

Partial rapture and dispensational punishment

The partial rapture theory, more recently, was taught by the successor of Watchman Nee, namely, Witness Lee. The official website of Watchman Nee (<http://www.watchmannee.org/scriptural-teachings.html>) presents some fundamental points that their theology teaches. Some of these points are indispensable to the theological foundation of partial rapture and, also, of a sub-doctrine of partial rapture known by different designations that vary through space and time: Millennial Exclusion, Millennium Exclusion, Kingdom Exclusion and, the preferred choice of Witness Lee, Dispensational Punishment. The doctrine of 'dispensational punishment' is not taught by all partial rapture adherents, but by some such as Witness Lee and his ministry called Living Stream Ministry whose official website (<http://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooks.cfm>) offers a search field that may be utilized to identify his works that teach the doctrine of 'dispensational punishment'. Such doctrines teaches that the elect (therefore saved and without the possibility of losing salvation) who do not watch against sin, who live in a carnal manner without repenting and, therefore, who are not 'conquerors/overcoming'¹ against sin in their own lives, will be cast into the 'outer darkness,'² for a period of one-thousand (1,000) literal years, during the Millennial Kingdom of Christ that, according to them, will begin after the end of the Great Tribulation, with the objective of being disciplined (or punished) by God. The term 'outer darkness' is interpreted as being *hades*, that is, hell. Therefore, such carnal elect will be thrown into hell, not to be saved, for they arrive there already saved and without the possibility of losing salvation, but to be disciplined³ by God in order to, at the end of the one-thousand literal years of discipline in hell, go to heaven. Thus, such discipline is understood to be the final process of sanctification of God upon the lives of His elected Christians who were carnal.

¹ The basis that only those who will be raptured, before the Great Tribulation, will be conquering Christians, is based, *inter alia*, in Revelation 2:26-28.

² It is based, *inter alia*, in Matthew 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30.

³ Discipline consists, among other things, in stripes/scourging and being burned by the fire of hell. One of the passages utilized to support such doctrine is Luke 12:47-48.

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Partial rapture was analyzed by Dr. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost and Charles Ryrie, among others. Thus, this article aims to continue their analysis and to focus on dispensational punishment.

There is a small variation of interpretation on the matter of salvation by part of the partial rapture believers (partial rapturists), that is, the great majority believes in the eternal security of their salvation, while rarely one or another believe that a Christian may lose their salvation. This observation was presented here because, according to the analysis of Walvoord and J. Dwight Pentecost on partial rapture, they concluded that partial rapturists do not believe that a Christian may lose their salvation, while according to Charles Ryrie, partial rapturists believe that a Christian may lose their salvation. If Ryrie had read any literature that says so, certainly it is an exception, for the majority and main proponents of partial rapture believe in the eternal security of salvation, including Watchmann Nee and Witness Lee.

In this article, I will discuss about some theological points that were not discussed or did not received enough attention by part of Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost and Charles Ryrie; however, such theological points are taught by partial rapturists and, also, by those that teach dispensational punishment (Millennial Exclusion/Millennium Exclusion/Kingdom Exclusion).

Some of these theological points may be found in <http://www.watchmannee.org/scriptural-teachings.html> that, among other points, teach that “The kingdom of God includes the entire reign of God from eternity in the past to eternity in the future,” “the kingdom of the heavens is a smaller sphere within the kingdom of God,” “participation [in the kingdom of the heavens] is a reward for living life under the heavenly rule [means to live in holiness]” to God’s elect that conquered/overcame sin in their own lives, and the kingdom of heaven “is a reward to the overcoming believers”.⁴ The ‘overcoming/conquering Christians,’ defined by Witness Lee, among others, are God’s elect who overcame/conquered sin in their own lives, repented of living in a carnal way, watched and waited for the pre-Great Tribulation rapture. With such theological foundation, adherents of partial rapture and ‘dispensational punishment’ are able to teach that the kingdom of the heavens will occur during the millennial reign of Christ and that carnal Christians (who are not

⁴ Available at: <<http://www.watchmannee.org/scriptural-teachings.html>>. Access on: March 2015.

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overcomers against sin in their own lives, according to Witness Lee's definition) will not enter the kingdom of the heavens, but instead, will be cast into 'outer darkness' (hell/hades) during all one-thousand years of Christ's millennial kingdom that, according to him, will begin after the Great Tribulation. In other words, both 'kingdom of the heavens' and 'millennial reign/kingdom of Christ' expressions, according to the partial rapture position, becomes synonymous. Therefore, while 'overcoming Christians' will be reigning with Christ for one-thousand years, 'carnal Christians' will be simultaneously disciplined in hell.

Kingdom of God/of Heaven

The following commentaries explain why the New Testament does not distinguish between the 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of the heavens' expressions:

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven⁵

One of the striking facts about Matthew's Gospel is that it consistently uses the term 'kingdom of heaven' to describe the subject of Jesus' teaching. The only exceptions to this are in Matthew 12:28; 19:24; 21:31 and 21:43, where we find the term 'kingdom of God', which is used throughout Mark and Luke.

On the basis of this distinction, some interpreters have thought they could differentiate two quite separate phases in Jesus' teaching. But, in fact, there can be no doubt that the two terms refer to the same thing. This can be demonstrated quite easily by comparing the same statements in Matthew and in the other two synoptic gospels. For example, whereas Mark summarizes Jesus' message as 'the kingdom of God is at hand; repent' (Mark 1:15), Matthew has, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 4:17). The two statements appear in exactly the same context (the beginning of Jesus' teaching ministry), and it is obvious that they are different versions of the same saying. There are many other examples of the same thing.

The most obvious explanation of this variety of expression is the fact that Matthew was writing for Jewish readers, whereas Mark and Luke were both writing for a predominantly non-Jewish readership. The Jewish tradition had always avoided direct use of the name of God in case people should unwittingly find themselves breaking the commandment, 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain' (Exodus 20:7). To minimize the possibilities of this happening, they often used other terms instead, and 'heaven' was a favourite substitute for 'God'. Matthew, therefore, speaks of 'the kingdom of heaven' in order to avoid offence to his readers. Gentiles, however, had no such reservations, and to them a term like 'kingdom of heaven' would have been

⁵ John William Drane, *Introducing the New Testament*, Completely rev. and updated. (Oxford: Lion Publishing plc, 2000). p. 115.

unnecessarily complicated, if not altogether meaningless, so Mark and Luke use the term 'kingdom of God' instead.

KINGDOM OF GOD, KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.⁶ The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' preaching, according to the Synoptic Gospels. While Matthew, who addresses himself to the Jews, speaks for the most part of the 'kingdom of heaven', Mark and Luke speak of the 'kingdom of God', which has the same meaning as the 'kingdom of heaven', but was more intelligible to non-Jews. The use of 'kingdom of heaven' in Matthew is certainly due to the tendency in Judaism to avoid the direct use of the name of God. In any case no distinction in sense is to be assumed between the two expressions (cf., e.g., Mt. 5:3 with Lk. 6:20).

[...] however, a close comparison of the two terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven," as they are used in all four Gospels, will show that they have the same meaning. For instance, in the Beatitudes, Matthew's gospel says that the poor will inherit the kingdom of heaven, while in Luke's gospel they will inherit the kingdom of God (Mt. 5:3; Lk. 6:20); in Matthew, the disciples are sent forth to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand; while in Luke, they announce that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mt. 10:6, 7; Lk. 9:2). (See also Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:15.) In the very context where Jesus refers to the parables (including that of the Tares and Wheat) as teaching the "mysteries of the kingdom," Matthew's gospel refers to them as mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11), while in Mark's gospel (4:11) they are mysteries of the kingdom of God. In one passage in Matthew, Jesus uses both terms in the same figure of speech with exactly the same meaning (Mt. 19:23, 24); in one sentence, "it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven"; in the next, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for the rich man to enter the kingdom of God." It is obvious from these comparisons that the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" were completely interchangeable in usage.⁷

(Matthew's Gospel frequently uses the term 'Kingdom of Heaven,' while Mark and Luke always use 'Kingdom of God.' 'Heaven' in these instances is a circumlocution—a way of referring to God without using his name, which Jews and Jewish Christians believed too holy to pronounce or even write. Thus, 'Kingdom of Heaven' and 'Kingdom of God' are identical in meaning. We do not know which expression Jesus himself may have used.)⁸

I. Terminology⁹

According to all three Synoptics, the kingdom of God was the central theme of the preaching and teaching of Jesus. The phrase occurs fourteen times in Mark, thirty-two times in Luke, but only four times in Matthew (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). In its place, Matthew substitutes "the kingdom of heaven" (lit "the kingdom of the heavens," Gk *hē basileía tōn ouranōn*). Although dispensational theology has customarily made a theological distinction between these two terms, the simple fact is that they are quite interchangeable (cf. Mt. 19:23 with v 24; Mk. 10:23). In Jewish rabbinic

⁶ D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996). p. 647.

⁷ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, Calif.: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983). p. 446.

⁸ Paul J. Achtemeier, Publishers Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985). p. 528.

⁹ Bromiley, Geoffrey W.: *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002, S. 3:24

literature, the common phrase is “the kingdom of the heavens” (Dalman, pp. 91ff). In Jewish idiom, “heaven” or some similar term was often used in place of the holy name (see Lk. 15:18; Mk. 14:61).

Kingdom of God (Heaven).¹⁰

The NT reports two different forms of the expression: “the kingdom of God” and “the kingdom of the heavens.” The latter is found only in Matthew; but Matthew also has “the kingdom of God” four times (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). “The kingdom of the heavens” is a Semitic phrase that would be meaningful to Jews but would clash on the Greek ear. The Jews, out of reverence for God, avoided uttering the divine name, and contemporary literature gives examples of substituting the word “heaven” for God (1 Mc 3:18, 50; 4:10; see Lk 15:18). The plural, “heavens,” is used because the corresponding Semitic word is in the plural.

In the Synoptic Gospels

[...] A rich man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life (Mk 10:17). The context makes it clear that he was asking about eschatological life—the life of the resurrection (Dn 12:2). Jesus speaks of the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God. (The parallel passage in Matthew has both “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of the heaven” [19:23, 24], proving that they are interchangeable terms.) [...]

Partial rapture and resurrection, judgment and rewards

Furthermore, concerning the belief that the kingdom of the heavens (millennial reign/kingdom of Christ) “is a reward to the overcoming believers,” it is worth conferring Dr. Walvoord’s treatment in his article entitled *Premillennialism and the Tribulation — Part V: Partial Rapture Theory*.¹¹ Besides his analysis and, considering that “the kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of the heavens” have the same meaning (as we have seen earlier), the following commentary presents the analysis of Henry Clarence Thiessen that addresses the topics of partial rapture, partial resurrection, judgment and rewards:

[...]

The question immediately arises, will all the saved be taken at the rapture? To this we may reply that the nature of the church would seem to require that everyone who belongs to it should be taken. The church is a temple (1 Cor. 3:16f.; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20f.; 1 Pet. 2:5). Will any part of the building in which the Spirit dwells be left behind? Further, the church is Christ’s bride (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:24, 32; Rev. 19:6-9). Will any part of his bride be left behind? It is also Christ’s body

¹⁰ LADD, George E.; Kingdom of God (Heaven). In: Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988). p. 1269–1278.

¹¹ Available at: <<https://bible.org/seriespage/premillennialism-and-tribulation-%E2%80%94-part-v-partial-rapture-theory>>. Access on: March 2015.

(1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22f.; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19). Surely, he will not leave a part of his body behind. That all the living believers will be taken at the rapture is no more improbable than that all those who have fallen asleep in Christ will be raised at that time. Some would maintain on the basis of Phil. 3:11, "In order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead," that Paul taught a partial resurrection; however, this is not an expression of doubt, but of humility and hope. In enumerating the order of the resurrection, Paul says, "Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father" (1 Cor. 15:23f.). Note that "those who are Christ's" are all grouped together as being raised at the same time; there is no division among them.

[...]

B. To **JUDGE AND REWARD**

Both of these are associated with the return of Christ.

1. *The believer's judgment.* Christ will come to judge the works of believers and to bestow the rewards. The believer will not be judged with regard to his sins (John 5:24), since he was judged for them in the person and cross of Christ (Isa. 53:5f.; 2 Cor. 5:21), and he will not again be called to account for them at the return of Christ. During this life, however, he is chastened for the sins he commits that he may not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 5:5; 11:32; Heb. 12:7; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14f.; 12:13f.). But when Christ returns, the believer will be judged as to the use he has made of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), and the opportunities (Matt. 20:1-16) that have been entrusted to him. Salvation is a free gift of God (John 4:10; 10:28; Rom. 6:23). When James says that we are saved by works (James 2:24) he means by a faith that produces works (2:22, 26). Paul indicates that while we are saved by grace, we are yet saved unto good works (Eph. 2:8-10). In other words, the Lord has given his people an opportunity to lay up treasures in heaven, now that they are saved (Matt. 6:20), so that "the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied" (2 Pet. 1:11). It is with regard to these works that the believer will be judged when Christ returns. Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). He also writes, "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God" (Rom. 14:10). And he continues, "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (v. 12). When he comes, the fire will test our works; and if they are of wood, hay, or straw, they will be consumed, yet we will be saved so as by fire; if of gold, silver, or precious stone, we will receive a reward (1 Cor. 3:11-15). No doubt many will belong to the group that will be saved, but have little reward; others will have much. We are challenged to abide in Christ so that when he appears we will not be ashamed at his coming (1 John 2:28). Paul writes, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?" (1 Thess. 2:19).

2. *The believer's reward.* The Lord will keep his word as definitely as in the manner of salvation. Several items must be noted as they relate to the reward.

(1) First, what is the basis of the reward? Various things in the Scriptures are said to lead to a reward. As a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1-5), the believer is to render an account of his stewardship. A definite reward is promised for those who are faithful (1 Cor. 4:2) in the use of the opportunities, the talents, and the pounds entrusted to them (Matt. 20:1-16; 25:14-30; Luke

19: 11-27). As trustees of their material possessions, they will be rewarded according to the way in which they have used their possessions (Matt. 6: 20 Gal. 6: 7). He that sows sparingly will also reap sparingly (2 Cor. 9: 6). Further, as one responsible for the souls of others, the believer will be rewarded according as he has led many to righteousness. The angel said to Daniel, And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3). In similar manner Paul writes, For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?” (1 Thess. 2:19). As those who live in a needy world, we may do good to all men and reap a reward for so doing (Gal. 6:10). Hospitality will be rewarded (Matt. 10:40-42), as will the care of the sick and the persecuted (Matt. 25:35-40). Even a cup of cold water will not remain unnoticed in that day (Matt. 10:42). This is especially true of kindnesses done to the Jewish people. And finally, as sufferers in an evil world, Christians will be rewarded for endurance. Thus, we read that when they revile us, persecute us, say all manner of evil against us falsely, our reward will be great in heaven (Matt.5:11f.; Luke 6:22f.). If we suffer, we shall reign with him (2 Tim. 2:12; cf. Rom. 8:17). As James promises, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him” (James 1: 12).

(2) What is the time of the reward? It is when he comes that the rewards will be given (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:5-10; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12). In view of this, it is not altogether correct to say of a believer when he dies, that he has gone to his reward. Paul declared that it would be in that day when Christ appears that he would receive his reward, and not at death. Those who have fallen asleep in Jesus are now in his personal presence, but they still look forward to the day of reckoning and recompense.

(3) What is the nature of the reward? The Scriptures represent the rewards to be bestowed under the figure of a crown or trophy. We are told that it will be an imperishable wreath (1 Cor. 9:25), and we are warned against losing our crown (Rev. 3:11). Souls won to the Lord are going to be our crown of exultation (1 Thess. 2:19). Besides these, there are the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), the crown of life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10), and the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4). Whatever may be meant by the figure, we may be sure that it represents a glorious and eternal honor in the presence of the Lord. As a part of the reward there is also the promise of a place with Christ in his throne (Luke 19:11-27; 2 Tim. 2:11f.; Rev. 3:21).

As you may see, the New Testament neither teaches a partial rapture nor a partial resurrection; it also does not teach that ‘overcoming Christians’ will go to their rewards, which partial rapturists believe to be the kingdom of the heavens (millennial reign/kingdom of Christ). The New Testament never affirms that the reward is the rapture, as was already discussed by Walvoord, Pentecost, Ryrie and Thiessen; the New Testament defines rewards as crowns and trophies. Thiessen also briefly discussed the judgment of Christians; such topic of judgment will be further discussed later on.

Moreover, partial rapturists further insist that the Revelation 2:11 passage, among other verses¹², prove that partial rapture is a reward. Such verse says that: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers [or overcomes] will not be hurt by the second death.”* The reasoning of partial rapturists is that the overcoming/conquering Christian, defined by them as those who do not live in a carnal way and that are watching and waiting for the pre-Great Tribulation rapture, will be raptured while non-conquering/non-overcoming Christians will be cast into hell for one-thousand literal years during the millennial reign/kingdom of Christ. But, how does the Bible define “one who conquers [overcomes],” in other words, the conquering/overcoming Christians? 1 John 5:4-5 says: *“4 For **everyone who has been born of God** overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our **faith**. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world **except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**”* Partial rapturists change the meaning that qualifies the concept of overcoming the world, basing it on works. Differently, John is very clear that “everyone who has been born of God,” everyone who placed their ‘faith’ in Christ and ‘believed’ that Jesus is the Son of God, are those who overcome/conquer the world. Everyone who is born of God overcomes the world; John does NOT say “everyone who watches, are matured and await for the pre-Great Tribulation rapture” are overcomers/conquerors. Therefore, Revelation 2:11 should not be utilized to sustain the erroneous interpretation that there will be a rapture of only overcoming Christians, for **everyone** who is born of God are overcomers/conquerors. A person that considers themselves to be a Christian living in sin without repenting until the end of his/her life, was never saved (cf. 1 John 2:19). Besides that, some partial rapturists utilize Revelation 2:11 to teach the opposite of it, that is, that those who are not overcomers/conquerors (defined according to them, and not according to Scriptures) will be cast into hell for one-thousand literal years to be disciplined (punished) by God. The next paragraphs will deal with “dispensational punishment.”

Dispensational punishment/Kingdom Exclusion/Millennial or Millennium Exclusion

Considering the topics discussed until now, that is, that the “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of the heavens” expressions are synonymous, that there is no partial rapture or

¹² Cf. Revelation 2:26

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resurrection, that the kingdom of the heavens (or millennial reign/kingdom of Christ) is not a reward, and that everyone who is born of God overcome the world, the following is an analysis on 'dispensational punishment' (Kingdom Exclusion/Millennial or Millennium Exclusion) as taught by Witness Lee, although it is taught by others¹³.

Witness Lee affirms that "The Bible reveals that we are saved for eternity, but that after we are saved, we need to overcome every sinful thing. If not, we shall be disciplined, punished. If you do not repent and confess your sin, but stay in adultery, in the next age you will be put into the fire and burned, not for eternal perdition, but as a dispensational punishment."^{14,15} Among several verses that are utilized to sustain such doctrine, I do not plan to exhaustively discuss all of them, but to introduce the basic argument of such doctrine through some verses that are often utilized: Matthew 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30. Some partial rapturists believe that the subjects ("sons of the kingdom" and "servant/slave") in these passages are saved, however, carnal and, therefore, may not enter the millennial reign/kingdom of Christ and, consequently, will be cast into hell ('outer darkness') for one-thousand literal years to be disciplined (punished) by God.

The following are commentaries on such passages:

[Matthew 8:11-12]

Jesus went on to say, **many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** Those who had less spiritual advantage and less opportunity to know God's truth-the Gentiles **from east and west**-would show greater response to the gospel than God's own chosen people, who considered themselves to be the **sons of the kingdom** simply by virtue of racial descent.

The gospel came through Abraham's seed, as Matthew has already attested through Jesus' genealogy. But the benefit of the gospel, which is salvation, is appropriated by faith, not by

¹³ cf.: NEE, Watchman. *The Gospel Of God*, vol. 3 (California: Living Stream Ministry, 1990), p. 460-461, and FAUST, J.D. *The rod, will God spare it?: an exhaustive study of temporary punishment.*

¹⁴ LEE, Witness. **Life-study of Matthew.** Available at: <<http://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooks.cfm>>. Access on: March 2015. One must search for the "dispensational punishment" expression, which will appear in several of his books. There is no direct link to any of his works, for it is a security system in his ministry's website.

¹⁵ Witness Lee says that, if a person (already saved) does not repent of adultery, he/she will go to hell for one-thousand years. What if a person sins by lying, or sinning in any other manner, and dies without repenting, will such person go to hell for one-thousand years? In other words, which and how many non-confessed sins to God and non-renounced sins are sufficient to qualify a person to be cast into hell for one-thousand years?

genealogical descent. The Jews played an integral part in God's bringing the Messiah and His gospel, and they are yet destined to play an important role in the end times. It was integral to God's plan of salvation that His own Son be born, live, and die as a Jew. But the fact that **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**-or any other Jew-will be **in the kingdom of heaven** will not be because of their Jewishness but because of their saving faith.

Jesus' words to those Capernaum Jews was startling in the extreme. What He said utterly contradicted everything taught by their rabbis. The twenty-ninth chapter of the apocryphal book of Second Baruch pictures what Jews believed would be the great heavenly feast at which all Jews were going to sit down and eat behemoth, the elephant, and leviathan, the giant sea monster, or whale-symbolic of an unlimited amount of food. In the eyes of many Jews, one of the most significant and appealing things about the feast was that it would be totally free of Gentiles.

But at that meal, Jesus said, many Gentiles would be present and many Jews absent. The presumed **sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth**. To the Jews God had given the unique promises and privileges of His kingdom, but because they rejected the King when He came to them, they disqualified themselves from God's blessing of light and destined themselves for **outer darkness**, where, instead of feasting throughout eternity, they would suffer forever in the horror of **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. Jewish tradition taught that sinners-a term synonymous with Gentiles in their thinking-would spend eternity in the outer darkness of gehenna. Jesus concurred with them about the destiny of condemned sinners (see also Matt. 22:13; 24:51), but He declared them totally wrong about the identity of those condemned sinners.

Hell is a place both of darkness and of fire, a combination not found in our present world. Part of the supernatural quality of hell is that it will be a place of fire, pain, and torment that will continue for all eternity in total darkness.

Being a physical descendant of Abraham was a great privilege and advantage (Rom. 3:1-2), but in spite of what most Jews believed, it did not guarantee salvation. It is the children of Abraham's spiritual faith, not the children of his physical body, whom God adopts as His own children (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:7-9, 26-29; cf. Rom. 4:11, 16). Those who reject Christ, even though they are physical descendants of Abraham, will have no place **at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven**. By their rejection of the Son of God-especially in light of the irrefutable evidence of His miracles-they prove they are really sons of Satan (John 8:42-44). Because they are false **sons of the kingdom**, they annul the divine promise, forfeit the divine blessing, and are forever barred from the divine **kingdom**. That was the substance of Jesus' brief but sobering message to the unbelieving Jews just before He pronounced the healing of the centurion's slave.¹⁶

[Matthew 22:13]

The proper wedding garment of a true believer is God-imputed righteousness, without which no one can enter or live in the kingdom. Unless a person's righteousness exceeds the hypocritical self-righteousness that typified the scribes and Pharisees, he "shall not enter the kingdom of

¹⁶ MacArthur, John: *Matthew*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1989, S. 15

heaven” (Matt. 5:20). The only acceptable wedding garment is the genuine “sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Many of Jesus’ Jewish hearers that day would have recalled the beautiful passage from Isaiah which declares, “I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). Sincere Jews knew that, contrary to the man-made, legalistic traditions of their rabbis, God not only requires inner righteousness of men but He also offers it as a gift.

God’s eyes, of course, can see into men’s hearts to know whether their righteousness is of their own making or His granting. But even outwardly a true believer’s life will evidence right living and reflect right thinking. The Lord not only *imputes* but *imparts* righteousness to His children. Only *He* can see the internal righteousness that He imputes, but *everyone* can see the external righteousness that He imparts. A child of God is characterized by a holy life. Peter made that fact clear when he described salvation as “obedience to the truth” which has “Purified your souls” (1 Pet. 1:22).

Just before Jesus declared that prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles in His name may be false evidence of salvation, He had said that true evidence of salvation will always be apparent. A person’s spiritual condition will be manifested in the fruit of his living. “Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?” He had asked rhetorically “Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matt. 7:16–17, 21–23). A holy, godly life cannot help bearing righteous fruit, because it is the natural outgrowth of the work of the Spirit within (Gal. 5:22–23).

Jesus surely would have been pleased had one of His hearers interrupted and asked, “How can I be clothed in the proper garment? What can I do to keep from being cast into the outer darkness like that man?” He no doubt would have said to that person as He had said many times before in various ways, “Come to Me, that you may have life” (John 5:40). As Paul explained to the Corinthians, God made Christ “who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). That is the wedding garment that God demands and His Son provides.

Jesus did not ask the Jewish leaders to comment on this parable as He had done with the previous two, where in each case they condemned themselves by their answers (21:31–32, 40–45). He knew they would not be trapped again, because it was now obvious that the whole thrust of the parables was to condemn them. Their only purpose, now heating up to a fury, was to trap and condemn Him to death (22:15; cf. 21:46).¹⁷

[Matthew 25:30]

[...]

The third slave was not simply unfaithful but faithless. A true Christian who wastes his abilities, spiritual gifts, and opportunities will have his work “burned up, [and] he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). The person represented by this slave, however, has no faith at all and therefore no saving relationship to God. No matter how much he

¹⁷ MacArthur, John: *Matthew*. Chicago : Moody Press, 1989, S. 315

may appear to have been blessed by God and to have served Him, one day he will hear from the Lord's own lips the devastating words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23).

The third slave was utterly **worthless**, and his fate was to be **cast out ... into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth**. Just like the man who tried to crash the king's wedding feast without the proper garment (Matt. 22:11–13), this unproductive, counterfeit servant was destined for destruction.

Outer darkness is a common New Testament description of hell. "God is light," John declared, "and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Light signifies God's presence, and **darkness** signifies his absence. Hell not only is eternal darkness but eternal torment. **In that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth**, signifying the unrelieved agony of separated from God's presence and goodness.¹⁸

The final state of the wicked is described under the figures of eternal fire (Mat. 25:41); the pit of the abyss (Rev. 9:2, 11); outer darkness (Mat. 8:12); torment (Rev. 14:10, 11); eternal punishment (Mat. 25:46); wrath of God (Rom. 2:5); second death (Rev. 21:8); eternal destruction from the face of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:9); eternal sin, (Mark 3:29).¹⁹

As you may see on such passages, it is a fallacy to affirm that the sons of the kingdom and the servant/slave are saved Christians, however, carnal and, therefore, would be cast into hell for one-thousand literal years to be disciplined or punished by God. The outer darkness, as well as other similar designations, were created by God for unbelievers, that is, the non-saved. Furthermore, the "sons of the kingdom" expression does not refer to the church of Christ nor to a saved person and the servants/slaves are not saved carnal Christians.

Judgment seat of Christ/God (great white throne), judgment, and Discipline of God

Other verses utilized to sustain 'dispensational punishment' are 1 Corinthians 3:15 and Luke 12:46-48. 1 Cor. 3:15 says "*If anyone's **work** is burned up, he will suffer **loss**, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire*". That which burns is the work, not the person. The person that has their works burned suffers the loss of not receiving rewards. The verse does not say that the person that is not raptured in the pre-Great Tribulation rapture group will go to hell, during the millennial reign/kingdom of Christ, to be burned for one-thousand literal

¹⁸ MacArthur, John: *Matthew*. Chicago : Moody Press, 1989, S. 109

¹⁹ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Bellingham, Wa.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004). p. 1033.

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years to be disciplined or punished and, after one-thousand years, go to heaven. The verse says that such person will be saved “**only as**” through fire [the Brazilian Portuguese Bible versions says “‘like’ or ‘as’ through fire”]. There is no literal fire in hell that will burn, for one-thousand years, a saved Christian, as ‘dispensational punishment’ adherents would like to believe as if the verse stated that “he himself will be saved through fire,” omitting “only as” or “like.”

The judgment seat of Christ/God (2 Cor. 5:10) is the same as the great white throne (Rev. 20:11) and that, therefore, the non-saved people will also be judged. Read the following commentary:

The great white throne judgment flows naturally from the millennial period as the necessary response to the unmasking of terrible evil. Yet the white throne does not judge only the sinners, for the saints must face God as well and be “judged according to their deeds” (20:12). The difference is that their final destiny is life; and while they will be faced with all they have done, whether good or bad (1 Cor. 3:12–15; 2 Cor. 5:10), the final results will be forgiveness and reward. For the sinners (Rev. 20:13–15), the result is tragically and completely the opposite. They too will be “judged according to their deeds,” but their destiny is the lake of fire, because they have rejected God’s call and their names are not recorded in the book of life. Unbelievers reading this must realize the significance of rejection. They will follow Death and Hades into the lake of fire and share the eternal torment of the false trinity (14:10–11; 20:10).²⁰

In addition, Luke 12:46-48 says: “46 *the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. 47 And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. 48 But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.*” The parallel text in Matthew 24:48 and 51 establishes that such servant, in Lk 12:46-48, is evil/wicked and hypocrite and unfaithful, in other words, he is not a servant of God that was saved by Jesus. Thus, the degrees of punishment in hell will be to the hypocrites, that is, the false servants that were never saved. Moreover, as Wiersbe states: “The phrases “cut him in two” (v. 46) and “beaten” (vv. 47–48) do not suggest that there will be physical discipline at the

²⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002). p. 724–725.

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Judgment Seat of Christ, for we shall have glorified bodies.”²¹ How can glorified bodies be disciplined by God through stripes and hell’s fire? Additionally, Samuel Hoyt explains that: “Scripture teaches that for the believer God’s justice has already been fully and forever satisfied at the Cross in relation to the believer’s sins. If God were to punish the believer judicially for his sins for which Christ has already rendered payment, He would be requiring two payments for sin and would therefore be unjust. Such a concept (punishment for sin) erroneously disparages the all-sufficiency of Christ’s death on the cross.”²² In relation to this last quotation, see Hb 8:12, 10:14, 17-18; Rm 5:1, 19, 8:1; Col. 2:10; Is 38:17, 44:22; Psalm 103:12; Mic 7:19, John 5:24 e 1 Cor. 11:28ff.

Concerning the discipline of God in the lives of His children, Hebrews 12:6-8 says: “6 *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*” Observe that each one of God’s sons/children (“the one he loves,” “every son whom he receives,” “all have participated”) —not just some—are disciplined by the Lord. In other words, all sons/children of God are disciplined. Since that all are disciplined, such discipline is done, by God, here on earth.²³ The Hebrews passage never extends God’s discipline, upon His children, to hell. Furthermore, Hebrews 12:11 says that God’s discipline yields peaceful fruit of righteousness. Thus, if it yields fruit, God’s discipline cannot be in hell, but on earth, for it is on earth that those who are saved yield fruits (cf. 2 Cor. 9:10), instead of yielding fruits in hell. Such fruits have characteristics that reflect God’s peace and righteousness. Jesus said that “*A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit*” (Matt 7:18). This means that the tree must be alive and planted on earth, for, it is on earth, instead of in hell, that it yields good or bad fruits, and it is by their fruits, on earth, that we may recognize the tree (Matt 7:20). Moreover, Jesus said “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to*

²¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1997, c1992, S. 178

²² KEATHLEY III, J. Hampton. *The doctrine of rewards: the judgment seat (Bema) of Christ*. Available at: <https://bible.org/article/doctrine-rewards-judgment-seat-bema-christ#P89_18460>. Access on: 18 March 2015.

²³ VENTILATO, James. *The Rod: loving familial discipline or condemnatory judgment in hell?*. July 2003. Available at: <<http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/doctrine/faustfd.htm>>. Access on: 22 March 2015.

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you” (John 15:16). Therefore, Jesus teaches that the fruits we must yield, as His disciples, will take place in our pilgrimage through this life, instead of in hell, and that these fruits should abide, that is, should be concrete and genuine fruits instead of hypocrite and chaffy fruits that will be burned in the judgment seat of Christ (synonym of great white throne); these fruits must be “in keeping with repentance” (Lk 3:8). After we yield fruits that ‘abide,’ we may ask ‘the Father,’ in the name of Jesus, for ‘whatever’ so that He may give it to you. Therefore, if God’s discipline (or punishment) upon His children was in hell, logically it would be in hell that carnal Christians would ask the Father for ‘whatever’ in the name of Jesus.

Therefore, the Bible does not teach a ‘dispensational punishment’ or divine discipline after life in this planet Earth. God’s discipline in the lives of all His children, that is, **each one** of His children (Hb 12:6-8 “the one he loves,” “every son whom he receives,” “all have participated”) will make them yield fruits of justice while they are still physically alive on earth, instead of in hell. God does not distinguish His discipline on His spiritual and carnal children, for all (carnal or not) of His children are disciplined on earth. In the judgment seat of Christ (great white throne), there will be rewards to those that are saved and degrees of punishment to those that are not saved.

Hades/abyss, Abraham’s bosom/Paradise/Third heaven and intermediate state

Other verses are utilized by partial rapturists and/or dispensational punishment adherents to teach that there are compartments in hell or that, at least, Abraham’s bosom is located in front of hell’s compartment called hades, where there is torment, and that both compartments are separated by an abyss. Thus, Luke 16:22-31 is quoted. Furthermore, it is taught that the penitent thief went to paradise that is considered, by partial rapturists and/or dispensational punishment adherents, to be Abraham’s bosom.

Luke 16:23, “*and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.*” It must be observed that the place of torment is hades and that this passage does not affirm that Abraham’s bosom is in front of hades. The idea, not defended in this article, that Abraham’s bosom is located in hell/hades, comes from Luke 16:26 that says: “*And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order*

that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.” The following text is a commentary aimed at clarifying the relation between hades, abyss, Abraham’s bosom, Paradise and third heaven:

[...] From Christ’s account of the last judgment, no one would infer that it takes place in an underworld. In both the Old and New Testaments, the good dwell with God, and God’s dwelling place is never represented as “below,” but “on high.” Paradise is the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1, 4), and none of the heavens are in the underworld. Elijah “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). [...]

[...] The locating of paradise in hades is opposed by Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 4.34) in the following terms: “Hades (*inferi*) is one thing, in my opinion, and Abraham’s bosom is another. Christ, in the parable of Dives, teaches that a great deep is interposed between the two regions. Neither could the rich man have ‘lifted up’ his eyes, and that too ‘afar off,’ unless it had been to places above him and very far above him, by reason of the immense distance between that height and that depth.” Similarly, Chrysostom in his *Homilies on Dives and Lazarus*, as quoted by Ussher, asks and answers: “Why did not Lazarus see the rich man, as well as the rich man is said to see Lazarus? Because he that is in the light does not see him who stands in the dark; but he that is in the dark sees him that is in the light.” Augustine in his exposition of Ps. 6 calls attention to the fact that “Dives looked up, to see Lazarus.” Again, he says, in his letter to Euodius, “It is not to be believed that the bosom of Abraham is a part of hades (*aliqua pars inferorum*). [...] To the same effect says Gregory of Nyssa (*In pascha*): “This should be investigated by the studious, namely, how, at one and the same time, Christ could be in these three places: in the heart of the earth, in paradise with the thief, and in the ‘hand’ of the Father. For no one will say that paradise is in the places under the earth (*en hypochthoniois*), or the places under the earth in paradise; or that those infernal places (*ta hypochthonia*) are called the ‘hand’ of the Father.” [...]

These patristic statements respecting the supernal locality of paradise agree with Scripture: “The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from sheol beneath” (Prov. 15:24). When Samuel is represented as “coming up from the earth” (1 Sam. 28:7–20), it is because the body reanimated rises from the grave. [...] “Father, I will that they also whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may see my glory” (John 17:24); “those which sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him [down from paradise, not up from hades]” (2 Thess. 4:14). At the second advent, “we which are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). Stephen “looked up into heaven and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). Christ said to the Pharisees, “You are from beneath, I am from above” (John 8:23). Satan and his angels are “cast down to Tartarus” (2 Pet. 2:4). The penitent thief says to Christ: “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Christ replies: “This day shall you be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42–43). This implies that paradise is the same as Christ’s kingdom; and Christ’s kingdom is not an infernal one. Christ “cried with a loud voice, Father into your hands I commend my spirit, and having said this, he gave up the ghost” (23:46). The “hands” of the Father, here meant, are in heaven above, not in “sheol beneath.” These teachings of Scripture and their interpretation by a portion of the fathers evince that paradise is a section of

heaven, not of hades, and are irreconcilable with the doctrine of an underworld containing both the good and the evil.

[...]

The Scriptures teach that the intermediate state for the believer is one of blessedness. The disembodied spirit of the penitent thief goes with the disembodied Redeemer directly into paradise: “Today shall you be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Paradise has the following marks:

1. It is the third heaven: “I knew a man caught up to the third heaven. He was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:2, 4); “to him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the center of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).
2. It is “Abraham’s bosom”: “The beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22); [...]²⁴

As we have seen, the rich man in the parable of Jesus was in hades, being tormented, and saw, on the other side of the abyss above him, Abraham’s bosom (which is a synonym of paradise and third heaven). In other words, the abyss was above the rich man, separating hades from the third heaven (Abraham’s bosom/Paradise). Likewise, when the penitent thief died, he went to the third heaven (Paradise/third heaven) (2 Cor. 12:2, 4).

Furthermore, Ephesians 4:7-10 is quoted to teach that Jesus descended to hades or hell between His death and resurrection: “7 *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.* 8 *Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”* 9 *(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?* 10 *He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)”*”

Partial rapturists and/or dispensational punishment adherents affirm that Jesus, after His death, ‘descended’ to hades and/or Abraham’s bosom (interpreted by them as being a compartment in hell and in front of hades in which both are separated by an abyss) and took/led (‘ascended’) to the third heaven all the saved ones that died before the death of

²⁴ SHEDD, William Greenough Thayer; GOMES, Alan W. *Dogmatic Theology*. 3rd ed. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2003, p. 828–858.

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Jesus. As we have seen earlier, it certainly was not in Abraham's bosom that Jesus descended, for it is located above, that is, it is the third heaven.

Moreover, the text of Ephesians 4:7-10 is an adaption of Psalm 68:18 that says: "You ascend on high, you have taken many captives. You receive tribute from men, including even sinful rebels. Indeed the LORD God lives there!" This Psalm prophesizes what Jesus would do in the future. The following text is a commentary by John Gill²⁵ on Psalm 68:18 in parts:

Thou hast ascended on high: [...] he was seen to go up by angels and men; and, because of the certainty of it, it is here expressed in the past tense, though it was then future.

thou hast led captivity captive: meaning either such who had been captives, in which sense the word is used, Ps 126:1; and so may design either those who had been prisoners in the grave, but were set free at Christ's resurrection, and went with him in triumph to heaven; or all his people, whom he redeemed by his blood from that captivity and bondage they were in by nature; or rather those who led them captive are here meant by "captivity"; such as sin, Satan, the world, death, and every spiritual enemy, whom Christ conquered and triumphed over; the allusion may be to public triumphs, when captives were led in chains, even kings and great men, that had captivated others: the words seem to be borrowed out of Jud 5:12;

thou hast received gifts for men: the gifts of the Holy Spirit, qualifying men for the ministry of the Gospel, as they are interpreted by the Apostle, Eph 4:11; these Christ received from his divine Father in human nature, when he ascended up to heaven, in order to give them to men; and which he did in a very extraordinary manner on the day of Pentecost. The Targum and Syriac version render it, "thou hast given gifts to men"; and the Arabic version, "and he gave gifts to men", as the apostle, Eph 4:8;

yea, [for] the rebellious also: disobedient and unbelieving, as all men are by nature, even God's elect, before conversion, Tit 3:3; who are not only called by grace, and have the blessings of grace bestowed upon them; but some of them have gifts given them, whereby they are fitted to preach the Gospel to others, as Saul, the blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious; and some of those among the Jews, that were concerned in the crucifixion of Christ: though some think the Gentiles are intended, on whom the Holy Spirit was poured forth after our Lord's ascension; and so the Targum interprets it of the rebellious, who become proselytes, and return by repentance;

that the Lord God might dwell [among them]: that is, that they, by the gifts and graces of the Spirit bestowed on them, might become a fit habitation for God; or that "they", the rebellious, being now partakers of the grace of God and his gifts, "might dwell [with] the Lord God" in his churches; enjoy his divine presence, and have communion with him in his word and ordinances.

²⁵ GILL, John. *John Gill's exposition of the entire Bible*. Available at: <<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/psalms-68-18.html>>. Access on: March 2015.

John Gill continues on Ephesians 4:8:

Wherefore he saith,.... God in the Scripture, Ps 68:18

when he ascended up on high; [...] being from Mount Olivet, attended by angels, in the sight of his apostles, after he had conversed with them from the time of his resurrection forty days; and which ascension of his was in order to fulfil the type of the high priest entering into the most holy place; and to make intercession for his people, and to send down the Spirit with his gifts and graces to them, and to make way and prepare mansions of glory for them, and receive the glory promised and due to him: in the Hebrew text it is, "thou hast ascended"; there the psalmist speaks to the Messiah, here the apostle speaks of him; though the Arabic and Ethiopic read there, "he ascended", as here:

he led captivity captive; which is expressive of Christ's conquests and triumph over sin, Satan, the world, death, and the grave; and indeed, every spiritual enemy of his and his people, especially the devil, who leads men captive at his will, and is therefore called captivity, and his principalities and powers, whom Christ has spoiled and triumphed over; the allusion is to the public triumphs of the Romans, in which captives were led in chains, and exposed to open view:

and gave gifts unto men; meaning the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and particularly such as qualify men for the work of the ministry; [...]

John Gill continues on Ephesians 4:9:

Now that he ascended,.... These words are a conclusion of Christ's descent from heaven, from his ascension thither; for had he not first descended from thence, it could not have been said of him that he ascended; for no man hath ascended to heaven but he that came down from heaven, Joh 3:13 and they are also an explanation of the sense of the psalmist in the above citation, which takes in his humiliation as well as his exaltation; which humiliation is signified by his descent into the earth:

what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? [...] for certain it is, that the place where Abraham was with Lazarus in his bosom was not near to hell, but afar off, and that there was a great gulf between them, Lu 16:23 and the spirits or souls of the patriarchs returned to God that gave them, when separated from their bodies, as the souls of men do now, Ec 12:7 nor did Christ enter any such feigned place at his death, but went to paradise, where the penitent thief was that day with him; nor were the patriarchs, but the principalities and powers Christ spoiled, the captivity he led captive and triumphed over: some interpret this of Christ's descent into hell [...]; but it may rather design the whole of his humiliation, as his descent from heaven and incarnation in the virgin's womb, where his human nature was curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth [Psalm 139:15]; and his humbling himself and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, when he was made sin and a curse for his people, and bore all the punishment due to their transgressions; [...]

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Therefore, the “lower parts of the earth” phrase in Eph. 4:9 comes from Psalm 139:15 that says: “*My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven **in the depths of the earth.***” As John Gill said, these depths or lower parts of the earth was where Christ was ‘intricately woven’ (in Mary’s womb). Thus, Christ descended to the earth and was woven in the depths of earth (Mary’s womb). No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven (John 3:13), that is, first Jesus descended from heaven to Mary’s womb; the ascension comes after the descent of Jesus.

Besides that, verse 9 does not say that Jesus descended into the inner parts of the earth nor to hades; the verse says that Jesus descended to “the lower parts of the earth.” Perhaps this verse in Portuguese may not be sufficient to convince partial rapturists and/or dispensational punishment adherents that such lower parts are on earth or refers to Mary’s womb where Jesus was “intricately woven,” instead of in hades. Hence, the following are two Bible versions in the English language on Eph. 4:9:

- New English Translation: “Now what is the meaning of “he ascended,” **except that he also descended to the lower regions, namely, the earth?**”
- *New International Version*: “What does “he ascended” mean **except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?**”

Therefore, “ascended on high” (Ef. 4:8) is the ascension of Christ from the earth to heaven (third heaven/paradise/Abraham’s bosom); No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven (John 3:13). Thus, although the descent of Christ to the lower earthly parts may mean the earth or Mary’s womb, where He was ‘intricately woven,’ one thing is certain: Jesus did not descend to capture, in order to take to heaven, no one in hades, since ‘Abraham’s bosom’ is not located inside of hades or hell, given that it is a synonym of ‘third heaven’ and of ‘paradise.’

This text of Ephesians 4:9 may, by part of partial rapturists and/or dispensational punishment adherents, be correlated to 1 Peter 3:18-20 to sustain that Jesus descended to hell after His death. However, one thing is certain: Abraham’s bosom is a synonym of paradise and third heaven, and that Jesus said to the penitent thief that he would be with Him in paradise. Consequently, 1 Peter 3:18-20 does not teach that Jesus descended to hades. For

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an explanation of the Reformed position on such passage, see “Descendit Ad Inferna”: Uma Análise da Expressão “Desceu Ao Hades” no Cristianismo Histórico, by Heber Carlos de Campos, on pages 13-16 of the PDF.²⁶

Finally, Acts 2:25-28, specifically v. 27, is utilized to sustain that Jesus descended to Hades. The following is a commentary of Simon Kistemaker:²⁷

c. “Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One undergo decay.” Although David refers to himself in the first part of the verse (v. 27; Ps. 16:10), in the second half he prophesies about the Messiah and his resurrection. David expresses his confidence that the grave will not mark the end of his fellowship with God. He will continue to enjoy life in the Lord’s presence. He repeats this thought in the next verse: “You have made known to me the paths of life” (v. 28; Ps. 16:11).

Many versions transliterate the Greek term *Hades*. [E.g., NKJV, JB, RSV, NASB.] This is the term for the Hebrew *Sheol*, which signifies “pit” or “grave.” In his sermon, Peter employs the word *Hades* not in the sense of “abode of the dead,” but as the grave. Even in the grave God does not abandon his own child but gives him assurance of the resurrection. The sentence, “Nor will you let your Holy One undergo decay,” is David’s assurance of God’s affirmation.

Paul provides a logical analysis of David’s words and applies them to Christ. He says: “For David, after he served God’s purpose in his own generation, fell asleep. He was buried with his fathers and underwent decay. But whom God raised from the dead did not undergo decay” (13:36–37). Peter’s explanation of David’s remark is even more explicit (vv. 29–32). He points to the evidence of David’s tomb in Jerusalem, but Christ’s tomb is empty because God raised him from the dead. And Peter himself can testify to this fact.

Conclusion

As was explained in the beginning of this article, Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost and Charles Ryrie only dealt with the theory of partial rapture; I dealt with the sub-doctrine of partial rapture, that is, dispensational punishment (Kingdom/Millennial Exclusion). Despite the fact that these three authors are premillennial dispensationalists, I consider their analysis on partial rapture to be useful and enlightening.

The New Testament (NT) does not distinguish between ‘kingdom of God’ and ‘kingdom of the heavens’ expressions; the NT does not teach a partial rapture not a partial resurrection;

²⁶ Article written in Portuguese. Available at:

<http://www.mackenzie.br/fileadmin/Mantenedora/CPAJ/revista/VOLUME_IV__1999__1/Heber.pdf>. Access on: 4 abril 2015. See “D. *Interpretação da Tradição Reformada*” beginning on page 13.

²⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001). p. 96.

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the reward is not the rapture of anyone, for the NT defines rewards as crowns and trophies; the NT does not teach dispensational punishment (kingdom exclusion/millennial or millennium exclusion), for God disciplines all His children here on the earthly life so that they may bear fruits while there are alive on earth; the sons of the kingdom and the servants/slaves are not saved Christians, carnal or not, but are the Jews, descendants of Abraham; the outer darkness, as well as other similar designations, were created by God for the unbelievers, that is, the non-saved; the great white throne and the white judgment seat of Christ/of God are synonyms and both the saved and non-saved will be judged. In this judgment seat, the works, good (genuine) and bad, will be tested by the fire and there will be rewards for the saved, who will already be in the state of glorification, and degrees of punishment in hell for the non-saved, including for the hypocrites and false servants and false prophets; Abraham's bosom, paradise and third heaven are synonyms, and the abyss was above the rich man, separating hades from the third heaven (Abraham's bosom/Paradise); Jesus did not descend to Abraham's bosom because it is located above for being paradise and third heaven; Christ descended to the earth, was intricately woven in the depths of the earth (or lower parts of the earth) that is Mary's womb; Jesus did not descend to hades.

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