

# Faith Pulpit

## Why the Promises to Israel Matter Today

Orthodoxy<sup>1</sup> always precedes orthopraxy.<sup>2</sup> Correct doctrine always precedes correct practice. No one can function with biblical practice and methodology without first having correct beliefs in place. Wrong theology will ultimately lead to errors in practice. Virtually every aberrant practice can be traced back to errors of theology. This truth is seen throughout Bible history and well as church history. This principle of ministry serves as an undeniable truth for every aspect of both doctrine and practice. Theology is about connections within doctrines and these connections inevitably end up in the practice of ministry.

Few doctrines matter more than the future of a literal Israel in God's prophetic plan. Many Evangelicals deny a prophetic future for Israel and do so by reading the church back into the Old Testament. Trying to find the church in the Old Testament compromises the integrity of the Old Testament story line as well as tainting virtually all of the theology that crosses through to the New Testament. For example, should we try to bring the kingdom in? Are we trying to build the kingdom today? Failure to recognize God's future physical kingdom on the earth (the millennium) with the fulfillment of covenantal promises to Israel as its center piece will lead to a distortion of both the meaning of the Old Testament but also a misunderstanding of the church's purpose today. A change in the church's purpose will lead to inevitable changes in how ministry occurs. Again, theology is about connections to both other doctrines but also to practice.

The reality of Israel possessing a vibrant future in God's prophetic plan has deep implications for the practice of local church ministry. Replacement theology, the errant belief that the church has replaced Israel, sacrifices the heart of what God says He will do for His people. Removing the covenantal fulfillment (primarily the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants) of the direct promises of God to Israel significantly affects the interpretive basis of understanding the Old Testament. Changing the interpretive basis for the Bible has a ripple affect through virtually every doctrine and ultimately in the

practice of ministry.

Here is a sample of what is lost. The biggest loser in this aberrant theology is, of course, Israel. What the world sees today in modern Israel has apparently no connection to what the Bible describes for Israel. If God has no prophetic plan for Israel, what a great disappointment that will be to every Old Testament saint. And what about what Israel is today? The pre-1948 theologian could only speculate about what we see happening in history.

The second biggest loser is the church. If God did not keep His promises to Israel, then how can we expect God to keep his promises to us? Finally, losing a future for Israel and the faulty interpretive process that gets someone to that position, undercuts the foundation of dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism as an interpretive model is less about being a framework than about being a lens through which one looks to see what God has done, is doing, or will do in the future.

Dispensationalism is about taking the text at face value and then seeing the connective tissue that brings Scripture together. Surely there are other losers but these are perhaps the largest.

With the loss of dispensationalism, the rapture becomes one of the first casualties. Again, this is about theological connections. The prophetic timelines of Daniel and Revelation become either non-literal (allegories) or already fulfilled prophecies (preterist<sup>3</sup>). Some attempt to keep a future for Israel with a kingdom but reject any details (historic premillennialism). Others want to build the kingdom today ultimately ushering in Christ's return through humanity's progress (postmillennialism). Still others reject any formal 'kingdom' seeing fulfillment only through the lens of the church (amillennialism). While there might be a general agreement among Evangelicals that Christ will return, none of the details matter anymore. As the old joke goes, the church is left with "panmillennialism" – hoping it will all 'pan' out in the end.

Losing the doctrine of the rapture affects the church's ministry in multiple ways. Always remember that doctrine affects practice. Surrendering the rapture not only means losing normal interpretation, a problem that will ripple throughout one's theological system, but it also affects local church ministry and practice. The New Testament labors to connect the rapture to broad understanding of living live for the Lord and His glory. Here are some implications for church ministry when Israel's prophetic future is discarded, normal hermeneutics are rejected, dispensationalism is trashed, and the rapture is forgotten.

1. A loss of the rapture means a loss of the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. The rapture only becomes the 'blessed hope' when the church awaits Christ's return with expectancy and anticipation. The scriptural reality is that nothing else needs to happen prophetically before the rapture of the church. The church can truly pray with John, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). Imminency mean that Christ could return at any moment and that nothing in prophecy needs to occur before the rapture. Imminency does not mean God is prevented from doing something prior to the rapture if He desires. This author has, for example, stepped into the voting booth hoping that he was not casting a ballot for the Antichrist. ? God controls the agenda

and the means to accomplish His will on earth. But everything is Scripture points to the conclusions that the rapture could be at any-moment, is near (certainly nearer today than yesterday), and the church should be anticipating His coming.

2. A loss of imminency means the loss of a primary New Testament motivation for righteous living. Multiple New Testament passages connect the any moment return of Christ with Godly living. Paul instructs Titus to be “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing (epiphany) of our great God and (even) Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). This immediately follows an admonition to live godly by negatively “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and then positively “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (v. 12). John encourages believers that the children of God have “not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). This encouragement is immediately followed by a reminder that knowledge of the soon return of Christ affects how one lives. John continues, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (v. 3). These statements are preceded by John’s admonition that “now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears (Parousia), we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (2:28). A quick check of other rapture passages find similar instruction as in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (see verses 7-12) and 1 Cor 15:51-57 (see verse 58). A reasonable conclusion is that the imminent return of Christ is used consistently as a motivation for both Christian living and godly service. The promise of Christ’s coming should provide incentive for the believer to serve the Lord with all our hearts. Any leader can tell you that you often get what you inspect, not usually what you expect. Christ’s promise of imminency should motivate us to greater heights of ministry for Him. Parents who travel leaving children home alone understand that certain things happen at home while the ‘cats’ away, but the day of accountability is coming when the parents return home. The rapture is presented to the church as that moment of accountability that may come at anytime without warning.
3. A loss of imminency affects preaching and the urgency of the message. The call of today’s preacher to ‘repent and believe’ should be heightened by the urgency that time is short and that Christ will soon return for His Church. This is both a motivation for the ministry and an appeal for the unbeliever. Remember that the fields are ripe and ready to harvest. The day will come when the harvest is over.

The church has had a sense of urgency throughout its history. Even the disciples thought Christ would return perhaps even in their lifetimes. The imminency of His return should motivate the church as the Church both individually and corporately. He is coming. Soon. This truth should invigorate and energize your pulpit ministry.

There certainly are other ministry areas where the loss of a future for Israel will affect our practice in the local church. Remember that what you believe does indeed affect what you do. Doctrine matters and it changes how we think and what we do in ministry. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

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## Works Cited

1. Correct Doctrine

2. Correct practice; one's manner of living.
3. The view that prophecies have already been fulfilled in history. Those who hold this view often do not agree on what historical event fulfills which prophecy.

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