

Articles by Mike Fitzhugh

Mike Fitzhugh

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Getting a Grip on Prophecy

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren..." These few words, recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff, reveal the heart of the Apostle Paul for the believers at Thessalonica. As he began his discussion about Christ's return, the resurrection of those who had died in Christ, and the rapture of the church, he did not want them to be "ignorant" (KJV) or "uninformed about those who are asleep." Neither did he want them to hopelessly "grieve." Paul explains, "...that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1 Thess 4:13-14, NASV).

A proper understanding of prophecy, especially God's specific plan for His blood-bought church in relation to end-time events, is one of the greatest encouragements a believer in Christ can have. It is said to be a source of "comfort" (1 Thess. 4:18), a "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), and an incentive to holiness (1 Jn. 3:2-3). In this regard, the Dictionary of Premillennial Theology (Mal Couch, General Editor) by Kregel Publications serves as an excellent primer and reference work on prophecy, as well as a great encouragement for the student of biblical eschatology.

Compiled by more than fifty Bible teachers, scholars, authors, and theologians from around the world, the Dictionary of Premillennial Theology is both concise, yet at the same time comprehensive in its coverage of eschatology as a theological discipline. I would recommend it for your library for the following reasons:

First, as a dictionary, the Dictionary of Premillennial Theology provides much information and many answers to questions having to do with Bible prophecy and premillennial theology. This can prove helpful for both beginning and advanced students. For example, what do such terms as rapture, millennium, Second Coming, the Seventieth Week of Daniel, abomination of desolation, Armageddon, premillennialism, amillennialism, dispensationalism, preterist, futurist, literalist, imminency, Israel, the Church, Jacob's trouble, Great tribulation, etc. mean, and how do they relate to end-time events? What are the various views concerning Christ's return to earth? Historically, how and when did they develop, and who were their main proponents? When will the rapture take place? Will it be prior to the Great Tribulation, mid-way through it, or at the end? What is the order of events on God's great prophetic calendar? Why do sincere Christians seem to differ as to the order of these events? When it comes to prophecy, what different methods of Bible interpretation exist, and how do they contribute to the differing viewpoints of believers in Christ? The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology provides answers to these types of questions, and much more.

A second reason for recommending this book is because of its coverage of almost all the books of the Bible in relation to eschatology (the doctrine of last things). The eschatology of each book of the Bible is given, with the exception of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament, and Philemon in the New Testament. Otherwise, all the rest of the books of the Bible are discussed in terms of how they speak to and/or present eschatological events. One need only look up the name

of the Bible book in the dictionary, as listed in alphabetical order.

A third factor that makes this book valuable is that it presents and clearly defines the key doctrines that relate to the end-times. Just to name a few, the doctrines of heaven, hell, Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, imminency, pre-tribulationism vs. post-tribulationism, millennialism, premillennialism vs. amillennialism, Israel and the Church, the rapture, the Great Tribulation, and God's wrath are all defined and discussed. The major theological terms and concepts in prophetic studies are concisely presented. Additionally, helpful cross-references and bibliographical information are supplied. All of this makes the DOPT a valuable reference tool indeed!

Fourthly, the fact that this book covers key people who have influenced, contributed to, and promoted prophetic teaching throughout church history makes this a valuable work. However, having said that, I am sure that some will wish that even more writers from various backgrounds (including the assemblies) had been included. The book includes articles on the following key figures: Sir Robert Anderson, Jean Astruc, Augustine, John Bale, David Baron, James Hall Brooks, E. W. Bullinger, Harry Bultema, John Calvin, Lewis Sperry Chafer, C. I. Scofield, E. R. Craven, John Nelson Darby, M. R. DeHaan, Jonathan Edwards, Morgan Edwards, Johaan Ernesti, A. C. Gaebelien, James Robinson Graves, James M. Gray, Hugo Grotius, Robert H. Gundry, Hippolytus, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Irenaeus, H. A. Ironside, Immanuel Kant, Samuel H. Kellogg, Lactanius, George Eldon Ladd, Clarence Larkin, Hal Lindsay, Martin Luther, Margaret MacDonald, Philip

Melanchton, D. L. Moody, Origen, Rene Pache, Papias, J. Dwight Pentecost, George N. H. Peters, William T. Pettingill, Philo, Arthur Pink, Francisco Ribera, J. C. Ryle, Charles C. Ryrie, W. Graham Scroggie, Joseph A. Seiss, Richard Simon, Bernard Spinoza, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, J. F. Strombeck, W. H. Griffith Thomas, Jean-Alphonse Turretin, William Tyndale, John F. Walvoord, Isaac Watts, Nathaniel West, and Johann Wettstein. Whew! The inclusion of such notable names contributes much to both a historical and theological understanding of the various prophetic viewpoints.

Finally, though this dictionary is fairly brief and concise (only 448 pages, with a very readable font size), and though it deals much with the history and development of many prophetic viewpoints, to its credit it also covers a number of the contemporary theological and eschatological issues that Christians face today. Some of those teachings would include the pre-wrath rapture, Christian reconstructionism, postmillennialism, theonomy, and covenant theology.

If I were to suggest improvements to the Dictionary of Premillennial Theology it would include the following: First, the book is woefully lacking in graphics and artwork (i.e. charts, illustrations, photos, etc.). If I counted correctly, there are only four charts in all of the book's 448 pages. Because of the media-laden world and visually-oriented culture in which we live, graphics are a must for effective communication, even on the printed page.

A second suggested improvement may at first seem somewhat contradictory. And that is that the book be expanded to be more comprehensive. On the one hand,

one of the strengths of the Dictionary of Premillennial Theology for today's busy reader is its conciseness. Yet on the other, there are a number of areas of prophetic study that readers will wish the book had dealt with in greater detail. On second thought, however, this may be the book's greatest strength--to serve to whet the believer's appetite for more in-depth prophetic study.

On the front of the Dictionary of Premillennial Theology the descriptive statement is made, "A Practical Guide to the People, Viewpoints, and History of Prophetic Studies." On the back of the book it is described as "a practical reference book for anyone engaged in the study of biblical prophecy and premillennial theology." Both of these statements are absolutely accurate! This book is very practical and useful when it comes to studying biblical eschatology.

If you as a believer do not want to be "uninformed" (1 Thess. 4:13) as to biblical prophecy and premillennial theology, then I would encourage you to be sure to obtain this book. As you study God's Word in regard to our Lord's return, this book can be a great aid and tool in helping you sort out the many terms, concepts, and truths associated with Christ's Second Coming and other end-time events. Most of all, I believe that it will be an encouragement to your heart and life as you look forward to His coming.

Maranatha!