethan style), this might prove cumbersome. But it should not dissuade those serious enough to reference this kind of detailed book in the first place. That said, it may be the obligation of current or succeeding generations to update the selected English Bible version texts quoted (NASB 1995 update,
perhaps?\(^7\) in *Things to Come* to make what is a great and treasured contribution to premillennial dispensational eschatology more accessible to an entirely new generation of readers.

One small area of critique more involves the classical premillennial dispensational position that the method which produced *Things to Come* makes plain.\(^8\) Oftentimes it appears that in trying to be faithful to a given theological grid such as the absolute division between Israel and the church, scholars resist allowing any ambiguity whatsoever to exist in their viewpoint. *Why* is God constrained to complete His “program” with the church in total before resuming His program with Israel? Can’t God juggle His plans? He seems to do have done this day in and day out now every day since creation began. Why does the *eschaton* suddenly change all that? And perhaps it would be OK to admit that the amillenialists can be allowed to make a valid contribution to classical premillennial dispensational eschatology by saying that in some temporary sense the church does replace Israel as the latter is disciplined and pushed to “the penalty box.” Oh, hark, we might not be considered classical premillennial dispensationalists! Maybe we don’t need to be inextricably welded to our positions, as we have in the past. No, not to chuck it all, that which Pentecost has built here, since the historical-grammatical method of using a literal hermeneutic seems to be the same method Jesus used in interpreting the Scriptures (“*But He answered and said, It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’*” [Matt 4:4 NASB]. “*Then He opened their minds to...*”

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\(^7\) NASB 1995 Update, or NASU (as Bibleworks designates it) would be a good choice for a revision since it continues the style of rigorous formal equivalence that the ASV championed and upon which Penecost’s historical-grammatical hermeneutic which *Things to Come* is built upon.

\(^8\) This does not mean that Pentecost is not culpable—he probably is—but more that he is characteristic of what scholars tend to do. Perhaps it is part and parcel with what must occur early in their training—that is to take a viewpoint, philosophy, or theological position, spend one’s professional lifetime advancing it and making a living by it, and thus tending “to defend it to the death.”
understand the Scriptures.” [Luke 24:45 NASB]. Study seems to indicate that Jesus used this type of hermeneutic!)

In conclusion, I identify strongly with the classical premillennial dispensational eschatology advanced years ago in Things to Come by J. Dwight Pentecost (due to its consistent hermeneutic). I valued the time it took to read it the first time and intend to use it more in the future as a springboard for further eschatological thought. The author continuously quotes the views of many of the heavy lifters of classical premillennial dispensationalists (of which DTS has been the academic and theological hub). The book is a careful compendium of everything to do with the end times. It is a must have for, can I be so bold to say, every serious student that comes through the doors of Dallas Theological Seminary—even with its limitations. God bless Dr. Pentecost for his great contribution to the church’s greater understanding of Christ’s soon return and the end times. Maranatha!