



ASK THE PASTOR

EPISODE 3 – NOV. 8, 2023

Q: Praying for Israel, cont.

Several Questions:

- Psalm 122:6-9 – “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. . . . For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.” Does this exhortation apply to today’s Israel or only to the church?
- Please speak to the origin of the Palestinian people – do they have a legitimate claim on Gaza? What is this war about? Anything in the Bible?
- How should we view the land promise from God to Abram today: “To your offspring I give you this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:28-32).

Answer:

- The OT promises for Jerusalem and the Promised Land find their fulfillment in Christ and with respect to his Church.
- God fulfilled his promise to Abraham during the reign of David and Solomon.
- But Israel broke the old covenant and forfeited its promises, but God was faithful to keep his promise of a Savior from the royal house of David, in whom the promises would be fulfilled.
- When Paul says that “all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20), he means that the OT promises are fulfilled *to* Christ and *in* Christ. Therefore, the promises for Israel/Jerusalem are valid today with respect to the Christian Church, and not to a political state of Israel. The Church is “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

Q: Praying for Israel, cont.

Q: But should Christians still have obligations to Jewish people as the former covenant people of God?

Answer:

- Christians are bound to feel kindly towards Jewish people, given their biblical heritage. “Remember, it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom. 11:18).
- Christians primarily have an evangelistic motivation toward Jews: “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world” (i.e. the gospel to the Gentiles), “what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15).
- As for America’s political relationship with the state of Israel, this should be considered primarily as a political and diplomatic situation on its own merits.

Geneva Gowns?

Q: Pastor Phillips has explained the gowns as resulting from the official nature of the ministers' work. The minister functions in his office, and the office has a "uniform." So *why don't ruling elders wear gowns?*

Answer: Because while the ruling elders exercise their function "jointly," only the minister exercises his office "severally" (i.e. individually). Moreover, while both ministers and elders are "elders," the minister holds the office of "pastor," being set apart for the ministry of the Word. First Timothy 5:17 says that "teaching elders" should be accorded "double honor," which accounts for the term "Reverend."

Do we expect Jesus at any time?

Q: Would a postmillennialist hold that Jesus could return at any time, or would that eschatological view have to be wrong for an imminent second coming to be a live possibility?

Answer:

- It would not seem possible under a postmillennial view (in which Christ returns after the kingdom of God has covered the earth) until the “Golden Age” has happened. There are varieties within postmillennialists as to how we assess the Golden Age.
- The New Testament tells Christians to expect an imminent Second Coming: “Surely I am coming soon?” (Rev. 22:20).
- However, in 2 Thess 2:1-12 teaches that “that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”
- So, we take Jesus’ “soon” in redemptive-historical terms (and we look eagerly for His return). Yet 2 Thess. 2:1-12 indicates that it will happen only after the great apostasy and the coming of the Antichrist.

Most Important Word?

Question: What is the most important word in the Bible?

Answer:

- I take the question as referring to the most important word for its theological importance. The answer is *huper*, meaning, “on behalf of” or “for the sake of.” The biblical doctrine of Christ’s substitution. He lived, died, rose again, reigns, and is returning *huper* his people.

Pharisees & WLC on the Sabbath

Question: “Methodologically speaking, were the Pharisees trying to do with the Sabbath basically what the Westminster Divines did in the Larger Catechism?”

Answer: No.

- The Larger Catechism devotes 3 questions to the application of the Sabbath, which cannot be compared to the voluminous rules of the Pharisees.
- The divines do not create a code of detailed obligations, but merely set forth the kinds of activities that are in fact forbidden by Scripture.
- Most importantly, the Westminster divines stressed the spiritual nature of the Sabbath and did not reduce it to behavior.
- The Westminster divines did not usurp God’s authority by creating their own laws/rules, but explained what Scripture actually says about it

Failure of OT Kings

Q: Why did so many otherwise faithful OT kings fail to remove or destroy the high places?

Answer:

- It is true that many otherwise excellent kings (excepting Josiah) failed in this regard (although Hezekiah and Josiah did):
 - Asa: “But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days” (1 Ki. 15:14).
 - Similar descriptions are given for Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah
- The best answer is that this was very hard to do and they faced persistent opposition in their efforts.

Christian Nationalism?

Q: What are your thoughts on Christian Nationalism?

Answer:

- Definition:
 - Christian nationalism is the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way. Popularly, Christian nationalists assert that America is and must remain a “Christian nation” (Christianity Today).
- As a historical view, it seems to be largely inaccurate. On the one hand, the denial of America’s Christian roots is dishonest. On the other hand, by the founding of the nation there was a clear rejection of an established religion.
- Biblically, the church does not have the mission of taking control of the political establishment (Mt. 28:18-20).
- However, Christians are bound to advocate for godly principles and laws. It is not “Christian nationalism” to pursue biblical morals. But it is contrary to our system of government for Christians to seek to disenfranchise non-Christians.
- No earthly political body should ever be confused for the church; no government can or will maintain biblical religion without massive corruption.

From all evil he spares them?

Q: How can we understand the line in “Children of the Heavenly Father,” which says, “From all evil things He spares them?”

Answer:

- We do not believe that God’s children are spared from all evil “things.” Nor do we believe that something is wrong with us if we or our children suffer evil.
- The hymn should be taken to mean that God spares his children from all evil “ends” in the sense of Genesis 50:20.

Do purity concerns lead to hasty marriages?

Question: Many Christians decide on short engagements in order to protect a couple from sexual sins. But might this at times lead to marriages that are too hasty?

Answer:

- I think that prudence supports avoiding long engagements, given the strength of sexual temptation in most cases and the need to avoid sin.
- However, marriage is “not to be entered into hastily or heedlessly, but reverently and in fear of God.” So a couple should avoid a rush to marriage. It is wise to test a relationship “through different seasons.” Marriage is life-long, so there should be great care exercised in marriage.
- In most cases, faithful Christians should be and are able to experience godly and blessed marriages. But there are sometimes serious issues that need to be dealt with first.

“This Generation” in Mt. 24?

Q: How should we understand “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Mt. 24:34).

Answer:

- One answer is to hold that Jesus was referring exclusively to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The problem is that there are many statements in the Olivet Discourse that can only be taken to refer to the Second Coming.
- Another answer is to take “this generation” broadly, to include the gospel age.
- The best answer is to understand this in terms of “prophetic telescoping.” Jesus refers to AD 70 and the fall of Jerusalem and uses it as a “telescope” to foretell his Second Coming. The context does require, however, a broad reading of “generation,” since the immediately preceding verses clearly refer to the Second Coming.
- Full preterists use this verse to deny the Second Coming, which is a heresy.