

# Dispensationalism's Eschatological Dilemma

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In recent times, there have been a number of accusations leveled against respected Christian leaders who hold to postmillennial (a traditional Protestant eschatology) and covenant (historic Protestant) theology of being anti-Semitic.<sup>1</sup> How these Christian

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1 Norm Resnick, "The Dr. Norm Resnick Show," (Johnstown, CO: The American Freedom Network, November 2, 1998). November 2, 1998 is one of many times in which Dr. Resnick engaged in malicious misrepresentations of well-known Christians, covenant, and postmillennial theology. To be specific, Dr. Resnick falsely labeled Rev. R. J. Rushdoony and Howard Phillips as anti-Semitic, among other things, on his radio show the day before the election. Candidates for the American Constitution Party (Colorado Affiliate of the U.S. Taxpayers Party) were accused of being deceived by Howard Phillips and therefore guilty by association (a fallacy) of anti-Semitism themselves.

Those accused have not been consulted nor given the opportunity to defend themselves. Dr. Resnick has not provided one shred of credible evidence that any of those accused are anti-Semitic. In fact it is not too strong to say that Dr. Resnick is a loose cannon who at times has done incredible damage to the freedom movement because of his lack of sound judgement. In addition, Dr. Resnick has made accusations against the John Birch Society after they stopped providing guests for his radio show when they became aware of his agreement and coziness with certain militia leaders.

Dr. Resnick is a Jewish man who prides himself as being a believer in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His malicious accusations against Rushdoony and Phillips are rooted partially in the godless libertarian publication *Reason Magazine* that he has demonstrated dependence upon. *Reason Magazine* supposedly champions individual rights. At times this translates into homosexual, abortion, and pornography rights. It is doubtful if Dr. Resnick sees that his stated theological beliefs are in direct conflict with the freedom-destroying degenerate philosophy of modern libertarianism.

Libertarian philosophy is a cancer that feeds off of the Christian worldview. In other words, libertarian philosophy like all non-Christian philosophy lives off the borrowed capital of the Christian worldview. Thankfully, at many times *Reason Magazine* is not consistent with its philosophical presuppositions. This is why at times they do argue for positions that Christians can have formal agreement with. However, at its core, *Reason Magazine* is an organ that propagates a godless philosophy. Just as its name implies, *Reason Magazine* exalts man's apostate reason over the laws of God.

It is a serious contradiction on Dr. Resnick's part when he claims to believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but then attacks those who propagate His laws by siding with a system that stands in complete antithesis to biblical ethics. The founding fathers of this country that Dr. Resnick claims to

leaders, some of whom are Jewish in heritage, and their postmillennial and covenantal beliefs are anti-Semitic is never stated. Accusations have been fabricated and left unchallenged leading to fallacious thinking on the part of some that these accusations are self-evident. Vague comments are made trying to show that postmillennialism, since it allegedly does not have a special place in its system for Israel, coupled with covenant theology's view of the church, will eventually lead to anti-Semitism is completely unfounded. Such accusations made against these historic theologies and Christian leaders are malicious and patently false.

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respect did not admire godless philosophy, which is characterized by ethical lawlessness towards God and human autonomy. Human autonomy among other things is epistemological rebellion towards God. This type of philosophy can never fashion a worldview necessary to produce a document such as the U.S. Constitution.

Rev. Rushdoony and others' theology was caricatured in the November 1998 article titled "Invitation to a Stoning: Getting cozy with theocrats" in *Reason Magazine*. The author, Walter Olson, did not provide proper context of the Christians he cited. Olson pulls quotes as if it were out of thin air attempting to shock his readers. Why didn't Olson provide the necessary context in which the quotes appeared? Why did not Dr. Resnick give those Olson quoted (absent *sine qua non* explanatory context) the benefit of the doubt before engaging in malicious slander against Rev. Rushdoony and Howard Phillips? Given Dr. Resnick's training he should have been aware that Olson was not providing any context for the quotations of the Christians he cited.

Without explanatory context anyone can have horns placed upon their head. This happened to Patrick J. Buchanan who had an article taken out of context making it appear that he was sympathetic to Adolph Hitler. Why does Dr. Resnick make false accusations against Christian theologians and leaders without first seeking to interview those in question personally? Furthermore, Olson in his article assumes the truth of his own position while at the same time dismissing the biblical ethics of the reconstructionists rather than attempting a serious refutation, or setting forth an alternative ethical system.

Those who agree with anti-Christian libertarian philosophy are hostile to the judicial laws of the Old Testament. Which faith or law structure will Dr. Resnick adhere to? Will it be lawless human autonomy, the philosophy of libertarianism or the law of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? If you want to identify the God of a person or philosophical system you must look for the origin of law of that individual or system. The source of law provides a means of identifying a person or philosophical system's ultimate commitments. The law structure provides the basis for determining right from wrong within the respective system and as such is the ultimate commitment. What is the source of this law structure, God or man? In biblical ethics God is the creator of and the source of law that is set forth in the entirety of Scripture.

At its core, libertarian philosophy is man centered and engages in idolatrous self-interpretation and the deification of man (Genesis 3:3-6). Consistent libertarian philosophy exalts man as the standard for right and wrong. This is the essence of humanism, which attempts to deify man as the ultimate standard. On the other hand, and relevant to our debate, American Constitutional law is based upon British Common Law, which is based upon the laws of God contained in the Bible. Unfortunately, Dr. Resnick has sided with a philosophical system that is incapable of setting forth a coherent ethical system along with the necessary epistemological presuppositions that can establish its truthfulness.

Going on in this reproof, Dr. Resnick exhibits a sophomoric understanding of dispensational

It should be noted that some of the greatest Protestant theologians have been covenantal and postmillennial in their eschatology. For example, John Calvin, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, Dabney, Thornwell, Shedd, Patrick Fairbairn, and B.B. Warfield held these convictions. Although an impressive list of theologians can be cited who held a certain position does not necessarily make it right, it should make one give pause, however, before making slanderous accusations against a position held by men of such stature. It is beyond dispute that postmillennial and covenant theologians have always believed in the future salvation of National Israel.

What exactly is anti-Semitism? Consulting the Webster's Unabridged Dictionary we find

theology, which forms the crux of some of his malicious attacks made against respected Christian leaders and their theology. Dr. Resnick is unable to distinguish between "Christian Identity" which he rightly condemns and covenant theology. In light of his appalling accusations, it follows that Dr. Resnick believes that the terms are synonymous. This is simply inexcusable and contemptible on Dr. Resnick's part. It is a matter of fact that Rev. Rushdoony denounces "Christian Identity" and has no relationships with adherents of this heresy. (See the Chalcedon Foundation's web page for a strong disclaimer regarding this perverted movement.)

Moreover, it is highly unlikely that Dr. Resnick can accurately state the positions of postmillennialism and covenant theology, or dispensational theology for that matter. Inability to properly state your opponents' position reveals your own intellectual bankruptcy in the dispute. Dr. Resnick rightly chastises Christians for not being involved in the political process. Yet, it is this very dispensationalism that has led Christians out of the political arena. The historical theology of covenant theology and postmillennialism, which Dr. Resnick attacks, is the theology that provides the basis for Christian social action. Dr. Resnick attacks in essence the theology of John Calvin and John Knox, both committed to covenantal postmillennial theology, which has the power to overthrow godless totalitarian governments.

Protestant theology accomplishes this by using God's law as a tool to establish dominion. The present government uses law as a force of dominion. Law and government are inescapably connected. The present cultural war is between two competing law systems. In the hands of men law will govern the nation. Which law will govern, man's law or God's? Dr. Resnick would do well to read chapters one and two in John Eidsmoe's *Christianity And The Constitution: The Faith of Our Founding Fathers*. According to Dr. Eidsmoe, the theology of Calvinistic, covenantal postmillennialism was the theology that provided the foundation for the U.S. Constitution.

Postmillennial and covenant theologies are part of the reformed faith. Both Rev. Rushdoony and Howard Phillips are committed to the reformed faith. Adherents of reformed theology or more properly Calvinism have been known as the fighting Protestants. In fact, Calvinism is known as the mortal enemy of monarchies or totalitarian government. In our country we are now embracing a form of government that can be described as democratic majoritarian tyranny or the law of the majority. In the above-mentioned work Eidsmoe shows that Calvinism gave rise to our republican form of government. A republic is a nation based upon law. Dr. Resnick knows this and he also knows what the law structure was that formed our republic. Why is he now repudiating that law structure?

A forerunner to Calvin and Knox was William Wallace. The theology of dispensationalism has made its adherents for the most part run from the cultural battle like the unprincipled morally bankrupt noble men of Wallace's day. Dispensationalism's distorted emphasis on the last days has paralyzed many from fighting in the cultural war. Why fight if the end of the world is just around the corner? More seriously, dispensational theology rejects law in the present. This is why dispensationalism has nothing to offer in the fight against the humanistic state. The humanistic state rules with the force of law. Our present law

the established definition: “a person who is hostile to Jews.”<sup>2</sup>the unabridged dictionary this is the only definition listed. If we are going to make up new and novel definitions, and then level accusations, we can prejudice people's minds against anything. For example, this has happened with the word racism.

It is easy to libel your opponent a racist, and then not deal in any substantive way with their arguments or position held. We should all be appalled at these types of tactics. Journalistic ethics at one time required before going public with an accusation against someone or group, the individual or representatives of the group in question would first be allowed to answer or explain themselves. Then, and only then, should charges be made in a public forum.

If we cannot agree on established definitions, rational dialogue is not possible. Many Christians are all too familiar with pejorative words used to prejudice or poison a debate concerning ethics in the public arena. Pro-life activists have suffered this type of abuse for years in the public arena. Should those who name the name of Christ resort to such despicable tactics? As will be shown, the tables can easily be turned on those who use fallacious definitions in an attempt to discredit their opponents.

What is God's definition of anti-Semitism? According to bizarre or inaccurate definitions even God can be labeled as anti-Semitic. Consider the case of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians recorded in the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 34:2, God says He will give Jerusalem into the hands of the king of Babylon so that he can destroy it. Was God anti-Semitic when he brought the king of Babylon against Jerusalem?

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structure in the hands of the humanistic state is becoming increasingly anti-Christian.

There is a law that is higher, namely, God's law. Only God's law can effectively challenge the idolatrous humanistic state. Why does Dr. Resnick want to throw away our best weapon? Dr. Resnick's political philosophy and his theology are characterized by serious contradictions. Unfortunately, these contradictions are shared by many. Until godless lawless human philosophy is repudiated, there will be no return to constitutional limited government in this country.

I propose that Dr. Resnick do several things. He should confess his ignorance in matters of Christian theology, apologize and ask forgiveness for his slanderous accusations, and seriously consider resigning from talk radio. Dr. Resnick is rejecting the ethical claims of Christ in favor of ethical rebellion, siding with those who promote a godless freedom destroying philosophy. Dr. Resnick needs to choose whom he will serve (Joshua 24:15).

Prayerfully, Dr. Resnick will receive Christ as his Lord and Savior. There is only one name under heaven whereby men can be saved and that is the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). The two covenant dispensational theology that deceives individuals into thinking that they can be saved based upon a covenant (allegedly the Abrahamic covenant) outside of Christ is fictitious and heretical. I fear that Dr. Resnick's dispensational friends have led him to believe this very heresy. The Abrahamic covenant is the covenant of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:14,29). In conclusion, I want Dr. Resnick to know that I bear him no ill will.

2 Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, (New Jersey: Random House, 1989) p. 67.

In 1st John 2:9 we read: “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.” The immediate context is dealing with Christian brotherly love. The broader implication of the passage is in harmony with Christ's command, “...Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” Matthew 22:39. Hatred is at the root of anti-Semitism. This conclusion is fully consistent with the definition from Webster's. Hatred towards a Jewish person is therefore anti-Semitic. Disagreement with nineteenth century dispensational theology is not anti-Semitic. Those within the dispensational system making false accusations of this nature are erroneously assuming dispensationalism to be orthodox. Dispensationalism has been studied and rejected in church synods and general assemblies on numerous occasions as well as in many serious theological treatises.

The following survey of dispensational eschatology will demonstrate that the dispensationalist position can be made to appear anti-Semitic or even worse. One purpose of this survey of dispensational eschatology is for illustrating a particular point. The point is that the tables can easily be turned upon adherents of dispensational eschatology who have attacked Christian believers of other persuasions. This article is not intended to be a refutation of dispensationalism in general or to seriously suggest that dispensationalists or their theology would be in accord with certain statements I make hypothesizing about the potential tendencies of anti-Semitism within dispensationalism itself. Hopefully, dispensationalists in the future will be more circumspect on how they treat their Christian brethren whom they have falsely accused.

Some dispensationalists make accusations and try to force conclusions upon postmillennialism and covenant theology that do not follow from or are necessitated by anything within these theological systems.<sup>3</sup> Some dispensationalists say that these two expressions of reformed theology logically lead to anti-Semitism because of the postmillennial covenantal theology's classical view of the church. Not only are these accusations completely irresponsible, it should also be noted that not one example of these theologies having produced anti-Semitism are ever presented. Why? That is because it is impossible to do so. These types of accusations are examples of *non sequitur* fallacies. This writer will now present some legitimate questions concerning dispensational eschatology as well as an instructive (for education only) example of how *non sequitur* arguments can be leveled against dispensational eschatology itself.

Most dispensationalists believe that we are presently living on the edge of the most momentous events since the time of Christ. The prophetic time clock concerning Israel is allegedly ticking again. According to dispensationalism this clock stopped ticking when the Jewish nation rejected Christ. It was at this time that God went to a backup plan,

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3 Tommy Ice has been a guest on the American Freedom Network on more than one occasion, repeating his discredited accusations that the postmillennial and covenant theology of reconstructionism will produce anti-Semitism. These accusations have been thoroughly refuted in public and print on numerous occasions. For example, see *House Divided: The Break-up Of Dispensational Theology*, by Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., for a thoroughgoing scholarly refutation of Mr. Ice's false accusations by two genuine biblical scholars. The fact that Mr. Ice keeps making these fallacious accusations speaks volumes.

starting the church during an intervening period of almost two thousand years. Supposedly this clock started ticking again in 1948 when Israel became a nation.

Dispensationalists are generally excited concerning what appears to be prophetic events unfolding right before their eyes. They see fulfilled prophecy on the pages of the everyday newspaper. It is a dream of many dispensationalists to visit the modern state of Israel. This writer, a former dispensationalist, visited Israel in 1982. It was a little unsettling; thinking one was going to the "Holy Land" only to find a secular socialist state, with topless bathing at numerous beaches. The tourists were a little bit shocked.

One of the first events to unfold according to this prophetic scheme will be the appearance of the anti-Christ. According to dispensationalism, this man will personify evil. Even Hitler's wickedness is supposed to pale in comparison to this future demonic figure. This leader, who is supposed to be Jewish, will trick the Israeli people into thinking he is good for three and one half years, and will then turn on them with unmerciful ruthlessness.

There will be a period of seven years known as the "great tribulation." This alleged "seven years" and all the dispensational theories about the coming of Christ, the rapture, the anti-Christ surrounding it are all based on an erroneous interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27. The dispensational "great tribulation" is supposed to be worldwide, yet is described with localized terminology as having to do with Jerusalem, Israel, her trading partners, the temple, its destruction, etc. Repeated false dispensational predictions surrounding these events have brought reproach upon the gospel.

Before it's all over, millions of Jews will be slaughtered in a blood bath. The Jewish holocaust at the hands of Hitler was a small foreshadowing of how terrible this anti-Christ's destruction will be. The terrible seven-year reign of the anti-Christ will end at the battle of Armageddon with millions more dying. Many dispensationalists believe that the Gentile Christians will be secretly raptured off the earth prior to these terrible events. The Gentiles escape while the Jews face a new Hitler. Interesting! Surely it follows that dispensationalism must be intrinsically anti-Semitic if it says that the world's most evil future ruler will be a Jew who will slaughter millions of the Jewish people while the Gentiles escape. The Bible does not teach that this ruler will be a Jew or even exist in the future. These are inferences and deductions, the products of a flawed dispensational hermeneutical system.

The adherents of dispensationalism rightly condemn Hitler's murder of millions of Jewish people this century. Hopefully, if alive during that time, they would have tried to save as many of the Jewish people as possible. The facts are, many dispensationalists were alive and did nothing. I have never heard one dispensationalist warn the citizens of modern Israel to flee before this wicked individual rises to power. Why? If it was a good idea to flee Hitler's Nazi Germany, why not the future anti-Christ in Israel? Why are dispensationalists not helping people escape from Israel? Instead, dispensationalists are excited about the Jewish people's return to Israel and at the same time knowing that these

same Jews will be killed. This is a serious ethical dilemma that dispensationalism must deal with. Dismissing this dilemma rather than dealing with it would make one more like an ostrich. Surely it follows that dispensationalists are not concerned with the welfare of those Jews who will be persecuted and slaughtered by the anti-Christ.

When attempting to respond to this ethical dilemma the dispensationalist claims that the rise to power of this wicked Jewish ruler is inevitable or fixed. At this point, the theology of Arminianism, which characterizes much contemporary dispensationalism begins to speak with Augustinian or Calvinistic terminology. Somehow, the claim of divine predetermination is supposed to lighten the force or make this dilemma disappear. In effect, dispensationalists by claiming divine predetermination at this juncture are trying to hang this dilemma on God. The dispensationalists do not grasp the force of this dilemma. It is a dilemma that they have to deal with, not God. This appeal to providence is reminiscent of Arminians thinking that their peculiar doctrine of “free will” somehow answers atheistic questions concerning evil in the world. It should be noted that this dilemma does not exist for traditional eschatology. This dilemma is one of many examples of theological confusion and contradiction inherent within the dispensational system. The false dichotomy between law and grace within dispensationalism is another example of serious theological error that this system of Bible interpretation has produced.

To continue pressing this dilemma, where are the dispensationalist humanitarian organizations helping Israelis relocate to safe places around the world? The Israelis need to be warned that this future ruler will deceive them, thus bringing on an almost unspeakable blood bath. Dispensationalists cannot claim that their numerous books on Bible predictions accomplish this. Nowhere in this literature are there any serious attempts to warn the Jewish people to flee from this imminent holocaust. This literature is written purely for Christian consumption.

Dispensational eschatology cannot escape the dilemma, on the one hand, of having great excitement about the Jews going to Israel and, on the other hand, knowing those millions will soon die during the seven-year tribulation. Should we warn those in danger? Where is the dispensational clarion call warning those to flee before the Jewish Hitler-like ruler emerges? The silence is deafening. Surely it follows that dispensationalists are not really concerned about this future slaughter of the Jewish people. After pouring untold millions of tourist dollars into the modern state of Israel, it would seem that dispensational leaders would at least pressure Israeli leaders into opening up their country to Christian missionary activity. At least this way the Jews have a chance of accepting Christ before being slaughtered.

The dispensationalist is caught in a contradiction between the moral imperative to warn those in danger, and his excitement at the re-gathering of those about to be slaughtered. It is no good to say that God will use this slaughter to save all Israel as Romans 11:26 teaches. What about the millions who will die during this rule by the anti-Christ? Are they saved? On what grounds can they be? Having faith in Christ is how people are saved. Dying at the hands of a tyrant does not qualify as a substitute for saving faith.

Supposedly during this terrible tribulation, Israel will be surrounded and hard pressed, because there will be no avenue of escape. This impending calamity will be a contributing factor in Israel's conversion to Christ. Why? After the children of Israel were delivered from Pharaoh's army, they ended up in the wilderness for forty years as a result of unbelief. When faced with life threatening situations, people will in desperation call upon God. This phenomenon is appropriately called foxhole faith. Miraculous events do not convey any kind of guarantee that regeneration will take place. See the story of the rich man and Lazarus for more confirmation of this, Luke 16:19-29.

According to dispensationalism, only at the end of the seven-year tribulation, when Christ destroys the anti-Christ and returns, will the Jewish people accept him as their Messiah. How can it be said that all Israel is saved according to this view? The anti-Christ and his forces have just killed millions who were not saved. Surely it follows that the dispensationalists are not honestly portraying their real beliefs when talking about all Israel being saved. They never tell their Jewish friends about the millions of Jews that they know will be slaughtered.

Briefly, to set the record straight, postmillennialism teaches that before regeneration the Gentiles were lost and without hope. Ephesians 2:12 says, "...at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Going on we read, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). We, the Gentiles, are no more strangers. Strangers to what, someone may ask? To the commonwealth of Israel, of which we the Gentiles are now a part. Another name for the commonwealth of Israel in the new covenant is the church. In Galatians 6:15,16 the apostle specifically calls the church "the Israel of God." Romans 11:17 teaches that "some of the branches [the Jews] have been broken off." Romans 11:25-27 says that in the future age of the church, Israel, or the Jews will be grafted back into the olive tree or the commonwealth.

Postmillennialism holds out a great hope for Israel. Postmillennialism believes that Israel will be converted during the church age. Many modern postmillennialists believe that the dispensationalist's "great tribulation" is in reality a past historical event. Many postmillennialists also believe that the book of Revelation represents historically fulfilled prophecy. This means that the Jewish people will not experience the dispensational slaughter in the future. All Israel will be saved according to Romans 11:25-27, minus the millions dying as proposed by the dispensational system. The grafting of Israel back into the olive tree will bring about the greatest blessings the earth has ever seen since the resurrection of Christ.

It should be clear that adherents of the dispensational system are seriously mistaken when making accusations against their Christian brethren. Moreover, dispensationalists compartmentalize their moral and eschatological beliefs. This is clearly evidenced by the dispensationalist's excitement concerning the Jews going to Israel and the millions soon to be slaughtered in the Jewish anti-Christ's blood bath. The moral imperative, leading to

action aimed to help those who are about to be slaughtered, is nonexistent and suppressed in dispensational eschatology. Compartmentalization in this system is a mechanism to escape contradictions.

“Dispensational truth” has supposedly provided a hermeneutical key to unlock prophetic interpretive mysteries in a literal way. It is interesting that “dispensational truth” had its beginning in the early nineteenth century along with a number of other heresies. Since the turn of the century dispensationalism has far exceeded the Jehovah's Witnesses in false prophetic predictions. There is no denying that these predictions cause great emotional excitement among dispensationalists. This writer, formerly a dispensationalist was oftentimes thrilled hearing about the predictions of the pre-tribulation rapture that was to take place in 1981. In reality, the excitement or thrill experienced when gaining a dispensational understanding of prophecy is more reminiscent of Gnosticism's concealed or secret knowledge (only possessed by those initiated into the deeper mysteries or dispensation truth) than a correct knowledge of the Bible. Those who live in glass houses should not cast stones, lest their own house shatters.

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