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After Dispensationalism: Reading the Bible for the End of the World by Brian P. Irwin with Tim Perry. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2023. xxxiii + 405 pp., cloth, $19.99.

Not until encountering his present work was Brian Irwin known. He is associate professor of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures at Knox College in Toronto, a seminary of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Although he has not authored any previous books, Irwin has contributed articles to various reference works and academic journals. Irwin's "collaborator," Tim Perry, is professor of theology at Providence Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba, and a columnist for *Faith Today* magazine, which is sort of like a *Christianity Today* for Canadian evangelicals. Perry is the editor of *The Legacy of John Paul II: An Evangelical Assessment* (InterVarsity, 2007) and the author of *Mary for Evangelicals* (Intervarsity, 2006) — two books of which conservative evangelicals would have major issues.

After Dispensationalism is divided into three parts: "the world of end-times teaching" (4 chs.), "the world of prophecy and apocalyptic" (1 ch.), and "the meaning of biblical apocalyptic" (3 chs.). Lists of figures and tables, abbreviations, acknowledgments, a prayer, and a very brief introduction precede the eight chapters of the book. The book ends with a conclusion, image attributions, 43 pages of endnotes, a very thorough bibliography, and subject, Scripture, and ancient sources indexes. The book contains a total of 52 figures and tables.

Irwin believes that the future offered by the "dispensationalist eschatology" that is "common among evangelical Christians in North America and globally" is "impenetrable to many inside and outside the church today" (pp. 1, 2). Part one of *After Dispensationalism* "sketches the origins of this approach, identifies it current proponents, and describes the future it predicts" (p. 2), part two "examines the genres of biblical writing that this approach uses most, their original contexts, and how their original audience likely understood their contents" (p. 2), and part three "considers dispensationalism's main texts to show how a reading of the final form of these biblical books yields important messages for the church today" (p. 2). The focus of *After Dispensationalism* is a critique of dispensationalist eschatology and not dispensationalism per se. Nevertheless, it is a critique,

not an attack like the typical book against dispensationalism by someone like John Gerstner.

The first part of the book, "the world of end-times teaching," actually gives a fairly accurate overview of dispensationalism; it begins with a brief survey of end-times speculation through the ages, including a good account of William Miller and the "Adventist" movement. As to be expected, Irwin begins dispensationalism with Darby, but does give an accurate account of his dispensational system. He concluded, "Darby's system leads to a pessimistic worldview. Since each dispensation ends with things getting worse, there is little to animate collective action for world peace or improved environmental stewardship." Irwin introduces the reader to important figures in American dispensationalism like C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, J. Dwight Pentecost, and John Walvoord, but, sadly, instead of mentioning Clarence Larkin and Charles Ryrie, he discussed Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, Tim LaHaye, and Paul and Peter Lalonde.

Irwin's "snapshot of how dispensationalism sees the future" (p. 64) provides an accurate description of key dispensational eschatological tenets like the restoration of Israel, the rebuilt Temple, the rapture, the judgment seat of Christ, the marriage supper of the Lamb, the great tribulation, revived Roman empire, the false prophet and the dragon, the 144,000 and the two witnesses, the battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ, the millennium and the great white throne judgment, and the new heaven, earth, and new Jerusalem. Irwin's criticisms of dispensationalism's tenets are mild: "Dispensationalist eschatology tends to overlook the original biblical audiences and contexts" and "the unrelenting focus on present fulfillment means that 'literal interpretation' can be idiosyncratic and constantly shifting" (p. 95).

In the final chapter of the first part of the book, Irwin "examines some of dispensationalism's distinctives and explores their effect on dispensationalists' actions" (p. 97). The distinctives he mentioned include: a literal interpretation of Scripture, dispensations, the distinction between Israel and the Church, and the pretribulation rapture and premillennialism. Again, Irwin's criticisms are mild. Literal depictions of the millennium are "poetic recollections of covenant blessing to be realized after the exile among God's returned, obedient people" (p. 99). "Clouds of eisegesis and sectarianism" hang over approaching Scripture "through the sequence of dispensations" (p. 101). "Christian Zionism often includes uncritical and fulsome endorsement of the modern state of Israel" (p. 102). (His assertion is actually a valid criticism of, not dispensationalism, but many dispensationalists.) Additionally, because of pretribulationism, "Dispen-

sationalists have not been at the forefront of Christian work in creation care, global development, or social justice initiatives" (p. 105).

The second part of the book, "the world of prophecy and apocalyptic," lays the groundwork for the author's examination of the prophetic passages in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation in the third part of the book. Herein Irwin used the concept of literary genre to counter the literal hermeneutic of dispensationalism. He maintains that most prophecy is "actually related to the original audience's immediate future" (p. 129), and is "(1) the fulfillment of covenant blessings and curses, (2) presented in the elevated language of prophetic rhetoric, and (3) dependent on the wholehearted obedience of Israel" (pp. 137-38). Dispensationalists "adopt a literalistic reading in place of a truly literary one" and fail "to consider the social setting and expectations of the original audience" (p. 138). According to Irwin, dispensationalists "incorrectly distinguish, or fail to distinguish, between prophecy and apocalyptic" (p. 140). Classifying certain prophetic literature as "apocalyptic" conveniently allows Irwin and other opponents of dispensationalism to relegate future references to a millennium, a rebuilt temple, and a new Jerusalem. The great enemy is the "wooden literalism" of dispensationalism.

The third part of the book, "the meaning of biblical apocalyptic," concerns how to read *correctly* the prophetic passages in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation. Irwin maintains that these books were "relevant to and readily understood by their original audiences" in contrast to dispensational writing that lacks attention to a passage's "original setting" and its author's "literary techniques" while using "a highly selective sampling of key verses simplistically pasted to related verses in the other biblical books or applied directly to contemporary global events" (pp. 167-68). Irwin sees the prophecies in the last third of the book of Ezekiel as limited to the return of the Jews from captivity after the edict of Cyrus. In dismissing the future unification and restoration of Judah and Israel (Ezek 37), he only mentioned Hal Lindsey's view that this occurred in 1948 (pp. 174-75). Only in an endnote did he assert that "this view is not universally held" (p. 327), and referred the reader to Pentecost's *Things to Come*. Irwin sees Daniel as "an apocalyptic work dating from the second century BC" (p. 185) to bring "a message of reassurance" (p. 210) to "Jews in Judea suffering persecution under the Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes" (p. 210).

Irwin's treatment of Revelation is a little different. He proposes "to read Revelation in the same way" (p. 233) as he reads Ezekiel and Daniel; therefore, it is no surprise that he concluded, "the book of Revelation was first given to followers of Jesus struggling to live for Christ in the shadow of

an oppressive Roman world" and is for us today because "it reminds us that we belong to God and not the world" (p. 283). Revelation "meant something to its original audience" (p. 222). Irwin provides brief but accurate descriptions of the historicist, futurist, preterist, and idealist approach to Revelation. He takes what he calls an "eclectic" approach that is basically idealist. He has some good material on the dating of Revelation and the letters to the seven churches. His description of the dispensationalist view of Revelation is accurate. Irwin sees the central section of Revelation (4:1—20:15) as "a chiasm of the pattern A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A', in which each of the paired sections is introduced as a new vision by the phrase 'and I saw' (*kai eidon*) and clearly connected by specific shard *vocabulary*, *imagery*, and *content*" (p. 262). Be that as it may, the beast is "Nero Caesar" (p. 275) and there is no future tribulation period or millennial reign of Christ.

Even though the book is a critique of dispensationalist eschatology, this reviewer highly recommends *After Dispensationalism* to seasoned dispensationalists. The reason for its recommendation is as an important example of how non-dispensationalists view dispensationalism and premillennialism that will challenge dispensationalists to broaden their understanding of dispensationalist eschatology instead of simply parroting Walvoord or Pentecost. Furthermore, if a non-dispensationalist was going to read a book regarding dispensationalism, this reviewer would rather it be this one instead of a polemic from John Gerstner.

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The Awe of God: The Astounding Way a Healthy Fear of God Transforms Your Life by John Bevere. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2023. 285 pp., cloth, $29.99.

The subject of this book is an excellent one: the importance of the fear of God. John Bevere, co-founder of Messenger International, "a ministry committed to revolutionizing global discipleship," wrote, "I want to show you how rightly directed fear—specifically the virtue of fearing God above all else—opens up the path to a life beyond what you have ever imagined. And it's only then that we are able to boldly address anything that life may throw at us" (p. xv). Noting that approximately 200 verses of Scripture reference fear of God (p. xv), Bevere defined it as "to esteem, respect,