

 THEMES IN THEOLOGY 

volume 4

Dispensationalism
and
Covenant Theology

Nathan Pitchford

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About *Themes in Theology*

The *Themes in Theology* series was born of the desire to make some of the less accessible but essentially Christ-centered material put out by Psalm 45 Publications more manageable and affordable, and better organized. Much of the material was accordingly taken from the unwieldy and immoderately eclectic *Articles* – a project gathering together in one large volume Nathan Pitchford's many and various shorter writings from the years 2005 – 2008. Each volume in the *Themes in Theology* series, drawing in large part from that stock, presents a manageable and coherent selection of essays on a particular theme in theology; and each strives likewise to be thoroughly Christ-centered and scripturally-grounded. Hence, most of the material (with some exceptions) has already been published in some other format by Psalm 45 Publications. In addition, each of the four volumes contains a concluding selection of original, Christ-centered poems by the same author.

 THEMES IN THEOLOGY 

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Foreword

The final title in Psalm 45 Publications' *Themes in Theology* series, *Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*, is the most polemic of the four. When I was first introduced to the utter centrality to all of life and reality of Christ and him crucified – the great presupposition of the series – and began to realize the necessary hermeneutical ramifications that this Christ-centered reality has for all the scriptures, and in particular the Old Testament, it was from within a milieu largely shaped by Dispensational hermeneutics; but immediately upon my life-altering realization, the detrimental effects of that Israel-o-centric hermeneutic to the thoroughly Christ-o-centric hermeneutic demanded by the all-interpretive reality of Christ crucified struck me with a painful poignancy. Since that time, I have both taken a long journey out of the multifarious, Dispensationally-derived errors in which so much of contemporary Evangelicalism is still enmeshed, and I have written much to encourage others to take that same journey. In the following pages, my devoted opposition to Dispensationalism as a system will doubtless be clear; I hope that my compassion and respect for the many true worshipers of Christ who still adhere to that system, as I once did too, will likewise be too clear to miss.

The structure of this volume is quite simple: *first*, there are several polemical articles against Dispensationalism in general, and certain expressions it has taken or errors it has spawned; *second*, there are articles laying out a summary of and a positive

case for that hermeneutical system to which it is opposed, classic Covenant Theology; *third*, a selection of poems is included which emphasize the redemptive-historical unity of God's gospel plan, and which are therefore quite at odds with the discontinuities so fundamental to the Dispensational hermeneutic; and finally, two appendixes are provided, the first of which is a categorized and annotated list of scriptures in opposition to the various teachings of popular Dispensationalism, and the second of which addresses various frequently asked questions concerning Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.

Solus Christus

IS DISPENSATIONALISM BIBLICAL?



THE INTERPRETIVE grid which sees a literal fulfillment of certain Old Testament prophecies mandating a futuristic, national restoration of ethnic Israel as an earthly people of God enjoys much currency today. Is this hermeneutical framework biblical? The question is not primarily eschatological, although it does have necessary eschatological implications. Neither is the question exclusively one of literal or figurative interpretation. On the contrary, the question at hand affects the entirety of the essential nature of God's eternal redemptive plan in Christ. It affects the liberty of an author to foreshadow the truths which it is his purpose to reveal, and later to explain the nature of his foreshadowing, and its intended application. It affects not the reality of promise-fulfillment, nor even the literalness of that fulfillment, but rather the one to whom the promises were made, and therefore, to whom they ought reasonably to be fulfilled. Does a natural, literal reading of the scripture message, from beginning to end, lead to an expectation of an ethnicity exercising

world dominance in end times, or to a progression from shadows to spiritual realities, from unclear to manifest, from physical and ethnic to spiritual and multi-national? Could such a spiritualization even possibly be consistent with a literal understanding of scriptures? Consider for a moment an example from Ezekiel 17. There God declares in very specific and literal terms that a great, multi-colored eagle plucked up a vine and planted it elsewhere. Later on, God says about this eagle and this vine, “Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean? Tell them, behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took her king and her princes and brought them to him to Babylon” (Ezekiel 17:12, ESV). Now, would it be consistent with a literal hermeneutic to say that God’s statement in clear terminology about an eagle and a vine was actually referring to the king of Babylon and Israel? Of course it would, because the very author of that parable later declared more manifestly what he intended to signify by what he had said. Only a fool would demand a literal historical event with an eagle and a vine, or insist, “Because God clearly said an eagle plucked up a vine, then a literal eagle plucked up a literal vine. You’re not calling God a liar, are you?” Now consider another example: God said in clear, specific, and literal terms, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the

LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34, ESV). At that point, it may perhaps be legitimate for one to say, "God said very clearly 'the house of Israel,' so he must be talking about ethnic Israel; you're not calling God a liar, are you?" However, when we read the same Author of this prophecy explain later, in no less specific terms, that this prophecy was made concerning us, the New Testament Church, and that it was fulfilled to us by Christ, then we had better be willing to rethink exactly what God meant by "house of Israel." God tells us in Hebrews 10:15-22

And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled

clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (ESV).

Now that God has declared that he intended all of us New Testament believers by this prophecy referring to the “house of Israel,” it would be foolish for us to say, “He said Israel, he must mean ethnic Israel.” God himself is the best interpreter of what he has spoken. If he makes a promise to Israel, and declares that it is spoken of all believers, regardless of their nationality, that has necessary consequences for what we understand him to mean by “Israel”. If God can say “eagle,” and later show that he means the king of Babylon, then he can likewise say “Israel” and later show that he means all believers. The issue, then, cannot be, “What sort of prophetic fulfillment do we think is consistent with a literal understanding of the terminology employed? But rather, how does the bible itself understand specific terminology as it concerns prophecy-fulfillment? As we look at scriptures with this hermeneutic, that is, a hermeneutic which simply allows the author to speak obscurely at first and explain himself more manifestly later on, then we find a prophetic expectation that is vastly different from the Dispensational brand of “literalness”.

Keeping this simple hermeneutical principle in mind, let’s briefly examine six questions regarding the biblical expectations for the fulfillment of Old Testament “Israel” prophecies.

1. Does the Old Testament Expect a Glorious Physical/Ethnic Kingdom of Israel in the End Times?

On the face of it, the answer to this question may seem an obvious yes. Didn't God promise the land of Palestine to the descendants of Abraham forever? Didn't the Lord promise David that his kingdom would have no end, and that his seed would reign in Jerusalem forever? Didn't God commence the fulfillment of these promises when he brought ethnic Israel up from Egypt and gave them the land he had promised to Abraham? When he raised up Solomon to sit on the throne in his father's stead? What reason then can there be to expect anything different than an ethnic kingdom of Israel to fulfill end times prophecies? Furthermore, this is clearly the expectation that Israel as a whole retained at least until the first coming of Christ. When they heard that Jesus was the Christ, they were willing to make him king by force, so certain were they that the prophecies of the Messiah spoke of one who would restore a physical kingdom to ethnic Israel. However, there are reasons to suppose that the Old Testament itself was never intended to give this firm conviction, and that, in looking for a Restorer of the physical kingdom, Israel missed the true Christ of which the prophets spoke. Throughout the Old Testament, we can pick up on several characteristics of that era that were recognized by all God's true people.

The Old Testament was confessedly a time of shadows.

It was to Abraham that God first made the land promises. But before his life ended, Abraham himself recognized that the land of Palestine was not the true kingdom which God was preparing for him. It was

instead a type of the heavenly kingdom. Abraham looked beyond the type, and longed for “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This attitude is characteristic of all true saints, such as David, who looked beyond the sacrificial system to the spiritual reality of non-imputation on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ (Psalms 32, 51, etc.). Not only could the blood of bulls and goats never take away sins; but the true saints of the Old Testament knew this, and knew furthermore that these things were merely types of the coming Christ for whom they were waiting; even as David and others spoke of the resurrection of Christ, and based their eternal hopes on that reality. (e.g. Psalm 16:8-11).

The Old Testament looked ahead to the casting off of the old shadows.

When David recognizes that “Sacrifice and offering you did not delight in,” he rests his hope instead on the coming perfect sacrifice of Christ, who declares to the Father, “I delight to do your will.” (Psalm 40). The true Old Testament saint longed for the time when the types would be cast off forever, because Christ would bring the realities to which they pointed.

Included in this expected casting off of shadows is the casting off of national Israel as God’s people.

When God removed his Shekinah glory from the temple in Jerusalem, he was essentially signifying the taking up of his presence from Israel, so that they were no longer his special people. They were now the

same as the Gentiles around them (see Ezekiel 11:23). If the reality of this casting off is not indisputably clear in Ezekiel's vision, it nevertheless becomes manifestly apparent in Hosea 1. There God very clearly and explicitly declares that Israel will become "lo-ammi" — "not my people". In this declaration, Israel becomes essentially the same as the Gentiles around them; therefore, immediately afterwards, when God declares that in the future Israel will number as the sand of the sea, he must mean an Israel that is drawn without distinction from a world that is, without distinction, "lo-ammi" with God. So the expected casting off of Old Testament shadows is complete enough to include the casting off of ethnic Israel as God's people.

Subsequent to this casting off, the old Testament looked ahead to a fulfillment of the spiritual realities which the cast-off shadows had signified.

Hence, David looked ahead to a resurrected Christ exalted on his own throne, executing the office of priest, and reigning forevermore as king (see Psalm 110). His vision of future prophetic fulfillment was not limited to Solomon sitting in physical Jerusalem with the Aaronic priesthood offering up the blood of bulls and goats. And so with many other ceremonial types, which time forbids me now to enumerate.

Included in this spiritual fulfillment is the expectation of a restored, spiritual people of God.

Although God cast off physical Israel, he prophesied of a restoration of Israel. What would be

the distinction between this eschatological Israel and the archetypical Israel? Israel would no longer be Israel because of birth or external laws on tablets. Instead, they would be Israel because God had written his law on their hearts, and put a new heart of flesh within their midst. (See Jer. 31:31-36; Ezekiel 36:24-28). This new Israel God would call from all the nations, choosing some who had been Gentiles to be Levites and Priests (See Isaiah 66:18-21). In fact, Paul himself clearly explains that the prophesied restoration of Israel spoken of by Hosea was accomplished when God called to himself a people from both ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles (Romans 9:24-26).

Hence, even in the Old Testament we start to see the necessity of a change from types to spiritual realities in order to do justice to the prophecies involving future Israel.

2. Did Christ Come to Offer an Earthly Kingdom, or to Proclaim the Inauguration of a Kingdom Not of This World?

Dispensationalism teaches that when Christ came to earth, he offered the Jews a physical kingdom, but they rejected him. Then, he inaugurated the church age instead, and put his plans for the kingdom he was offering to the Jews on the back shelf, so to speak. Therefore, he now has two distinct peoples and two distinct programs, one earthly, that will be picked up again in the end of this age; and one spiritual, that is being accomplished now, and will be effectually completed by a rapture from this earth,

before God once again deals with his earthly people, national Israel. But is this understanding borne out by a perusal of the “kingdom of heaven” teaching of Christ throughout the gospels? It would appear from the gospel accounts of Christ, that he did not weakly “offer” himself as king, but proclaimed authoritatively the commencement of his kingdom. It seems obvious, as well, that the Jews did not reject Christ’s offer of being a physical king — in fact, they would have made him a king by force. It seems, moreover, that Christ did not intend a visible kingdom when he spoke of the kingdom that had arrived, but a kingdom that does not come with observation. What then is Christ’s teaching on the kingdom? In the beginning of his ministry, Christ is very clear that the long-awaited kingdom had arrived, and that he was the Messianic king who had long been prophesied. Matthew tells us that from the time Christ came to dwell in Capernaum, he started preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near” (Matt. 4:17). From the beginning of his ministry, then, Christ was proclaiming the commencement of the prophetic kingdom. That he was not merely offering himself to be the King of national Israel until they rejected him and caused him to rescind the offer is patently clear from his own testimony. For instance, when the Pharisees accused him of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, he demonstrated that on the contrary he was casting them out by the Spirit. Having observed this, he made the application, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28) If Christ was doing these mighty works through the power of the Spirit, then the kingdom had come. Christ was not

offering himself as King, but proclaiming himself to be King and declaring that his kingdom had already been inaugurated. This point is missed when one misunderstands the nature of his kingdom, as did the Jews and Pontius Pilate. They expected a kingdom that would be physical and visible. Christ himself deals with these misconceptions, declaring to the erring Pharisees, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20-21, ESV). Christ’s clear teaching was that his kingdom had come and was already spreading — but it was not a kingdom which could be seen. He makes the same point again when standing before Pontius Pilate, who poses the question, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus’ reply is very emphatic: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world” (Jn. 18:36, ESV). Dispensationalists understand the kingdom to which Christ refers exactly as Israel did — a physical kingdom for national Israel. But Christ rebuked Israel for their spiritual blindness and hardness of heart. You are wise, and know how to apply this.

3. To Whom Were All the Old Testament Promises Made and to Whom Must they be Fulfilled?

Contrary to Dispensational teaching, the seed to whom the Old Testament promises were made was

not ethnic Israel. It was instead Christ. Ethnic Israel as God's people, that is, God's "Son," was just a shadow of Christ, the true Son of God. Therefore Matthew is able to tell us that when God called Christ from Egypt, he was fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my Son". Matthew clearly tells us that when God said through Hosea, "Out of Egypt I have called my Son," he was referring to Christ. We must, therefore, understand that Old Testament Israel was intended to signify Christ, as the true Son of God. To deny this would be equivalent to saying, "When God said an eagle, he could not have meant the King of Babylon." Matthew did not have a flawed hermeneutic. He just did not have a dispensational hermeneutic. God was revealing manifestly through Matthew what he had previously signified more obscurely by this historical event of bringing out Israel from Egypt. And even beyond this interpretation in Matthew, there could be no clearer statement that Christ alone was the one seed to whom the Abrahamic promises were made than what we find in Galatians 3:16. There, Paul tells us, "Now, to Abraham and to his Seed the promises were declared. It does not say, 'And to the seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' which is Christ". Again, we find in II Corinthians 1:20 that, "all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (ESV). The hermeneutic that demands that the Old Testament promises must be fulfilled to ethnic Israel is in direct opposition to the New Testament teaching that those promises were made to Christ alone and fulfilled in him alone. Christ owns the land of Israel, and reigns

on the throne of David, and in him are multitudes numbering as the sand on the seashore. He is the one to whom all those promises were made, and a hermeneutic that demands an additional fulfillment to national Israel does not do justice to New Testament teaching.

If Christ is the one seed of Abraham, then who does the New Testament say is a Jew? Very simply, the one who is in Christ. Being a true Jew is never seen as a matter of ethnicity in the New Testament. Christ himself tells the ethnic Jews that, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did” (John 8:39, ESV). In other words, they could not claim Jewishness on the basis of ethnic descent, but only on the basis of a spiritual consistency with Abraham. How could this truth be more clear throughout the New Testament? In Romans 2, Paul tells us, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Romans 2:28-29, ESV). In chapter 4 he tells us, “[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Romans 4:11-12, ESV). In chapter 9 he tells us, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from

Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring" (Romans 9:6-8, ESV). In Galatians 3 he tells us, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:28-29, ESV). How can Paul be more clear? In the New Testament, Israel is not composed of those ethnically descended from Abraham. Those who believe like Abraham are Abraham's true children, the true Jews of this era, the true Israel of God.

4. Does "Israel" Terminology in the New Testament Refer Exclusively to Ethnic Israel?

Dispensationalists teach that, any time the words "Israel," "Jew," "temple," etc., show up in the New Testament, they are referring to ethnic Jews, national Israel, the physical temple, and so on. But is this the case? The briefest perusal of the New Testament will show that this is simply not so. On the contrary, we find throughout references to the church that are saturated with "Jewish" terminology. Consider, for instance, some of the following:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons,
one by a slave woman and one by a free

woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. [Galatians 4:22-31, ESV]

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight

that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. [Hebrews 12:18-24, ESV]

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. [Hebrews 13:10-16, ESV]

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. [I Peter 2:4-5,9-10, ESV]

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. [Ephesians 2:19-22, ESV]

In all of these passages, one thing must be patently clear: the New Testament authors were not at all scared to spiritualize Old Testament physical realities, and show that their spiritual fulfillment was being realized in the church. In other words, a literal reading of the New Testament leads one to the realization that the Author of the New Testament is simply explaining more clearly what he had been speaking of and showing forth figuratively throughout the Old Testament.

5. What Does the New Testament Say About the Permanence or Transitoriness of Old Testament Types?

Once again, what dispensationalism teaches of an end time return to God's earthly program for Israel is not borne out by a perusal of the New Testament on the purpose and transitoriness of the old shadows. Consider the following:

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant

with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. [Hebrews 8:1-13, ESV]

Here we find very clearly explained that when Christ brought the substance, the old types — including the tabernacle, the priesthood, and, significantly, even the covenant itself — were permanently done away with. As long as the work of Christ remains operative, a return to the old types can be nothing but blasphemy. Consider again,

But into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the

Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. [Hebrews 9:7-14, ESV]

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every

year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [Hebrews 10:1-9;14;19-22, ESV]

So we see that the old types are forever done away with, and replaced with something new, something which is spiritual, and not physical. They were transitory, and their time has ended. There can be no return to the old shadows that is not at the same time a blasphemy of Christ. Consider further:

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. [Colossians 2:8-17, ESV]

And again,

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the

circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands--remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it

has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. [Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:3-6, ESV]

Any hermeneutic that suggests that, in the end times, the last trumpet will sound; Christ will re-erect the wall of division between Jews and Gentiles that he had previously torn down by his work on the cross; that he will carve into two peoples what had been one body; that he will strip away from ethnic Gentiles the share that they did have as fellow-heirs of the promises; any such hermeneutic is not only not to be found in the New Testament; but it even does despite to the work of Christ. The day that there is once again an ethnic distinction in the people(s) of God is the day that the distinction-shattering work of Christ will suffer a mighty relapse, the day that the shadows will nullify the substance, which is of Christ. To imagine that God will again deal with an earthly people who are his merely on the basis of ethnic descent, betrays a carnal mind such as the Pharisees had, whose hope of the Christ was so small as to be limited to a physical, ethnic kingdom. This is far different from and vastly inferior to the new Testament teachings we have on the consummative glory of the presently-reigning Davidic King, and of his people who are one body without distinction from all the nations of the earth.

6. Do New Testament Authors Understand Old Testament Prophecies as Dispensationalists Interpret Them?

Once again, the dispensational understanding of Old Testament prophecy-fulfillment is vastly different from the New Testament teachings on how the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled. Read how Peter interprets Joel 2 in his sermon recorded in Acts 2. Or how he interprets Psalms 16 and 110 in the same sermon. Or How Matthew interprets Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15. Or How the author of Hebrews interprets the cutting of the new covenant with “Israel,” from Jeremiah 31. Or how Paul interprets the wilderness account of the Rock that gave water in I Corinthians 10. Or how he interprets the prophesied restoration of the “house of Israel” in Romans 9. And so on. A hermeneutic that will allow an author to prefigure something initially, and explain unequivocally what he meant later on can never arrive at a dispensational understanding of scriptures. When one presupposes what interpretation a “literal” hermeneutic demands, and clings to that interpretation in spite of a clearly contradictory interpretation of the same prophecy given later on in scripture — then, and only then, can he reject the possibility of the church of this age being the spiritual people of God which was foreshadowed by his temporary earthly people, national Israel. Dispensationalism errs in that it demands the same brand of literalism which Christ rejected in the Pharisees. The expansion of the Old Testament people of God, so that in this age true Israel is equivalent to the church, in which persons from every nation have

been grafted in to become Abraham's true seed, is not an imaginative and careless theory. On the contrary, it is the only understanding that a literal reading of the New Testament will allow for.

LAND, SEED, AND BLESSING IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT



THE CHARACTER of the promises first made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, and later reiterated and expanded in 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:1,4-21; 17:1-9,19; 21:12; and 22:16-18 has long been recognized, in some sense, as foundational to all of redemptive history subsequent to this epochal event. How we understand the precise nature of these promises, therefore, will largely shape our understanding of all of redemptive history from the call of Abraham to the eternal state. An understanding of these promises that concentrates predominantly on their *physical* aspect, and therefore sees an ongoing necessity for Middle Eastern geography to be reserved for the ethnic offspring of Abraham has several problems: first, it little accords with the understanding that the patriarch himself had of the covenant promises; second, it is in violation of clear fulfillment formulas found later in the Old Testament; and finally, it fails in its intent to understand literally the promise of eternal possession

of the physical land by the physical offspring of Abraham. The discussion of the first of these points will be reserved for the main body of this article; but it will not be out of place here to touch briefly on the other two. As regards the former of these, we find stated in Joshua 21:43-45, in very specific terms, that God had fulfilled all that he swore to the fathers. Later, in I Kings 4:20,21 and II Chronicles 9:26, we see the precise geographical boundaries promised to Abraham in the actual possession of Solomon, at the height of Israel's political history. Immediately subsequent to this complete fulfillment of the land promise in its physical aspect, its typical purpose then having been realized, Israel as a nation began to lose possession of the extreme portions of its geography, never again to recover them. Can this historical reality be consistent with the promise made to Abraham that "all the land which you see I will give to you, and to your seed forever"(Gen. 13:15)? Those who understand the permanence of the promise to mandate a renewed future possession of these boundaries by the nation of Israel have the same fundamental problem that they criticize in the interpretation which considers the physical aspect of the promise to be done away with upon its fulfillment under Solomon: namely, that this geographical possession will one day end; the one interpretation is no more consistent with an eternal fulfillment than the other. The old earth will one day melt with a fervent heat to make way for the new (II Pet. 3:10); and as soon as this dissolution of the old earth takes place, (including the geographical regions promised to Abraham), a literal fulfillment of the land promise becomes impossible. The nature of the promise made

to Abraham is such that, any fulfillment which is not eternal does not do it justice. God's promise to Abraham must extend to him and his seed for all eternity, including that portion of eternity in which the land of Palestine no longer exists. There must be a time, therefore, when the physical land promise is done away with, and only that aspect of the promise which was eternal remains. Whether this transition is placed immediately subsequent to the height of Israel's glory or immediately prior to the dissolution of the earth has no bearing on the reality that what was promised to be for Abraham's seed forever is actually not forever. The Abrahamic promise, then, could never be eternal unless something other than the physical land of Palestine is fundamentally intended by the promise. And if something other than the physical land is intended by the promise, then it would be vastly beneficial for us to ascertain the nature of this original intention, together with the ramifications that it has for our understanding of God's unfolding plan of redemption. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the fundamental intention of the land, seed, and blessing aspects of the Abrahamic covenant was, respectively, (1) An eternal place of restored fellowship with God; (2) An eternal people enjoying a restored fellowship with God; and (3) A universalization of the promised blessings of this fellowship which is, at the same time, a specific localization of those blessings within Abraham. This understanding will be demonstrated, first, by an examination of the promises in connection with Abraham's history; and second, by an examination of the promises from a New Testament perspective.

The “Land” Promise Intended an Eternal Place of Restored Fellowship with God

From the time of his first being called out by God and commanded to go to a land which Jehovah would show him, Abraham demonstrated an understanding of the nature of that land which transcended mere physical possession. Hence, the first thing we see of Abraham’s sojourn in the land of Canaan is an occurrence which eventually becomes a pattern: Abraham experiences a divinely-initiated encounter in which he enjoys personal fellowship with God. He immediately builds an altar at that place of fellowship; and, at later periods of his wandering, he returns to that specific place to call upon the name of the Lord. (Genesis 12:7,8; 13:3,4). Eventually, we find Jehovah revealing himself and Abraham building altars and calling upon his name throughout the land of Canaan, which Jehovah had promised to him. We read that Abraham built altars or called upon the name of the Lord at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, Beersheba, and Moriah, all places within the boundaries promised to him by Jehovah. And, although he traveled outside of those boundaries, for instance journeying twice to Egypt, we never read of him building altars or calling upon the name of the Lord except in the land which God had promised to him. From the beginning, then, we find a pattern linking the promised land to places of theophanies and personal encounters with Jehovah, and places where Abraham was led to respond to those theophanic experiences in worship and personal fellowship.

Furthermore, Abraham never truly possessed the land which Jehovah had promised to him. And, although he was rich and powerful, he never sought to take possession of the land by wealth or force, excepting the single incident of his buying a burial plot for his wife. In fact, at times when he might have gained some of the land or its wealth, as when he defeated the coalition of kings and was offered compensation for it, he adamantly refused, fearing that his possessions might then be construed as coming from human hands (Gen 14:22-24). In rejecting this portion from the king of Sodom, Abraham demonstrated an understanding of the nature of his promised blessings as transcending the mere physical. He had ample opportunities to seize the city of earthly foundations; but he already possessed the conviction that the land which was promised to him was a city of spiritual foundations, a city in which the redeemed might enjoy everlasting fellowship with God. In the circumstance of God's bountifully providing personal encounters of fellowship with Abraham in the land of promise, while at the same time denying him the physical possession of that land, we perceive a divine safeguard against a crassly physical hope which longed for a city of bricks and stones as the pinnacle of the land promise made to Abraham. Abraham demonstrated a lively faith which steadfastly embraced the eternal hope which glowed alluringly beyond the hills and valleys of Canaan and found satisfaction only in an inheritance of unending personal fellowship with Jehovah at the place where he would choose to set his name. Tragically, many of his descendants, lacking his spiritual perception, failed to look beyond a physical

land in which God's presence was nowhere to be found except as mediated through a cumberingly wrought cult of ritual approach.

The “Seed” Promise Intended an Eternal People Enjoying a Restored Fellowship with God

One of the most striking statements Abraham had of the true nature of the blessings promised to him comes, appropriately, at the occurrence of the official inauguration of the covenant, in which God swears by himself that he will give Abraham a seed and a land (Gen. 15). Although God had promised Abraham several specific things falling into the general categories of land, seed, and blessing, when he sums up all those blessings at once, he declares, “Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you, your exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). At the heart of the covenant, then, God himself is the intended fulfillment of the promise. Therefore, every true understanding of the promised blessings must be able to be subsumed under that head. The land promised to Abraham was only included in the promise because it was integral, in some way, to the reality of having God as his portion. This point is vital for understanding the nature of the promises as they relate to Abraham and his seed. Yes, the Lord made Abraham the father of many nations: Israelites, Edomites, and twelve Arab nations all sprang from his loins. But the ultimate fulfillment of his being made a father to a great people, or to many nations, could only come by his being a father to those whose exceeding great reward

was Jehovah. Hence, when we find the original promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12 repeated and developed in Genesis 17, we find the very essence of the covenant promise made manifestly clear. In verse 4-8 of the latter chapter we read,

Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. (ESV)

At the heart of this reiterated covenant promise is the reality that Abraham's true seed would be those whose God would be Jehovah. This promise, "I will be their God," is given twice, once in connection with the seed that Abraham would father, and once in connection with the land that God would give to them. It is readily apparent from these verses that the Immanuel principle — the principle of God being the God of a certain people and dwelling with them alone of all the nations of the earth — is a vital principle for understanding the promise made to Abraham. At the

heart of the seed and land promises, and in fact what constitutes the very essence of those promises, is the reality that Jehovah will be their God. This “Immanuel principle” is the substance of all later redemptive history, and the precise content of the Abrahamic covenant.

In safeguarding against a literalistic/physical misunderstanding of the “seed” aspect of the promise, God found it expedient to go to considerable lengths. Hence, he closed Sarah’s womb, making her barren for the entire fruitful period of her life; then, he awaited the fulfillment of the promised seed until Abraham himself was beyond the age of reproductive virility; and additionally, beyond the age of Sarah’s natural fertility even if she had been capable of bearing children in her youth. Finally, he brought about a seed to Abraham through purely physical means (i.e. Ishmael) simply to declare that this physical seed was not the fulfillment of the seed promise (Genesis 16). In these circumstances we see that a purely physical seed could never meet the criteria for being the seed of which Abraham was promised an innumerable multitude. Instead, a seed to whom Jehovah sovereignly gave life out of death was to be the nation which fulfilled the promise given. It would have benefitted the later descendants of Abraham who presumed upon the favor of God by virtue of their genealogy to have considered well this point.

**The “Blessing” Promise Intended a
Universalization of the Blessings of Fellowship
Which Is, at the Same Time, a Specific**

Localization of Those Blessings Within Abraham

In the phrase we have recorded for us in Genesis 12:3, “In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” we ascertain the striking circumstance of Abraham’s blessing being at once universalized, so that all the families of the earth come to share in its riches; and at the same time localized, so that the fountain of this world-encompassing blessing is in some sense within Abraham. That Abraham is seen as the source or location from which the blessings comes, and not merely a dispenser or mediator through whom it would be disseminated, is the natural reading of the inseparable *beth* preposition in the original. This relationship of Abraham’s blessing to himself and to the world, so that he would be, on the one hand, blessed himself, and on the other hand, the location from which the blessing would spring, is vital for understanding the promises made to him. The precise manner in which the blessing was said to be both for Abraham and in Abraham must have been initially somewhat obscure: but by the end of his life, Abraham would have understood that the promised blessing was to come through a *person*, the one seed to whom the promises were ultimately referring. When God favored Abraham through encounters of personal fellowship, he connected those events with reiterated promises that he would give the land in which fellowship with God was made possible to his seed (Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 17:8). Hence, Abraham would have learned to connect in some organic sense the place of fellowship with God to the advent of the seed promised to him. This connection would have led

to an intensification of his desire for the promised seed to come. And as he remained frustrated in his continued expectation, and utterly failed in his own attempt to produce it through other means, he must have come to understand in a fuller sense how vastly significance this promise was, that it could only be accomplished by the all-powerful God performing that which is impossible. The first instance in which we are forced to recognize, to a large degree, this mature understanding in Abraham is when the Lord appeared to him and gave the promise, “The one who shall come forth out of your bowels, he shall be your heir” (Genesis 15:4). It is in this context that the statement is made that Abraham believed in the Lord, and he counted it for righteousness. What was it that Abraham believed that was sufficient to stand as the grounds of his justification? It could not have been simply that God would give Abraham a child of his own. This indeed happened when Abraham fathered Ishmael, and yet it was not the fulfillment of the promise that God had made. The only fulfillment consonant with what Abraham had come to expect was a seed who would bless the nations, a seed who would provide fellowship with God, a seed who would possess the land where God dwells with man, and a seed who could only be brought about through the accomplishment of the impossible. In other words, what Abraham believed was that God would supernaturally send a seed who would be the ground of blessing and fellowship with God. All of this becomes more manifest when Sarah commands Ishmael to be cast out, having rejected the thought that the son of the bondwoman should inherit with her own son. In God’s response to Abraham’s initial

displeasure at this idea, we find that Sarah was essentially right. When God came to reinforce to Abraham the decision that Sarah had made, he reiterated the principle that it was through a specific seed in the future that the blessing would come. Sarah's desire was indeed appropriate because, "In Isaac shall a Seed be called to you." In adducing this promise, God was indicating that Ishmael by all rights should be cast out because he had no part in bringing in the promised blessing; instead, the Seed who would bring Abraham the blessing was in Isaac. It is significant that Isaac is not said to be that seed, but rather that the Seed who would be called to Abraham, the Seed who would be the grounds for every blessing given to him, was *in* Isaac — again, the natural reading of the *beth* preposition.

This consideration of Abraham's history compels us to credit him with a much greater understanding of the Messianic hope than some interpreters have given him. It is not some raw, blind faith without content (or with a content of which the full extent is the birth of a child essentially the same as any other child) that justifies a man. It is only faith in the promised Christ and his victorious work of redemption that justifies. This was the content of the belief that Abraham had, and for which he was counted righteous. The essential correctness of this assertion is borne out later by the nature of the test to which God put Abraham's faith. When God put Abraham's faith to the ultimate test, he did not ask for some task that was entirely unconnected to the content of his faith. Instead, he gave a command to Abraham that was so constructed that his response to the command would indicate precisely what it was he

believed about the promises of God. God had already revealed that the Seed who would come to bless all the families of the world was in Isaac. When God commanded Abraham to put Isaac to death, and Abraham obeyed without hesitation, he demonstrated that he believed in a coming Seed who could be put to death and yet be brought to life through the power of God. Abraham's faith had grown so that even the death of the one in whom the promised Seed still resided could not overcome his belief in the triumphant life of that Seed. Abraham had grown to trust in the resurrection power of God by which he would make the promised Seed victorious even over death. By the end of Abraham's life, therefore, we must conclude that he understood that the blessing which would come to all the families of the earth was in him before it came to be in Isaac, by virtue of the fact that he was in the genealogical line of the Messiah that was prophesied from the time of Adam. In this respect, the blessings which Abraham hoped for, blessings of a people of God enjoying a place of fellowship with God were to be universalized so that they touched the whole earth; and at the same time localized so that they were in Abraham.

Further Support Adduced from the New Testament

In examining the teaching of the New Testament as it touches the topic at hand, we find our conclusions largely corroborated and made explicit. We concluded that the land promise made to Abraham could be ultimately fulfilled only by a place

in which fellowship with God is possible. In light of this conclusion, it is striking that the place of rest with God for saints who have fallen asleep in the time of Jesus is a place which Christ refers to as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). More interesting yet is the observation made of Abraham’s life, concerning which he was said to have possessed that faith by which one draws close to God, that, “he awaited the city which has foundations, of which the builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham’s faith did not consist in looking to the ownership of Middle Eastern geography; he looked instead to the land which Canaan could only symbolize, a city which God alone would build. That this city intended a place of fellowship with God is made clear throughout the New Testament. In Galatians 4, Paul declares that believers in Christ are inhabitants of the Jerusalem which is from above, which he sets in opposition to the physical city of Jerusalem. In Hebrews 12, the author declares that we who worship have come to the spiritual Zion. The apostle John looks to a New Jerusalem, one whose chief characteristic would be the presence of God and his dwelling with men (Rev. 21:2,3). In all of these instances we find certain confirmation both of our conclusion that physical Palestine served as the type of a place of restored fellowship with God; and of our conclusion that this was precisely what Abraham understood and believed and awaited.

The second assertion we made, that the seed promise intended a people enjoying restored fellowship with God, is also corroborated by New Testament teaching. In the fourth chapter of Romans Paul makes evident that Abraham was justified

through faith in the one who justifies the ungodly. In virtue of this reality, Paul goes on to assert that Abraham, by virtue of his faith, became the father of all those who believe, whether uncircumcised and believing (as Abraham himself was when he believed) or circumcised and believing. The ultimate fulfillment of the promise that he would be the father of many nations came when people from every tribe, tongue kindred, and nation believed, and so demonstrated that believing Abraham was their father. And this teaching is not isolated to Romans alone. In the third chapter of Galatians, Paul explains that, “They who are of faith, these are the children of Abraham” (verse 7); and again, “The scripture, seeing beforehand that God would justify the nations by faith, promised before to Abraham that 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'; so then, they who are of faith are blessed together with faithful Abraham” (verses 8,9). How was it the nations were blessed in Abraham? By virtue of the fact they were in Abraham, who fathered them all as the patriarch of the family of faith; and, being in Abraham who believed unto justification, they received likewise the blessings of justification through faith. As Paul sums up later in the chapter, “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise” (verse 29).

The final conclusion we made was that the blessing promise intended a universalization of the blessings of fellowship which is, at the same time, a specific localization of those blessings within Abraham. In demonstrating this, we observed that the promised blessing was to come to Abraham and all those who believe, through his promised Seed; this promised Seed is the long-awaited Christ; and

therefore, it is only in Christ, the true Seed of Abraham, that we are blessed together with him. This conclusion is borne out by the New Testament teaching that those who believe are in Christ. Faith brings justification, but only because faith establishes one in a relationship in which he is said to be “in Christ”. Hence we are blessed because we are in Abraham, the spiritual father of us all, as we observed in Galatians 3:7-9; but more specifically, we are in Abraham because we are in Abraham’s seed, Christ. Later in the chapter, Paul clarifies just how it is that those of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law...in order that the blessing of Abraham might be to the gentiles *in Christ Jesus*“ (verses 13,14). The blessing of Abraham comes to the gentiles because they are in Christ; Christ is the seed of Abraham; therefore, if we are in Christ, we too are the seed of Abraham by virtue of our relationship in Christ. We, not ethnic Jews or Arabs, are Abraham’s true children and heirs.

That we alone are Abraham’s heirs, as his children through faith, is demonstrated by a grammatical feature of our text in Genesis that Paul brings to light in his letter to the Galatians. Ethnic Jews could never claim to be the heirs of Abraham, and therefore the rightful owners of Palestine, for the simple reason that the promise was never made to all of Abraham’s offspring. Paul recognizes this truth in Romans 9, where he observes that, “neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children; but, “In Isaac shall be called to you a Seed” (Romans 9:7). In other words, mere ethnic descent was never sufficient to make one a true child of Abraham. The promises were never given to all Abraham’s offspring

— as Paul goes on to clarify later in the chapter that Isaac was chosen and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau, and so on. This basic point Paul reiterates in Galatians 3, when he observes that the promises were originally made not to Abraham and his children, but to Abraham and his seed, which is singular. This one seed of Abraham, to whom the promises must be fulfilled, was Christ alone (Galatians 3:16). If Christ is the only seed of Abraham to whom the promises must be fulfilled, then those who are in Christ, not those who are ethnically descended from Abraham, are the heirs of the promises. Hence, Paul tells us that we have all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3); that all the promises of God find their “yes” and “amen” in Christ (II Cor. 1:20); and that the nations are fellow heirs and of the same body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ (Ephesians 3:6). Only to Christ were the Abrahamic promises fulfilled; and therefore only by virtue of being in Christ are we Abraham’s children and heirs.

Conclusion

The interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant which sees the promises necessitating the possession of physical Palestine by ethnic Jews fails to do justice to the spiritual understanding of the promises that Abraham himself had. As Christ told the Jews of his day, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad” (John 8:56, ESV). Abraham looked beyond the merely physical and placed his hope in the coming Messiah, and in God who would raise him from the dead. This assessment

is borne out by a careful study of Abraham's life. And that this understanding that Abraham had of the promise is essentially correct is made clear by New Testament teaching on the topic. Any interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant that misunderstands the scriptural teaching of what the promises signified, to whom they were made, and who could claim them as Abraham's true children and heirs is not only wrong, but positively harmful. An interpretation that insists on claiming physical benefits for Israel on the basis of their ethnicity obscures the vast spiritual riches of the Abrahamic promises as fulfilled to Christ and to us who are in Christ; it minimizes the place of Christ as the one true Seed of Abraham and the one in whom are all promised blessings; and it conditions us to be looking for a crassly physical, not to mention false, eschatological hope in the coming of an ethnically Jewish millennial kingdom, instead of understanding and awaiting that blessed hope of all redemptive history, the great proclamation, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev. 21:3, ESV). This is the hope of Abraham and all his true children, and the goal of all redemptive history.

APPARENTLY CONTRADICTORY PROPHECIES OF ESCHATOLOGICAL ISRAEL IN ISAIAH



ANY VIEW of scriptures as inspired and inerrant demands of the interpreter a final product which is free of all absolute contradiction. If the bible is the word of God, and if God is trustworthy, then in the bible, *A* can never equal non-*A* fundamentally. That is, *A* can never equal non-*A* in the same sense and at the same time. Every instance we have in the bible, therefore, of *A* being equated with non-*A* is only a superficial, or accidental equation, and never an essential contradiction. That is not to say that we can find no examples of express *A* equals non-*A* formulas in the bible, but rather that every one of those formulas must be understood as indicating the negation of *A* respective of a different *sense*, or respective to a different *time*. For instance, when we

examine Paul's statement in Romans 9:6, "they are not all Israel, who are of Israel," we must be content to presuppose of Paul as a reasonable man, not to mention a man writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the contradiction intended is not a fundamental one. The precise formulation of this expression leaves us no doubt that a contradiction is being posited: under the rubric "all who are of Israel" is included a subset, "those who are not Israel". Of this subset, therefore, we see characteristic *A*, *being of Israel*, attributed to them, and at the same time the negation of *A*, *being not-Israel*, attributed to the same set. The context of the apparent contradiction leaves us no difficulty in vindicating our presupposition of the reliability of scriptures. As Paul goes on to elaborate, there is, of the entire set of those who are in some sense "Israel" a smaller set of "Israel according to God's promise" or "elect Israel". This elect Israel is truly Israel in a deeper and more fundamental sense than the set of those who are merely ostensibly Israel. Therefore, the non-elect offspring of Jacob are, in a superficial sense, "Israel," but in a more fundamental sense they are not *true* Israel. And so the *A* equals non-*A* formula is one of contradiction respective merely of a different sense.

This interpretive presupposition of biblical reliability also leads us to assume a corollary truth, namely, that Paul himself was not positing a solution to an apparent contradiction which, when accepted, must lead to the simultaneous acceptance of an *essential* contradiction in the Old Testament corpus with which he was dealing. In other words, Paul's understanding of a set that could be characterized as *Israel* and *not-Israel* was not a fabrication that was

foreign to the Old Testament writings. Paul was expounding and interpreting the Old Testament prophecies; therefore, his solution to the apparent problem of promises to Israel not being fulfilled to the preponderance of Jacob's physical offspring must have been in response to a truth which inhered in the Old Testament prophecies from the beginning. Paul himself, then, was dealing with apparent contradiction in scriptures. He was dealing with prophecy *A* being made to Israel concurrently with prophecy which was the negation of *A*. His solution to the apparent contradiction is one that must be of first importance to us due to its being inspired by the Holy Spirit just as were the Old Testament prophecies themselves. And his solution is one that relegates the apparent contradiction to a distinction in *sense*, not *time*. The application of this observation is obvious: our understanding of the apparently contradictory Old Testament prophecies of eschatological Israel are to be solved with regard to a variable sense in which the term "Israel" is employed, and not with regard to a different time about which the prophecies are being made. That this conclusion is not in fundamental violation of the Old Testament prophecies viewed with respect to themselves alone is the proposition that this article will attempt to demonstrate; but before we turn to the Old Testament, it would be of benefit to substantiate further two points that we have just touched on: (1) that in the book of Romans, Paul is using the term "Israel" in a variable sense, and (2) that, in doing so, he is expressing his understanding of Old Testament prophecy, and not suggesting a novel development.

In the Book of Romans, Paul is Using the Term “Israel” in a Variable Sense, So As to Account for Apparent Contradictions in Old Testament Prophecies

Even the quickest perusal of Romans serves to substantiate this claim. In Romans 2:28-29 Paul sums up in as explicit terms as can be conceived the essential point that he has been taking some pains to demonstrate, namely, that

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (ESV)

We have here a proposition, together with its converse expression, clearly and unmistakably set forth. Positively, not all who are outwardly Jews are true Jews. And negatively, some who are not outwardly Jews are true Jews. This point, so clearly made, is to prove vital for our understanding of Old Testament prophecies made to Israel. Have they failed, because outward Israel is no longer God’s people? By no means. Why not? Because in the future they will become God’s people again? No, that is not the point of reconciliation for the apparent contradiction; rather, it is that the prophecies made to “Israel” intended Israel in a different sense than merely outward Jews. In fact, the whole reason this issue is being addressed is to disprove the supposition that, because the Jews do not believe in Christ, God’s

faithfulness has fallen into reproach (Romans 3:3). How could this conclusion be suggested, other than to adduce Old Testament prophecies that, in the days of Christ, Israel would still be God's people, with his law written on their hearts? Paul is simply demonstrating that the promises made to Israel have not failed because of the variable sense in which "Israel" was used by the Old Testament prophets.

Again, we have the same basic point expressed for us in Romans 9. Has the word of God failed? By no means. Why not? Because the prophecies made to Israel were made, not to outward Israel, but to elect Israel (Romans 9:6-13). Does this elect subset of Israel then exclude any who are not outwardly Israel? No, for the restored Israel prophesied in the Old Testament was to be an Israel who is truly God's people, irrespective of outward Jewishness. This is precisely the point of which we read in verses 23-26 of Romans 9. Paul here quotes a prophecy from Hosea 1, which expressly states that the rejected people of Israel will be restored, so that, once again, "the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea"; and, "in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God""; and, "the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together" (Hosea 1:10-11, ESV). So when Paul says that this restoration of God's people, involving their reconstitution as "the children of Israel" was fulfilled when God called all believers "not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles" (Romans 9:24), he is arguing that the Old Testament prophecies have not failed because the prophesied restoration of Israel intended a true Israel which was composed of various

ethnicities. In other words, there is a variable sense in which the Old Testament prophets employ the term “Israel,” even to the point of the prophet Hosea’s using that same term in the same passage to indicate two essentially different groups — “Israel” (physical offspring of Jacob) would be cast off, but “Israel” (elect from every nation) would be restored. So then, the Pauline approach to reconcile superficial Old Testament contradictions was to posit a different sense in the term “Israel,” and not a different time in which the prophecies would be fulfilled.

Nor is this conclusion at odds with Romans 11. Although this chapter has been understood as Paul’s substantiating the validity of the promises to Israel by deferring their fulfillment to a future epoch, the more reasonable understanding, which alone accords with the rest of the Romans passages addressing the same objection, is that a deferred time-frame is not at all being suggested. The answer to the question, “Has God rejected his people?” is not, “No, because in the future ethnic Israel will again be a people of God,” but, “May it not be! for I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin”; and, “In the same way, therefore, there is also in the present time a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:1-5). So then, the Old Testament prophecies are not vindicated because of a future fulfillment, but because of the present fulfillment to the restored remnant. Again, the answer to the question, “Have they stumbled that they should fall?” is not, “No, because in the future they will be restored,” but, “No, the purpose of their stumbling was not simply arbitrary, but rather it had the purpose of bringing the Gentiles in as fellow-partakers of salvation” (Romans 11:11,

paraphrased). This in turn was to provoke ethnic Israel to jealousy over the fact that the Gentiles were receiving God's riches, not through the works of the law, but by grace alone, in order to drive them to seek God's grace as pure grace, and not as favor conditioned on the merits of ethnic descent, law-keeping, or anything else. This was a cycle that Paul was laboring to see being fulfilled in his own day (Romans 11:13,14), and not something he awaited a future time to see. In conclusion, all "Israel" was being saved, as per the Old Testament prophecies, by the process of ethnic Gentiles and Jews provoking each other to come to the free riches of God's grace and glorify him who has mercy on all who are shut up in unbelief, regardless of race. (Romans 11:28-32). A variable sense in "Israel" terminology, not a future expectation for physical Israel, is Paul's reconciliation of apparent Old Testament prophetic failures. Hence in Romans 11:25,26, the clear teaching is that ethnic Israel was cast off as a people of God so that the Gentiles might be brought in to become an integral part of the people of God (just as a branch being grafted into a tree), and "in this way" all true Israel (Jews and Gentiles alike) will come to salvation. This is the only reasonable and consistent interpretation of these verses in spite of the common mistranslation of houtos (verse 26) as a temporal "then," instead of, in accordance with the actual meaning of the term, "in this way." That this interpretation necessitates a variable understanding of the term "Israel" in the same context should not be a surprise for us, since Paul clearly employs the term "Jew" in a variable sense in the immediate context of Romans 2:28,29, and indicates a variable sense in the immediate

context of Hosea 1:9-11 when he interprets it in Romans 9:23-26.

Now that we have substantiated our claim that Paul is vindicating the reliability of Old Testament prophecies by positing a variable sense of the term “Israel” as employed by the prophets, we will turn our attention to the Old Testament writings themselves. If there is any prophetic book which may lay claim to being superlative in its genre, it is the book of Isaiah. Therefore, we will address the prophecies of Isaiah, as a test-case for Old Testament prophetic writings in general, and attempt to establish, in doing so, that Isaiah’s prophecies of future Israel involve apparent contradictions; and that these ostensible contradictions can best be explained as resulting from a different sense in which they speak of “Israel,” not a different time-frame in which they speak of Israel.

A Brief Survey of Isaianic Eschatological Prophecies Concerning Israel

A brief survey of the prophecies of Isaiah as they touch the end-time state of Israel leaves us with an impression of two utterly distinct and diametrically opposed expectations for the nation. On the one hand, the days are coming in which Israel is to be cast off, forsaken, desolate, and destroyed. On the other hand, the days are prophesied in which Israel is to be accepted by God in a vastly more inclusive sense than ever before. She is to be holy, peaceful, fruitful beyond imagination, prosperous, and full of unflinching joy. The obvious and immediate tension felt at the simultaneous existence of two such classes of

prophecies representing patently incompatible portraits of eschatological Israel is only a little alleviated at first: but as the prophecies continue to unfold, the nature of the solution to this apparent difficulty becomes more and more clear. At the end of the book, in fact, it is stated in quite explicit terms. Let's turn to the text to trace this progression in brief.

Chapter One

In the first chapter of his writings, Isaiah immediately lays out some major themes of his argument, which will form the substance of his message throughout the book. These themes include

that Israel has enjoyed a privileged status as God's own people, the children of his fatherly care (Isaiah 1:2a)

that Israel has egregiously rebelled against her Maker in spite of her privileged status (Isaiah 1:2b-4)

that Israel has undergone severe chastisement for her transgressions (Isaiah 1:5-8)

that the only factor standing in the way of Israel's absolute destruction is God's preservation of an elect remnant (Isaiah 1:9)

that Israel cannot presume God's favor or willingness to listen on the basis of any national distinction, but on the basis of an internal righteousness alone (Isaiah 1:10-17)

that this internal righteousness is offered by God through a complete cleansing of sin (Isaiah 1:18)

that it is only those who actually receive this cleansing who will be preserved and enjoy prosperity; but those who rebel will be devoured (Isaiah 1:19,20)

that on this basis the prophetic outlook for Israel is nothing but utter and absolute destruction and rejection by God (Isaiah 1:21-25;28-31)

that in the midst of this prophetic picture of destruction and rejection is a diametrically opposed prophetic expectation for Israel which looks to a restoration which extends beyond any previous condition of blessing and is characterized by a genuine, reigning, pervasive righteousness (Isaiah 1:26,27)

In summary, from the beginning Isaiah anticipates a time in which Israel as a national entity will be utterly cut off for her rebellion; and yet not all Israel will be lost, for God will sovereignly save an elect remnant by going to the exorbitant lengths of atoning for their sins and working a righteousness within them. Of utmost importance is that, on the basis of these foundational themes, Isaiah gives two prophetic outlooks for “the faithful city,” Zion, which indicate vastly different end-time scenarios. These are given in the same context, to the extent that the one prophetic picture is surrounded before and after by prophecies which give the opposite picture. Although there are some differences in the immediate context

by way of terminology, mode of address, etc., which indicate a distinction in the subjects of the prophecy, there are also modes of expression which are common to each, for instance, “the faithful city,” which is addressed to a city about to be consumed and a city about to be restored. In other words, in Isaiah 1:24-31 we have the first example of what may superficially be understood as an A equals non-A formula: Israel will be rejected, Israel will not be rejected; Israel will be redeemed, Israel will be consumed, etc. However, in the broader context, we have the first hint that would lead us to a reconciliation of this apparent contradiction: “Israel” (or “Zion,” “the House of Israel,” and so on) is being used indiscriminately to describe two different sets of people: (1) those who are outwardly Israel but inwardly wicked; and (2) those who are the remnant of Israel and inwardly righteous. The broad context of Isaiah, then, would lead us to favor a reconciliation of apparently contradictory “Israel” prophecies by supposing a different sense in “Israel” terminology, and not by supposing a different time frame to which the prophecies refer. Who precisely is comprised in this set of “the remnant” of Israel remains somewhat ambiguous, but becomes clearer as the prophecies continue.

Chapter 2

In chapter two, we immediately discern one of the most optimistic outlooks for eschatological Israel in any of the prophetic writings. Included in this lofty expectation is fruitfulness, all-pervasive peace, genuine, internal righteousness, and the very presence and teaching of God himself (Isaiah 2:1-4). All of this

is in a very Jewish context: all the blessings flow from “the house of the God of Jacob,” the law goes forth “out of Zion,” and the word of the Lord proceeds “from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). What is strikingly different about this prophecy, when compared with the previous chapter’s prophecy of hope for the remnant, is that all the nations of the world are included in its extent (Isaiah 2:2,3). Is this simply a case of expanding the subjects of prophesied blessing, so that the remnant is included together with a distinct set composed of all nationalities? Verse five, following on the heels of the first four verses, seems to indicate otherwise: immediately after the description of “all nations” coming to walk in the light of the Lord, we find Isaiah giving an exhortation to those who are to be included in these blessings, that they should take heart and see them actually realized. In so doing, he refers to this set of persons who are about to experience the future blessings of Zion, and who are to come from every nation, as the “house of Jacob” — “O house of Jacob, come,” Isaiah urges, “and let us walk in the light of Yahweh.” So we see the first hint that the remnant of the house of Jacob is to be multinational. If one prefers to interpret verse five as being addressed merely to national Israel, he retains a problem of another sort: a blatant prophetic contradiction that gives no contextual hint of being salvable by relegating one or the other to a different time-frame. For the next verse immediately states that God has “forsaken [his] people, the house of Jacob.” If God has forsaken his people, then the foregoing prophecies, which are so clearly depicted in Jewish terms, must have nothing to do with the house of Jacob. How are we to account for this apparent

contradiction? The context gives us an answer: the house of Jacob has become thoroughly Gentile: verses six through nine catalogue the resemblance of Israel to the Gentile nations around them. If many from the nations become as the house of Jacob, coming to Zion and being taught of the Lord; and if many from the house of Jacob become as the Gentiles, worshiping idols, practicing wizardry, and so on; then God makes clear that he will cast off those who are the house of Jacob outwardly but Gentiles inwardly, and that he will bring to Zion those who are Gentiles outwardly but the house of Jacob inwardly. In conclusion, Isaiah 2:1-5, set off against Isaiah 2:6-22, presents the reader with a clear *A equals non-A* formula. No time-frame difference is indicated to ameliorate the contradiction. But the context makes a difference in sense painstakingly clear: those who are inwardly righteous and God-lovers are to be treated as the house of Jacob, and blessed with the riches of Zion. Those who are outwardly wicked and pagan are to be cast off and destroyed. In this way, we start to see the prophetic “remnant” of Israel take on a multi-national quality, just as Paul later observed in his letter to the Romans.

Chapter 3, Verses 1-11

As we proceed to chapter three, we see more clear prophecies regarding the absolute destruction and casting off of Israel as a nation. Once again, this is because of her essential similarity to Gentiles, in this case Sodom in particular (Isaiah 3:9). Hope is again given to a select set of those who are different, and again, the criteria for receiving blessing instead of cursing is internal righteousness rather than internal

wickedness (Isaiah 3:10,11). Other than the clarity resulting from repetition and the continued emphasis on internal righteousness, there is nothing here that substantially adds to our understanding of the remnant, or the variable sense of “Israel” terminology. And so we continue to

Chapter 3, Verse 12 through Chapter 4

The rest of chapter three basically catalogues a thorough destruction of Israel, with special attention being directed to her women, as typical of the qualities of the nation in general. The prophecies continue to emphasize utter destruction because of utter corruption. The summative statement of the entire catalogue of prophecies is in Chapter 4, verse 1, where we read, “And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, “We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach”” (ESV). The women of Zion have been thoroughly haughty and corrupt, and therefore, in the eschatological period of the end times (“in that day”), the women of Zion will be put to thorough shame and reproach. There is nothing positive whatsoever in this summative prophecy against the women of Zion. And yet in the next verse, in the very same time frame (prefaced again with the same expression, “in that day”), we find a prophecy which is precisely the opposite being made regarding the remnant of Israel. This prophecy is explicitly said to include “the daughters of Zion,” who were also the subjects of the diametrically opposed prophecies preceding (Isaiah 4:4). We ascertain a major development in this prophecy by noting the

essential connection between inward righteousness (the condition for eschatological blessing, as we have observed before), and truly Jewish qualities. For those who remain of Zion and Jerusalem, that is, for those whose filth has been purged away, there shall be reserved a dwelling place on Mount Zion. But this dwelling place will be greater than that of old Israel inasmuch as the presence of God will be personally found in each individual assembly. The pillar of cloud and fire, long symbolizing God's presence with national Israel, will be individualized in the eschaton, so that every one who dwells in Zion will have the pillar of God's presence before him personally. The vast implications of this prophecy are noted by the author of Hebrews, who develops the theme, declaring that all believers in this period of the last days worship on Mount Zion, and come into the very presence of God (Hebrews 12:18-24). Being Jewish, and experiencing the blessings of being Jewish, are therefore internalized. In other words, being a Jew has taken on a different sense than one of outward nationality; and it is this circumstance which explains the blatant (but superficial) contradiction in the prophecies of chapter 4, verse 1, and chapter 4, verses 2-6.

Chapter 6, Verses 9-13

In the latter portion of chapter six, we find a striking prophecy that has much bearing on our topic at hand. God's judgment of Israel includes hardening and blinding so that they will not understand and turn and be healed (Isaiah 6:9,10). Consequent to this judicial hardening God will bring about destruction

and captivity, laying waste to Israel (Isaiah 6:11,12). However, in his mercy God will preserve a remnant, whom he will bring back to the land (Isaiah 6:13a). This series of events is likened to a great tree having been felled: the tree is Israel, who has been cast off; the stump is the holy remnant of Israel which alone remains; the inference is that God will cast off the main body of his people, who have become corrupt, but preserve just enough who are still holy to grow once again the tree (symbolic of his people) from the same stump. It is striking to compare this analogy to Paul's illustration in Romans 11 of national Israel being branches who have been removed from God's tree, and believing Gentiles being branches grafted into the same tree. If we admit a similarity of interpretation between the two images, it is no difficult stretch to see the point of this parable being God's intention to cast off the bulk of ethnic Israel, who are not truly his people, preserving only enough to "grow" from that remnant a true Israel, composed predominantly of those who are Gentile by ethnicity.

Chapter 8, Verses 13-16

Here we have a prophecy of Christ, given with an understanding that, when he comes, he will be rejected by his people, and a cause for their stumbling, instead of their salvation. Therefore, God will hide his face from the house of Jacob. Nevertheless, Christ will redeem a multitude to be his children, and these children will be signs and wonders in Israel, raised up by the God who dwells in Zion. So then, in the days of Christ, those who are not of the house of Jacob will be taken into Israel as God's

children; and this will be a sign, most likely with the intent of provoking physical Israel to jealousy, as we read in Romans 11.

Chapter 8, Verse 21 through Chapter 9, Verse 6

In this prophecy we see that Israel will walk in gloom and darkness; but pursuant to this, the light will shine among the Gentile nations, in the way of the sea. This process is not referred to as a casting off of the nation, but as a multiplying of the nation, and an increasing of its joy (Isaiah 9:3). This increase of the nation is resultant of the eternal, personal reign of Christ from the throne of David, a reign which will comprehend "Galilee of the Gentiles". Therefore, the increase of the nation of Israel in the days of the reign of Christ involves Gentile inclusion. Gentiles do not just enjoy benefits alongside Israel; they are the substance by which the nation grows.

Chapter 10, Verses 17-23

We find here a definite element of time-sequence in the prophetic expectation for Israel. The nation will be cast off, and subsequently will return. However, the subjects of the prophecy of return are narrowed down to include a mere remnant who are righteous. Israel will indeed be exiled and then restored; but even in this circumstance we see that the essence of restored Israel will be unlike that of exiled Israel. Israel of the restoration will be an Israel of internal genuineness.

Chapter 10, Verse 33 through Chapter 11

The prophecies included in this portion of the book are as explicit as any we have encountered thus far. Prefatory to the prophetic picture of joy, peace, and righteousness in Zion is the image, once again, of Jehovah lopping off branches and cutting down thickets, until almost all is destroyed. In fact, only one root is left, and only one shoot remains to come forth from the holy stump. This one last shoot, growing from the stump of Jesse and designated the “Branch,” is none other than Christ himself. God will cast off his wicked people so thoroughly that, in reality, the righteous remnant is coterminous with Christ alone. This is vital for what follows. Immediately after this prophecy of the Shoot’s springing from the stump of Jesse, we see him beginning to exercise a dominion of righteousness and peace all over the earth. He judges from Zion, and all the nations come to seek his blessing. In this manner, Christ recovers his remnant from the entire world (Isaiah 11:11). In what way are we to understand this, except that the circumstance of the nations coming to Christ is identical with the remnant of Israel being restored? So then, the remnant will be restored, they will be internally righteous, and they will be from all the nations of the world. Hence, we read in verse 11 that the remnant will come “from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea” (ESV). The restored remnant of Israel is a multi-national body. That this intends those who are by ethnicity Assyrians, etc., and not merely those who are ethnic Israelites dwelling in Assyria is suggested by the

juxtaposition in the following verse of the phrases, “He shall lift up a banner for the nations,” and “[he] shall gather together the outcasts of Israel,” and “[he shall] assemble the scattered ones of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” Lifting up a banner around which the nations might gather is thereby equated with gathering together the dispersed of Israel. The true restored Israel must, therefore, be comprised of persons from all nations. How this may technically be the case is suggested in verse one of chapter eleven, where we learn that, in actuality, the righteous remnant of Israel is Christ alone, the only righteous seed of David. Therefore, all those who are in Christ, and only those who are in Christ, qualify as the righteous remnant. And those who will come to Christ in the last days will arise from every nation on earth.

Chapter 66, Verses 18 through 24

Although we could profitably continue throughout the rest of the book in the same manner, finding prophecies ever more clear and explicit (particularly in chapters 48-66), time now forbids us; therefore, we will advance to the last prophecy of the book, at the end of chapter sixty-six. Here we read of Isaiah speaking to the people of Israel (cf. verses 10 and following), and prophesying that the Lord will draw Gentiles from every nation to be their brothers (Isaiah 66:18-20); and that of these Gentiles-turned-brothers-to-the-Israelites, God will choose some to be priests and Levites (verse 21). In this manner Israel’s seed and name will remain; but not the old Israel: a recreated Israel (Isaiah 66:22; cf. Isaiah 65:18), an Israel who is composed of various ethnicities. At the

conclusion of Isaiah, therefore, it is patently clear that a Levite is no longer one physically descended from Levi, even as Israel is no longer physically descended from Jacob. Instead there is a newly created Israel, circumcised in heart, but composed of persons from every nation. Apart from this foundational understanding of the various significations with which Isaiah employs the term “Israel,” his whole prophetic corpus must remain an obscure mass of contradictions.

Conclusion

In Isaiah, as indeed throughout the rest of the prophetic writings, we are initially struck with a multitude of apparently contradictory prophecies related to eschatological Israel. In certain of these instances, a difference in time frame is contextually ruled out as a means whereby to reconcile the apparent contradiction. However, many of these prophetic interplays give contextual reasons for understanding a reconciliation of the ostensible contradiction by means of a difference in the signification of the term “Israel”. Some of these contextual reasons are very explicit, as, for instance, in the latter part of chapter sixty-six. Furthermore, this understanding accords very well with clear New Testament teaching on the subject. A recognition of this basic principle will go far in enabling the interpreter to piece together the scriptural message by means of scripturally-derived canons of interpretation. God grant us a Spirit-led sensitivity to the richness and complexity of “Israel” terminology in

the prophets, and resultantly, the deeply-satisfying product of a thoroughly Christ-centered understanding of scriptures, for which we must all be laboring.

ARE THERE TWO GOSPELS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?



I JUST FINISHED reading an article which had obviously been influenced by the idea that there are two distinct gospels in the New Testament. This insistence that there is a “gospel of the Kingdom,” which Jesus proclaimed to ethnic Jews, who rejected it insistently enough that they received a temporary retraction of the offer; and that this gospel is to be sharply distinguished from the gospel for the Church, as defined in I Corinthians 15:1-4; is a common Dispensational understanding (see Renald Showers’ book, *There Really is a Difference*, for an example of such argumentation). Frankly, this disturbs me greatly, first of all, because it makes nonsense of the whole tenor of New Testament teaching. If the “Gospel of the Kingdom,” is a different gospel than that which is preached today, then why is this “Gospel of the Kingdom,” which Jesus had been proclaiming throughout his ministry (e.g. Matthew 4:23, 9:25), the very same gospel that he said must be proclaimed in

all the world before his return (Matthew 24:14)? Why is it that the apostles throughout the New Testament writings continued to proclaim this Kingdom-gospel (see Acts 8:12; 20:24-25; 28:23, 30-31)? How can one justify adhering to a belief that is so eloquently argued against throughout the New Testament scriptures?

But this blatant lack of scriptural legitimacy is not the only reason that this philosophy so deeply disturbs me. Following are several further reasons that I am so opposed to it.

1. It minimizes the kingly glory of Christ

First, in that it minimizes the nature of his Kingdom. The Dispensational dualistic gospel idea is driven by an urge to see the Kingdom restricted to a thousand year earthly reign of Christ over his ethnic people, Israel. This is in contradiction to the New Testament teaching on the Kingdom, which indicates, first, that the Kingdom arrived with the coming of Christ (see, for example, Matthew 12:27-28, which clearly states that the Kingdom of God has actually arrived, to which reality Christ's power over demons bears certain witness); second, that the Kingdom of God is not merely a physical entity that comes with observation (see Luke 17:20-21), but rather consists of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17), as well as "power" which is presently displayed in the Church (I Corinthians 4:20); and finally, that we who have believed today are Kingdom-citizens (e.g. Colossians 1:13, and Revelation 1:5-6, 9). Now, consider well: if one were to deny a great king a vast portion of his subjects, and greatly restrict the

bounds of his kingdom from what he had declared them to be, would he not be offering that king a sharp insult, and robbing him of his royal dignity? When done to the King of kings, this is no small matter.

And second, in that it minimizes the present reality of his reign. For again, the Dispensationalists hold to this two-gospel idea so that they can say that Jesus is not now reigning, but he will in the future. However, the New Testament teaches us that when Jesus was raised from the dead, he ascended to the throne of David, is now reigning, and will reign until all things have been put under his feet (e.g. Acts 2:32-36; I Corinthians 15:20-28; Hebrews 1:8-9; Ephesians 1:18-23). This is not only an error, but a terrible slight against Jesus' royal dignity.

2. It minimizes the unity of Christ's redemptive work

In the gospels, we have a picture of Christ's intent upon one purpose, namely the accomplishment of redemption; he is able to do nothing other than what the Father had planned for him in the pursuit of that accomplishment (e.g. John 5:19-20; 10:14-18; 17:1-10), and he is intentionally fulfilling all positive righteousness from the beginning of his ministry (e.g. Matthew 3:15), all the while resolutely setting his face to go to Jerusalem to fulfill likewise the passive righteousness of suffering for sins (e.g. Luke 9:51; Matthew 17:22-23). The Dispensational two-gospel idea, on the other hand, sees Jesus as offering a physical kingdom to the Jews, at first; and then, when he has been rejected, turning to accomplish a different

work, namely, the purchase of our pardon on the cross.

3. It robs us of our part in Christ's work on earth.

The effect that follows from our last observation, that Jesus was always intent upon his one redemptive purpose during his life on earth, is that we who have received his redemption have received the effects of his entire life's work. This is absolutely vital for our eternal welfare, for we have need not just of forgiveness of sins, which Christ accomplished for us by suffering for our transgressions on the cross; but also, we have need of a positive righteousness, which Christ accomplished for us through his life of perfect obedience. If Jesus' words and works were intended for the ethnic Jews, to offer to them a physical kingdom and to demonstrate his authority to make the offer, then we who are not ethnic Jews have no share in his accomplishments from this time period. And if we do not, we have no sufficient righteousness with which to approach the Father. Remember as well, that part of Jesus' work in "bearing our sicknesses" was fulfilled in his ministry on earth (Matthew 8:16-17); but we are cut off from this aspect of Jesus' substitutionary ministry if the Dispensational two-gospel scheme should adhere.

4. It makes impossible for us a direct application of Christ's earthly teachings

Jesus' teachings on the blood-earnestness of Kingdom living, the riches that await Kingdom-citizens, the denial and eternal punishment that awaits those who do not take up their cross and follow him, and so on, are made useless with regard to the invigorating and soul-stirring effects that they ought to have upon us as Christians, if they actually set forth to the ethnic Jews the way to gain a part in a future physical Kingdom. Largely on the basis of this Dispensational teaching, there has emerged the false gospel of easy-believism, which asserts that mental assent to the factual truths of the crucifixion and resurrection is sufficient to ensure one of eternal salvation, even if he is not willing to follow Jesus as his Lord – for the statements that Christ made which indicate that one cannot follow him unless he takes up his cross, hates father and mother and even his own life, etc., are made to the Jews who stand to gain a temporal reward in the earthly kingdom, and have no connection with the different gospel, proclaimed to the Church. Oh, what riches we are denying ourselves, and oh, to what heresies we open ourselves up, when we call Jesus' teaching a different gospel!

5. It requires a different way of salvation for the pre-Pentecost ethnic Jews

This, because it is clear throughout the gospel accounts, that when certain Jews believed in the gospel-teaching of Jesus, they were not only granted kingdom-heir status, but they were forgiven of their sins. Now, if this was a different gospel, then the fact of the matter is, the Jews in Jesus' day were saved by

believing in a different gospel than that which we today believe in for salvation. Instead of believing in the person and work of Christ, they have to believe that, if their works are sufficiently righteous, they will be duly rewarded in a physical kingdom (for this is what the Dispensationalists say the gospel of the Kingdom entails – physical rewards for righteousness/faithfulness) – and then, their sins are forgiven. This is not much different from that Dispensational teaching which says that faith has always been the way of salvation, but the content of that faith differed from era to era. This is a very pernicious error, that cuts away every ground of hope for eternal salvation, which is only to be found in the Messiah and his substitutionary sacrifice.

6. It robs the true Jews of their greatest riches

It is ironic that Dispensationalists tend to think that they are the friends of ethnic Israel, boldly standing up for their peculiar privileges, whereas Covenant Theologians have minimized Israel's status and importance. Just ask any ethnic Jew who has come to believe in the Messiah whether his greatest treasure is Christ, or a share in a thousand year physical kingdom that will be reserved for ethnic Israel alone. The physical glory of the Dispensational understanding of Jewish privileges falls vastly short of what we Covenant Theologians hope and pray for ethnic Israel, namely, that they might be granted repentance so that the full number of the remnant will be grafted back into their own natural tree, where they will share in the eternal glory of the imperishable

Kingdom that now is, and that will one day find its ultimate realization in the new heavens and new earth. We trust that this full remnant will indeed return to the Lord, maybe even in great numbers, near the end of the age (see Romans 11); this is a far richer and more comfortable doctrine for our Israelite friends than that, after a “secret rapture,” they will face seven years of persecution while the Church (which is different than they) will be feasting with Christ as his true bride (which they are not); at the end of which time, they will reign over the earth in their imperfect bodies, living and dying, while the Church (which they are not) reigns with Christ in glorified bodies. This two-gospel idea seems somewhat anti-Semitic, in that it reserves for the Jews the gospel which is vastly inferior in the nature of its rewards.

Conclusion

Of all the Dispensationally-derived errors in the Church today, one of the most serious is this two-gospel teaching. It is in flagrant contradiction to the overwhelming tenor of New Testament truth, and it brings one to the brink of several very destructive heresies. I trust that most Dispensionalists have not fallen into these deep and fearful chasms which have been opened up around them by certain of their peculiarly Dispensational understandings, but I feel compelled to call out the warning that those chasms are indeed there, on the boundaries of all their good grazing land – and I fear lest, throughout the course of their generations, some such doctrine as the two-

gospel error may swallow up many in some greater heresy to which it should give rise. I trust that God's grace has enabled me to say these things in love, and out of genuine concern for my Dispensational friends, who like me have experienced the one true gospel of God's free grace.

DISPENSATIONALISM AND THE ECLIPSE OF CHRIST (AN OPEN CORRESPONDENCE)



AS MANY of you are no doubt aware, I was raised a Dispensationalist. When I first became convinced that the teachings of Dispensationalism are not supported by an honest assessment of scriptures, I determined to change my thinking on the topic, and so be done with the issue summarily. Such were my intentions, but I found, much to my surprise, that the roots of Dispensationalism are so deep, and they affect so profoundly one's way of thinking about virtually every theological issue, that the task of rejecting one's own Dispensationally-flavored way of viewing the Bible is no simple task. It is a monumental struggle that requires years of deep, intense, Spirit-reliant searching of the scriptures. As I embarked on this long process, I slowly became aware of a vast array of manners in which a thorough grounding in the Dispensational ideal tends to influence one's beliefs

and emphases. This in itself was shocking to me; but what came as the severest shock of all was the reflection that virtually every one of these Dispensationally-derived misunderstandings tended in some way towards the eclipse of Christ as the sum and substance of every redemptive promise and reality, the One for whom, to whom, and by whom are all things, the One who sums up all of reality, brings all things under his feet, and is in himself all the fullness of the Godhead. Let me be clear here: I have no doubt that many, if not all Dispensationalists would affirm in theory the Christo-centrism of all reality; nevertheless, the fact remains that in practice they deny the explicit Christ-centeredness of many times, persons, and realities in history - and not just minor, inconsequential persons and things, but those that stand out as epoch-defining and historically-pivotal.

I am indeed grateful for the many resources available today which demonstrate scripturally that Dispensationalism is in error. I think that our current need is not so much to argue *that* Dispensationalism is wrong - although such efforts will certainly continue to be helpful - as it is to show *just how grave* and far-reaching the errors really are. In contribution to this latter goal, I have reproduced a portion of an interaction that I had some time ago with one of my Dispensational friends. My hope is that the preceding comments and following correspondence will not be unduly inflammatory or derogatory in nature, but that they will be used by God "for equipping the saints for the work of the ministry [and] for the edification of the body of Christ, until we all attain, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto

a perfect man..." (Ephesians 4:12-13). We all retain errors of some sort in our striving after the full knowledge of Christ and his great work: God grant that such dialogues between fellow-believers in Christ may be useful in the doctrinal maturation of each one of us!

I will begin with a portion of a letter written by my friend, in which he responds to a comment I had made labeling Dispensationalism as "dangerous"; and then proceed to my response to his letter.

Initial Letter from a Dispensationalist Friend

I understand that you think my teaching is dangerous, but I am at a loss as to what makes it so.

I am Trinitarian according to the 1689 Baptist Confession. I believe in inerrancy as explained by Warfield. I believe in the substitutionary death and physical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. I believe in the resurrection of all the saints to glory, and in the just, eternal, conscious torment of all the damned. I teach Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus, Sola fide, Sola Gracia, Sola Deo Gloria, total depravity (and inability), unconditional (individual) election, particular redemption (as generally expressed by Grudem), irresistible grace (and the priority of regeneration to conversion), and perseverance of the saints (including the Reformed view of sanctification as presented in 1689 Baptist Confession and Sinclair Ferguson's essay in the five-views book). Though those in the Reformed camp have traditionally disagreed on apologetics (Warfield vs. Kuyper; Clark vs. Van Til; Sproul vs. Bahnsen), I am, as you are,

presuppositional in my apologetic, understanding the Christian worldview to provide the only reasonable basis for knowledge, ethics, morality, and brushing one's teeth. I fail to see how a distinction between the eschatological roles of true Israel and the true Church puts any of these doctrines in danger. While other dispensationalists may not be as conservative on these things as I am, they made up a strong contingent of conservative, Bible-believing Christians in America of the twentieth century.

As [_____] said, eschatology is a difficult subject, but it is worth our study. Your change in position implies that you agree with me on both counts. I understand that you passionately believe what you have stated; I too passionately believe what I have stated elsewhere on this forum. That means that we both think the other person is dead wrong. Nonetheless, patience with one another is essential to forwarding the conversation, and, in my view, calling one another "dangerous" should be somewhat further down the road of disagreement.

My Letter in Response

I accept your rebuke all the more seriously, perhaps, by reason of my own experiences in being labeled unorthodox for teaching what I understood then, and still understand, to be derived exclusively from the scriptures. Before I respond specifically to your question as to my labeling of Dispensationalism as "dangerous," let me affirm to you that I am not now, and certainly never intended before now, to call you a heretic, or to say that what you believe, as you

have explained yourself, is heresy. I truly and honestly rejoice at your clear and sincere commitment to the great and fundamental doctrines of the faith. I am both encouraged and rebuked by your passionate love for Christ and your diligence in studying carefully the word of our God. But I am not sure (even if I stated it too harshly or was too little specific in what precisely I was warning against) - I am still not sure that I am ready to rescind my assessment of Dispensationalism as "dangerous." Even in using the term, I intend to imply a difference between heresy and the simple schema of Dispensationalism - it is dangerous because it may *lead* (as I believe) to heresy, or it may assume *forms* which are heretical. Although those specific forms of Dispensationalism which I would call heretical I have never heard espoused by you or anyone I know from your particular circles, and neither do I expect to. But let me move from these realms of vague generalities, and mention what I perceive to be dangers of the system. All of these "dangers" are either things that I have been clearly and specifically taught as Dispensationalism, or things about which I have been confused - things which largely shaped my thinking - when I was a dispensationalist. I think some of these things you will agree with me are "dangerous" (or downright heretical): but you will not agree that they are necessarily dispensational. I would argue that they are (1) clearly taught by many dispensationalists, or (2) clearly demanded by consistent loyalty to dispensational tenets.

1. *Dispensationalism tends to a Kierkegaardian conception of faith.*

I adduce this danger as one having suffered from it personally. I was always taught that, although salvation was always by faith alone, the content of that faith differed in other dispensations (the position which Ryrie clearly espouses). The way this was presented to me (and the way I understood and believed it) was that, essentially, Noah was saved by believing it would rain. And so on. In other words, it was not faith in Christ alone, but faith with respect only to itself that saved a person (and similarly, even today the abstraction "faith" has some mystical eternal life-giving power in itself). Obviously this conception of faith is somewhat Kierkegaardian, but I am convinced that it affects the minds of far more evangelicals than we would like to admit. Faith in itself is nothing, it only turns our eyes to someone who is everything. Dispensationalism taught me that faith was what saved, and not that faith was the means through which Christ saved. Regardless of how else we may differ on Acts 2 interpretations of OT prophecies, I think we would both admit that Peter was quite confident that David had a faith which looked ahead to a resurrected Christ, as did all the OT saints. The genuinely Christocentric nature of faith and salvation from the beginning is obscured (dangerously) by dispensationalism.

2. *Dispensationalism was destructive to my ability to grasp the unity and significance of the biblical story.*

For instance, when I was a dispensationalist, the Davidic Covenant was of almost no import whatsoever to me in structuring the epochs of past redemptive history. It revealed God's gracious condescension to mankind, as did, for instance, his promise to Hezekiah that he would live fifteen more years, and so on. But as far as structuring the biblical story, I saw nothing monumental in it. I thought the bible was structured in "dispensations," and the giving of the covenant did not mark a new administration essentially different from that of "law". When I forsook dispensationalism, I was shocked by how central that covenant was, particularly among the writing prophets, in advancing the eternal kingdom of God. And I was much better equipped to make sense of Acts 2 (again) and Christ's reigning from the throne of David in the New Testament. In brief, the grand, Christ-centered, organically-connected, unified story of redemption and the spread of the kingdom was for me split into several inter-related, but not organically progressing, periods. And in the process the glory of Christ and his grand drama of redemption was dangerously eclipsed. In the exchange, by the way, the stories of the OT became "Aesop's fables," tales that contain a moral for upright living, but have no real connection to me, and no real glorying in Christ alone, and no real awe-struck wondering at how the story of redemption was unfolding until it reached its height of glory in the spiritual realities of the New Testament that were promised and typified and illustrated and yearned for in the Old Testament - much as a mustard tree growing until it is the greatest of all the herbs, and excels in the glory which inhered in its seed from the beginning.

3. *Dispensationalism tainted my mindset with leanings towards Arminianism.*

This particularly with regard to the dispensational teaching of the offering of the kingdom. What is more absurd than the idea of a king "offering" to reign? This whole mindset of a God who is "sovereign" by invitation only - who reigns unless he is rejected - strikes me as fundamentally Arminian. Again, I know that you are not in any way Arminian - but I believe that Arminianism is consonant with dispensationalism, and that the largely Arminian worldview of many Christians is reinforced by dispensational teaching. Let me add here, dispensationalism contributed to my blind acceptance of the philosophy of easy-believism. If Christ was only teaching that we must give up everything to follow him into some crassly physical thousand year reign, then eternal salvation (in my mind something wholly distinct) might well have had other demands. Simply faith, which was ultimately Kierkegaardian, and demanded no accepting of Christ as "Lord," became the abstraction by which I assured myself of eternal life, with no regard for the persevering work of Christ continuing in my life.

4. *Dispensationalism (the version I was taught) embraces a horrendously insufficient view of the new covenant in Christ's blood.*

I have had more than one well-respected dispensationalist (in our old circles) try to convince me that the new covenant in Christ's blood has nothing to do with us. Because (forget the four gospel

accounts, I Corinthians 11, Hebrews 8, 10, etc.) the new covenant was prophecied for "Israel" which can never be anything other than ethnic Israel (forget also what Paul said about a true Jew being one who is a Jew inwardly). So how does the blood of Christ affect us, the church (as distinct from the rest of the redeemed)? We get, (and I quote) "peripheral benefits" of Christ's blood. I consider this blasphemy, and although I do not believe that you hold to this assessment (on the contrary, your comments have apprised me otherwise), yet I think this position is one that is ultimately demanded by the dispensational way of reading OT prophecies.

5. *Dispensationalism (the version I was taught) embraces what must be considered a blasphemous idea of a return to a system of priests and sacrifices of bulls and goats.*

The author of Hebrews leaves me no doubt that any return to priests other than Christ or any spilling of sacrificial blood now that Christ's has been spilled, can be nothing other than blasphemy. But this is precisely what has been taught to me by many well-respected dispensationalists.

6. *Dispensationalism, in destroying the unity of God's redemptive purpose in the Church, minimizes the singular, all-encompassing headship of Christ.*

All of creation and history was devised with the purpose of showcasing the glory and nature of God. This is particularly true with Christ's great work of

redemption, the work to facilitate the accomplishment of which all of history was designed. Now, what are some of the things that Christ's great work was intended to reveal about Christ's glorious person? That he occupies the *unique* and solitary position of the one true bridegroom to the one pure bride (Ephesians 5:23), the one Head to his one Church (Ephesians 1:22-23), the one who, with respect to redemptive history, gathers all things together in himself (Ephesians 1:9-11). If God's redeemed are comprised of different peoples with different destinies, contra Ephesians 2:11-22, then there no longer remains a unique and all-encompassing position of highest glory for Christ to fulfill. He is effectually made one Head to two bodies which are independent of each other; one king to two different countries, each with their own customs and peculiar characteristics; one bridegroom to two brides; the one who gathers all things together in himself, and yet keeps them at distinction within himself, withholding from them the unity that his blood is elsewhere said to accomplish. It is a glorious king who can rule two mutually distinct peoples; it is a far more glorious King who can unite them both into one unique people who forever sing his praise as their one unique King.

7. *Dispensationalism tends toward a real ethnocentrism as regards Israel (which springs from a veiled materialism).*

I used to think that America's allying herself with Israel, regardless of the political situation and Israel's justice or injustice at the time, would unconditionally result in blessings from God. This

thinking did not come isolated from my dispensationally-flavored world view. Where, exactly, did this whole mode of thinking come from? From embracing old types and shadows to the minimization of the spiritual realities that they were meant to convey. The vast extent of NT teachings on the particular members of the Church loving and caring for each other must be a truer response to the status of "Israel" as God's chosen people than the modern cult of red-heifer hopefuls displaying a racist favoritism toward a particular ethnic group.

8. In summary, Dispensationalism tends to downplay the Christocentric nature of all reality.

If some of these other things are true - if faith, not the object or "content" of that faith is what is important - and if the physical offspring of Abraham, not those who are in Christ, the true seed of Abraham, are God's chosen people - and if a physical Jewish millennium, not Christ's spiritual reign over the entire earth is the goal of human history, and so on - if all these things are true, then the extent to which all of history and reality can be said to be Christocentric must be dangerously limited. This is my biggest problem with dispensationalism.

I want to reaffirm that I am not accusing you of believing any of these things specifically, or of teaching anything which you suppose may detract from the glory of Christ. But I am observing that these results are very real and very extreme in many dispensationalists I have known (even in myself, when I was a dispensationalist). And I don't think it is

because all of those affected misunderstood what dispensationalism really is. I think it's because the very schema of dispensationalism lends itself to these conclusions.

Please don't doubt my sincere love for you in the bonds of our precious Savior, Jesus Christ. If these things I have written are not true, show me (scripturally) how they are not, and I will, to that extent, modify my position.

In Christ,
Nathan

Concluding Observations

I have come to the conclusion that Dispensationalism is a much more serious threat to a well-informed biblical worldview than I was once inclined to think of it. Dispensationalism is not exclusively (or even predominantly) a complicated eschatological schema that lends itself to bizarre novels. The eschatological phenomena, which are so predominant to many people, have their roots in a soil from which spring ideas and conceptions of all of redemptive history, and which even extend to one's understanding of the position and nature of the Redeemer. Thankfully, many Dispensationalists are affected in their understanding of these weightier issues only to varying degrees, some quite minimal. However, this ameliorating circumstance can only come through allowing inconsistencies with their basic worldview to predominate in certain areas. And as Dispensationalism is allowed to flavor their

thinking, to that extent their understanding even of matters of great importance will be dangerously clouded. It is a task of the greatest importance to be diligent in exposing the underlying beliefs of the Dispensational ideal, examining those beliefs in the light of scripture, and informing our brothers and sisters who have, to varying degrees, been affected by this system.

THE THREAT OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM



IF THE PHENOMENAL success of the bestselling *Left Behind* series indicates anything about the prevailing eschatological mindset across a wide swath of the evangelical landscape in modern America, then we would do well to pause and consider. Where is this fascination with the sensational, and frequently outright bizarre, interpretation of the significance of current events coming from? What is driving the obsession to see end-time prophetic events transpiring in every headline? What connection does this mindset have with the implacable opposition to any measure taken for peace in the Middle East which would leave the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, or any part of Jerusalem outside of the complete control of the modern state of Israel? More importantly, what ideologies, theological convictions, or ways of understanding the bible lie beneath these phenomena, and how much of an impact are they having on the theological moorings of the Church today? I suspect that the impact is significant enough to warrant a strong warning statement about the

movement known as Christian Zionism, and the hyper-Dispensationalism which drives it, from the leaders of the evangelical Church. Unfortunately, however, it has not received the united front of resistance with which other threats to the health of the Church have been met with, such as Openness theology and gender-role confusion. Is this because many Evangelical leaders share enough theological convictions in common with the more extreme examples of the movement that they are loathe to give a clear denunciation? Or do they simply not perceive the errors as being a significant or widespread enough a danger to warrant the time and effort of a thoroughgoing rebuttal? Whatever the reason, there seems to be a general lack of attentiveness to a very rampant problem in Evangelicalism. Perhaps it is time to make clear just what Christian Zionism is (as well as all its theological bedfellows), what convictions are driving it, and what results it is tending towards in the thoughts and practice of the contemporary believer.

What is Christian Zionism?

Simply speaking, Christian Zionism is support for the Jewish movement to regain possession of their ancient homeland, which derives from a Christian theology and understanding of the Bible. In the most basic of terms, this Christian theological support comes from a literalistic reading of such passages as Genesis 13:14-15, where God promises to Abraham, “All the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your seed forever”. When this motif is conflated with

such passages as Genesis 12:3 [spoken to Abraham], “And I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse the one who curses you...”; and Joel 3:2, “And I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will judge them there because of my people, even my heritage, Israel, because they scattered them among the nations *and because they divided my land*”; the obvious implication is that, anyone who fails to support modern Israel in all her struggles with her various enemies, or anyone who approves of a treaty by which the boundaries first promised to Abraham are divided between Israel and her neighbors, will be under God's curse, and the object of his eschatological judgment. The glaring problem with this simplistic reasoning, of course, is that it fails to take into account the biblical qualification as to who is intended by Abraham's “Seed,” and what is indicated by the land which he was promised (for the former, see Galatians 3:16; 3:28-29; Romans 4:11-17; for the latter, see Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 11:9-10; 12:22-24).

Of course, if there were only a handful of minor passages that this understanding affected, it would be somewhat inflammatory to call it dangerous, or even severely misguided. But the simple fact is that it affects one's interpretation of a whole class of prophecies. For example, consider the following prognostication, involving a broad range of scriptural testimonies:

The situation in Lebanon portends that Israel may soon be involved in another war. Now that Israel has withdrawn from the buffer zone in south Lebanon, the situation may quickly

escalate to military confrontation with Syria. There are a number of Bible prophecies that may be speaking of the situation just ahead. It's important to have an understanding of these because fulfilled prophecy is one of the most powerful proofs of the veracity of the Bible. God has revealed the significant details of His plan for human history before they happen. This prophecy regarding the destruction of Damascus could occur very very soon, and we will be able to point to it as yet another evidence that the Bible is absolutely reliable, and that the things that God has spoken will soon take place.

Here is an outline of how I understand it:

The war will include Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians.

Syria - Isaiah 17:1, Zechariah 9:1 Zechariah 11:2-3, Jeremiah 49:23-25

Lebanon - Zechariah 11:1 Zechariah 9:2-4
"Palestine" - Isaiah 17:3 Zechariah 9:5
Zephaniah 2:5 Ezekiel 25:15-17 Isaiah 14:31-32
Jordan - Isaiah 17:2 (Aroer) Zephaniah 2:8-9 (Ammon)

Damascus will be utterly annihilated. Isaiah 17:1 Jeremiah 49:23-27 The extent of the destructions hints that nuclear weapons may be involved; how else would an entire modern city "cease to be a city"?

The Palestinians will join the Syrians and foolishly make a grab for territory. They will see the obliteration of their ally Damascus and "writhe in anguish." "The king will perish from Gaza" - Gaza is the place where Arafat's headquarters are. Zechariah 9:1,5 "I will eliminate the pride of the Philistines."
Zechariah 9:6

Lebanon, Syria, and perhaps Jordan will burn.
Zechariah 11:1-3
As a result of Israel's destruction of Damascus, their national status will become emaciated because of intense international condemnation and outrage. Isaiah 17:4,12

These circumstances will compel Israel to begin looking to the Lord. Isaiah 17:7

Possibly, as a result of this war, Israel will obtain large portions of territory from Lebanon, Syria and Jordan (land that had been promised to them by God.) Zechariah 10:9-10
Jeremiah 49:1-2 Isaiah 54:2-3 Obadiah 1:19-20
(Bob Westbrook)¹.

This is just one example of many that could have been cited. This forecast has obviously been framed on the basis of the author's interpretation of a wide selection of biblical prophecies. His understanding of Israel's contemporary political significance does not come from a few isolated passages, but is part and parcel of an entire worldview

1 <http://www.trumpetsounds.com/horizon.html>

supported by his interpretation of a wide spectrum of the biblical testimony. So if he is wrong at all, he is wrong in a way that affects his understanding of a great many passages of scripture. Even apart from the inherent dangers in becoming unhealthily absorbed in finding the next fulfilled prophecy in every headline, or in the possibility of a wrong hermeneutic leading to a truly aberrant theology, this point raises the stakes on its own terms. Assuming that each of these passages does have a legitimate meaning and application which is vital for the believer's continuing growth in grace, it becomes a problem of no little import when they are wrested from their original intent in order to buttress one's pet theories. In other words, the problem is not merely positive, in asserting things that are not true and helpful; it is also negative, in circumventing those things which ought to be derived from all the passages in question, and which would have much fruitful impact in a Christian's life.

The Christian Zionist movement is also dangerous for another reason: not only does it involve one's understanding of a large percentage of the scriptures, but it also affects a large percentage of American Christianity. This is not a fringe movement, even in its more extreme varieties, but is embraced by a wide selection of Christians from various denominations within Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism. Nor is it just in vogue among the unlearned and uninfluential masses, but it also has a voice among the religiously and politically powerful. Christian Zionists not only have a great capacity to influence the thinking of the Church, they also have a significant pull in Washington D.C. And if the decisions for which they are lobbying are supported

by a faulty premise, there may well be unwise and uninformed choices made in politics on an international level, and with disastrous results. There is a tragic possibility that many of the war prophecies which the Christian Zionists are awaiting may prove to be self-fulfilling, as the contingency which predicts them obstinately opposes any Middle East peace treaties which involve any compromise, with a voice powerful enough to be heard in Washington and Jerusalem.

As a case in point, consider John Hagee, one of the most influential Christian Zionists in America today. Hagee pastors Cornerstone Church, in San Antonio, Texas, which is one of the largest churches in America, with some 18,000 active members. He is the author of several bestselling books, including *The Beginning of the End, Final Dawn over Jerusalem*, and most recently, the controversial *In Defense of Israel*. He is the CEO of John Hagee Ministries and Global Evangelism Television, both massive non-profit enterprises providing him with a voice on numerous radio and television networks, and he is also the founder and national chairman of Christians United for Israel, the most influential Christian Zionist organization in America. In addition to the ability he has to influence the popular opinion of millions of people across the world, he also has not a little political clout, which has been felt most recently in his endorsement of John McCain in his candidacy for the White House. This political presence is felt quite strongly in Israel, as Israeli journalist and Christian Zionist expert Gersham Gorenberg noted in the September 18, 2006 episode of the radio talk show "Fresh Air":

[The Christian Zionists'] clout is in their impact on the politics of the United States, which is Israel's key strategic ally. To the extent that they can affect the Congress and the administration's attitude toward diplomacy, toward military action in the Middle East, they have a very strong effect on what happens to Israel. If they can push the American administration away from diplomatic effort towards peace because of the so-called "danger" that Israel would give up land, if they can express support for military moves rather than diplomatic moves, they will have a strong effect on what happens to Israel. And therefore, their support and their lobbying activity and their political activism is encouraged by Israeli politicians on the far right².

This puts the whole movement in the unusual situation of having much influence both politically, in matters of international diplomacy, and religiously, in the doctrine and practice of the worldwide Evangelical church. If for no other reason than that, therefore, it would certainly behoove the leaders of Christianity which do not share the same belief system to develop a united and comprehensive response to Christian Zionism and the ideology which drives it.

What Are the Driving Factors Behind Christian Zionism?

² http://www.jewsonfirst.org/06c/hagee_fresh_air.pdf

The answer to the question, “What factors drive the beliefs and activities of the Christian Zionists?” has a theological and a psychological side. Theologically, the whole impetus of the movement derives from the one true *sine qua non* of Dispensational theology: the belief in two distinct peoples of God, ethnic Israel and the Church. If believing Gentiles have been grafted into the good olive tree which springs from the root of the patriarchs (Romans 11:13-24), so that they are now Abraham's seed (Romans 4:11, 16-17; Galatians 3:6-7), heirs of the promises made to Abraham (Galatians 3:28-29; Ephesians 3:6), one body in which there is no further distinction between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:11-21; Galatians 3:28), then the modern state of Israel has no more divine right to extend its political influence than any other of its neighbor states. The disputes between her and her enemies should be resolved by the Christian virtues of equity, justice, etc., that ought to characterize all the nations which God has made and placed within their respective boundaries. The various states of the Middle East will finally be judged on the basis of their cruelty, pride, and so on, Israel as well as Palestine, Jordan, and all the rest; and any nation involved in arbitration between them would do well to consider the various dynamics of the current situation without resorting to the idea that one of them possesses a divinely-written title to all the land from the Nile to the Euphrates. But if one of those nations does in fact possess that divine right, then one's obligation is simply to drive all other nations out, so that the divinely appointed possessor might have unswayed dominion. So then, one's theology has a necessary

impact on the questions surrounding the Middle East tensions: Is God starting to fulfill his old promise to curse all who are opposed to Abraham's ethnic descendants, and to drive all the nations except Israel out of their promised land? If so, then to support any peace treaty in the Middle East which leaves any nation but Israel *in* the Middle East would be to struggle against God himself, and would be tantamount to siding with the Canaanites when Joshua first crossed the Jordan. Are the Christian Zionists then the derided and misunderstood Rahab of our times, seeing God's purpose and casting in their lot with God's people?

On the other hand, if God is fulfilling his promise made to Abraham by calling out persons from every nation to be his children by faith, and preparing them to inherit, not just the promised land, but the whole earth, and the New Jerusalem of which they are citizens even now (Matthew 5:5; Galatians 4:25-26; Revelation 21:1-4), then one can best throw in his lot with God's people by laboring to bring children of every nationality in to his kingdom, which has now exploded beyond the bounds of the Middle East, and soon promises to change the entire world, when the redemption of God reaches its consummation and the Davidic King returns in all his glory. Although ethnic Israel still retains a special place in God's redemptive design, being the nation to whom he first gave his grace and promise and covenant, and though we might with firm biblical conviction labor to see the ethnic Jewish people enjoy the blessings that God has irrevocably covenanted to give them, and continues to give to a remnant of grace within their ranks (Romans 11); yet, it would be a

tragic step backwards to labor to reserve for them all the old shadow-blessings of a typical strip of this still-cursed earth, when the remnant of grace has entered into the true inheritance of Christ, and awaits an entire new and glorious earth, that “city which has foundations” (Hebrews 11:10, 14-16), which all of Abraham's true seed by faith will inherit.

The practical outworkings of this two-people theology have an immense psychological effect among those committed to laboring for God's redemptive ends. According to Dispensational theology, God's last prophetic purposes will revert back to the political and geographical designs he has for his earthly people, national Israel. The end of the world will come about with the fulfillment of a host of prophecies relative to the modern state of Israel, and if one has a discerning eye, he can see how God is already setting the stage to fulfill these prophecies. Since all Christians are aware that this world does not constitute the end of all God's redemptive designs, but that a new and much better world is coming; and since they are all vexed with the trouble and vanity of the modern world, and long to see their inheritance arrive; they will naturally be interested in doing whatever they can to “wait for and hasten the appearing of the day of God” [2 Peter 3:12]. So then, if one's eschatology involves a reversion to a geopolitical program for a national people of God, then seeing that earthly end coming to fruition will constitute the fuel and motivation for a sincere Christian's strivings to labor for the Lord, and enter into his rest.

The Dispensational idea of an imminent rapture of the Church also plays into this motivation to be absorbed in the political situation in the Middle East, as a sign of the end times. Since an imminent event cannot be preceded by signs, many Christian Zionists introduce the technical distinction that none of the prophecies of the end times can be fulfilled until after the Church has been raptured. This means that, as the stage for the fulfillment of end-time events is set more minutely, and the forces which will lead to the Apocalypse begin to appear on the scene, the likelihood of an approaching rapture becomes increasingly greater, since none of the things that are presumably about to happen possibly *can* happen with the Church still on the earth. For instance, consider the following statement by John Hagee:

In May 1948 Israel was reborn. How many of you were alive on May 15, 1948? It was the most important prophetic day of the 20th century. Why? Because Jesus said in Matthew 24:32 'when you see the fig tree--national Israel--begin to bloom again, know that my coming is nigh at the door. Behold, one generation will not pass away until all things are fulfilled.' We are racing towards the end of time. We are not living in the last days. We're not living in the last hours. We're living in the last minutes of the dispensation of grace. In 1967 the six-day war united Jerusalem under Jewish control. Why is that important? Because the gospel of Luke says when Jerusalem is no longer trodden down by the gentiles, then shall the end come. The Bible

says when the Lord builds up Jerusalem, when he builds up Zion, he will appear in all of his glory. So the Bible is screaming, when you see Jerusalem united, when you see it beautified, when you see it built up, the Messiah is coming. And when you see these signs in the heavens and the sun, the moon and the stars and the waves of the oceans that are roaring, what did God say? He said `Lift up your heads and rejoice! Your redemption draws nigh.' I want you to do it, Cornerstone. Rejoice! The King of Glory is on the way³.

Or else this assertion from noted Dispensationalist John Walvoord, from his book *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*:

But if there are no signs for the Rapture itself, what are the legitimate grounds for believing that the Rapture could be especially near of this generation?

The answer is not found in any prophetic events predicted before the Rapture but in understanding the events that will follow the Rapture. Just as history was prepared for Christ's first coming, in a similar way history is preparing for the events leading up to His Second Coming. . . . If this is the case, it leads to the inevitable conclusion that the Rapture may be excitingly near⁴...

3 http://www.jewsonfirst.org/06c/hagee_fresh_air.pdf

4 John F. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*, revised (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), p. 217. Quoted in an online article by Dr. Thomas Ice here: <http://www.pre->

This belief system can have both a positive and a negative effect on the believer's practice, both of which possess a very destructive potential. Positively, there is the tendency to become obsessed with "headline exegesis," searching for prophetic relevance in every current event and situation in the world. This very real effect has consumed thousands upon thousands of professing believers, has served to distract them from the true matters of living a Christian life of sobriety and moderation, and has no doubt damaged the reputableness and power of their testimony with the world, as well, which tends to see them as conspiracy-theorists and nuts, but not primarily a peculiar people marked by their godliness and devotion to Christ. Negatively, there is an even greater danger of failing to labor toward seeing those things fulfilled which truly must take place before the coming again of Christ. If the eternal state will be inhabited by representatives of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9), and if the gospel will be proclaimed in all the world before the end comes (Matthew 24:14), then it is a most pressing task for modern Christians to finish the Great Commission by targeting and evangelizing the remaining unreached people groups of the world. Although they do not know the day or the hour of Christ's return (Matthew 24:36), they may know the signs of the times, so that the day will not overtake them as a thief, like it will overtake the rest of the sleeping world (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8). Therefore, a Christian with a proper eschatological motivation will be laboring to spread the gospel to every people group under heaven, and doing so as a way of hastening the Lord's coming

trib.org/article-view.php?id=63

(from a human point of view). But when the doctrine of a rapture which has been imminent from the apostles' generation enters the picture, then the literal possibility of the gospel first having an impact upon *every* people group is precluded; and so the Great Commission loses its character as a finishable task which will conclude at the dawn of the new era of eternity, and becomes something we engage in in the meantime, and not necessarily among the unreached peoples most specifically, while our eyes are straining toward the Middle East for our hopes of the end of our labor.

What Are the Potential Results of Christian Zionism?

In light of what has previously been said, it should be apparent that Christian Zionism has the potential to shape the beliefs and practices of its adherents in a great many arenas. Some of these will now be designated more clearly:

First, a fervent adherence to the ideologies of Christian Zionism may very possibly lead to outright heresy and anti-christian doctrine. Consider once again John Hagee, perhaps the most outstanding representative of influential Christian Zionists. In his recent controversial book, *In Defense of Israel*, Hagee made several statements that clearly denied that Jesus came to be the Messiah, and that the Jewish people had rejected him as the Messiah. For example:

If God intended for Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel, why didn't he authorize Jesus to use

supernatural signs to prove he was God's Messiah, just as Moses had done? (p. 137)

Jesus refused to produce a sign ... because it was not the Father's will, nor his, to be Messiah. (p 138)

If Jesus wanted to be Messiah, why did he repeatedly tell his disciples and followers to "tell no one" about his supernatural accomplishments? (p. 139)

The Jews were not rejecting Jesus as Messiah; it was Jesus who was refusing to be the Messiah to the Jews. (p. 140)

They wanted him to be their Messiah, but he flatly refused. (p. 141)

He refused to be their Messiah, choosing instead to be the Savior of the world (p. 143)

Jesus rejected to the last detail the role of Messiah in word or deed (p. 145)⁵

Consider also the text of a commercial Hagee produced to advertise his book:

This book will expose the sins of the fathers and the vicious abuse of the Jewish people. *In Defense of Israel* will shake Christian theology. It scripturally proves that the Jewish people as a whole did not reject Jesus as Messiah. It will

5 John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel*, Frontline, 2007

also prove that Jesus did not come to earth to be the Messiah. It will prove that there was a Calvary conspiracy between Rome, the high priest, and Herod to execute Jesus as an insurrectionist too dangerous to live. Since Jesus refused by word and deed to claim to be the Messiah, how can the Jews be blamed for rejecting what was never offered? Read this shocking expose, *In Defense of Israel*⁶.

Hagee did later issue a statement to clarify the “misunderstanding” of his intentions, with such explanations as the following:

I am writing to share with you some important news pertaining to my latest book *In Defense of Israel*. It has come to my attention that my choice of language and some of the interpretation being given that language in Chapter Ten has caused some confusion and actually led some readers to question whether I believe that Jesus is the Messiah. If people are reaching such a conclusion, then I have clearly failed to communicate my views as well as I should have....

Over the centuries, Christians have been quick to condemn the Jews for failing to recognize Jesus as Messiah. This approach led to replacement theology and the viewpoint of some that God has rejected and broken covenant with the Jewish people. These ideas, in turn, opened the door to a vicious Christian

6 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8khCJTDD44>

anti-Semitism that led to the Crusades, the Inquisition and countless pogroms.

I tried to challenge this view by highlighting a distinction that has been long recognized in Christian theology between the role Jesus played in His first coming, and the role He will play in his second coming. Jesus came the first time as the suffering Messiah, as exemplified by His persecution, rejection and crucifixion. Jesus will come back as the reigning Messiah, who will rule the world from His throne in Jerusalem as King of Kings and Lord of Lords⁷....

However, this letter of retraction remains unconvincing on several fronts. First, the statements made in the book and commercial were too clear and too numerous to be the product of an unintentional slip of words. And then, in the letter, Hagee in no way retracts the content of what he had said, he just attempts to clarify a misunderstanding of what he had meant. Which means that, whatever the statements from Chapter Ten of his book actually mean, Hagee still believes and endorses them. Is it really likely that Hagee did not actually mean what he had seemed to state so clearly, but was simply the victim of a misunderstanding? Or is it not much more believable that he let his true theology, which drives his Zionist movements and organizations, come out into the open, so that it was no longer veiled behind the catch

⁷ The rest of the letter can be read here:
[http://cufi.convio.net/site/PageServer?
pagename=learn_teachings#special_message](http://cufi.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=learn_teachings#special_message)

phrases of popular Evangelicalism, which by overuse have largely been derived of any meaningful content anyway?

But let's consider even the amended statements a little more carefully: for argument's sake, we will grant that Hagee didn't intend to say that Jesus had not come to be the *suffering* Messiah (Moshiach ben Yosef), or that the Jews had not rejected him in that role; but he certainly intended to say that he had not come as the *conquering* Messiah (Moshiach ben David), and that the Jews had not rejected him in that capacity. And therefore, since they had not rejected him in this conquering role, which he would play in the eschaton, immediately after the rapture of the Church, then they had not in any way rejected or disqualified themselves from receiving the blessings which Christ as the conquering Messiah had been sent to give them. That this is in fact Hagee's intended meaning may be substantiated from statements he has made elsewhere, such as the following:

GROSS: So where does that leave the Israeli Jews who don't believe in Jesus Christ when the Rapture comes?

Pastor HAGEE: Where that leaves them is that during the tribulation, the book of Revelation says in the 14th chapter that God is going to send angels who will preach the everlasting gospel across the face of the earth so that everyone will have the opportunity of knowing who Jesus Christ is. Now, when it comes to the Jesus people, Zechariah very clearly says that they are not going to believe that Jesus Christ is

the Messiah until they see him. Zechariah says in the 14th chapter `and when they, the Jewish people, see him whom they have pierced'--and the word pierced there actually refers to his rib and side-- `when they see him whom they have pierced, they will weep as one weeps for his only son for a period of one week. They're simply not going to believe he is the Messiah until they actually see him, and that's at the Second Coming. Then, at that point in time, there is the judgment of the nations in which all nations are judged for the way in which they have treated the nation of Israel and the Jewish people, and the Jewish people and that will be an eternal kingdom⁸.

Here, Hagee clearly states that the Jewish people will reject Christ and disbelieve the gospel even after the rapture of the church and until the final appearing of Christ to establish his kingdom. However, at that time, after their rejection of Jesus, they will enter into the reward of an eternal kingdom, where they will rule the earth, and all the nations who had mistreated them will be judged. So then, for the Jewish people, there is a very different way of salvation than belief in Jesus as the Messiah. However you look at it, Hagee has indeed denied the salvific exclusivity of belief in Jesus as the Christ, by positing a different type of salvation, namely eternal physical sway over the earth, which is not connected to Jesus' Messianic task of suffering. If one is a Gentile, he must believe in the suffering Messiah to be given the spiritual inheritance of eternal life. If one is a Jew, he

8 http://www.jewsonfirst.org/06c/hagee_fresh_air.pdf

can reject the suffering Christ and forfeit his spiritual inheritance – but he will still get the consolation prize of a physical inheritance, by virtue of his ethnicity, his rejection of Christ notwithstanding. This idea has derived directly from Hagee's Christian Zionist ideology, and the two-peoples-of-God/two-prophetic-agendas theology which drives it. Consider well: if the leading proponent of Christian Zionism has gone down the path of heterodoxy in pursuing it, is apostasy and heterodoxy not a very real danger for the whole of the church that is in favor of the Christian Zionist ideals? Is heresy not a danger intrinsic to the very nature of the movement, and are not the seeds of it worked into the very fabric of the whole philosophy? If this is indeed the case, then the need for a warning call from the leaders of the church is most pressing indeed.

Second, and conversely, not only does the extreme ideology of Christian Zionism offer a free acquittal to unbelieving Jews, falsely guaranteeing them a hope of salvation to a glorious earthly kingdom in spite of their rejection of Jesus as the suffering Messiah, it also obscures the true riches that ought to be proclaimed among them, in the free gospel offer of grace in Jesus Christ. The New Testament teaching is that all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, are heirs of every promise made to the fathers (Galatians 3:28-29; Ephesians 2:12-13, 3:6) and possessors of every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), the one to whom all the promises were made (Galatians 3:16), and in whom they all find their fulfillment (2 Corinthians 1:20). Christian Zionism teaches them that, if they accept Christ now, they become a part of a different body (the Church) which is not in continuity

with their own heritage and which does not guarantee the fulfillment of the promises made to their fathers. To accept Christ is to denounce the Abrahamic promise, for from the point at which they accept him, they become a part of God's spiritual people, which does not inherit the physical promises. If they reject him, then, although they forfeit their spiritual inheritance, at least they are still properly considered ethnic Jews, in God's sight, and so they can still hope to possess their land in peace and fruitfulness. Although most Christian Zionists would no doubt say that it would be of benefit for any modern Jew to embrace Christ, do not their own actions undermine the genuineness of their claim? If they are expending so much effort and energy to see that the modern state of Israel retains hold of her land, are they not saying in effect, "Do not give up your place in God's eschatological program as an ethnic Jew! If you become part of the Church, where there is no Jew or Greek, you will be raptured away, and the land will not be yours in the millennial kingdom – but it is an invaluable great thing for the land to remain yours, and hence we are spending so much effort to keep it in Israeli hands." How much better than this false dichotomy is the true gospel that says, "You will certify yourselves to be genuine Jews and Abraham's seed indeed, and you will be given the full and eternal possession of every blessing ever made to the fathers, if you only embrace the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ, who came once to suffer and fulfill every promise, and is coming again to bring his inheritance with him"!

Third, as we have already noted, the ideology of Christian Zionism carries the very real danger of distracting believers from their true and most

pressing tasks as Christians on this earth, whether it be spreading the gospel throughout the nations or just living lives of simplicity, hope, and virtue before the watching world, by focusing their attention on a divine agenda which, by their own confession, has nothing to do with themselves as part of the Church, but only serves to indicate the approximate time when God may snatch them up to be out of the way of what he has begun to do again with his other people.

Fourth, the impact that Christian Zionists have on international politics may bring about some very tragic results in the diplomacy of the Middle East, including very real bloodshed and bereavement which might have been avoided if the idea of Israel's divine entitlement to the land had been abandoned (or rather, if it had been put in its proper perspective as that which guarantees that all of Abraham's true children will inherit the new earth through much meekness and patient endurance). This effect of a wrong ideology, having such a vast and widespread capacity to do much harm, has no doubt been grossly underestimated by a great many Christian theologians who disagree with the basic premises underlying the Christian Zionist movement.

Conclusion

The Christian Zionist movement is the result of an aberrant theology, and is dangerous on several fronts: it tends to distract and confuse true believers in a vast segment of worldwide evangelicalism; it tends to obscure the true message of the gospel from the Jewish people, by presenting to them a false

dichotomy which demands that they forfeit the Abrahamic promises if they should come to Christ (who actually fulfills them – tragic irony!); it tends towards greater doctrinal confusion and heresy, which has been seen even in the most respected and influential leaders of the movement, and not just on the radical fringe; and it tends to work against the preservation of peace in the Middle East, by obstinately refusing any sort of compromise. Any movement that has such a destructive potential, and that has in fact already had many such harmful effects, is no small issue. Perhaps it is time for the leaders of the worldwide Church to present a united front of opposition to a very widespread and alarming threat.

CRITIQUING THE DISPENSATIONAL HERMENEUTIC



AN OPEN response to a letter positing a necessary hermeneutic for the understanding of Scriptures; or, in fact, any extension of knowledge

Dear _____,

For the sake of the name of our precious Savior whom we both serve, and in the bonds of his love, I trust that you will not count amiss my intrusion into your correspondence with _____ on the matter of this hermeneutic which, you say, leads to dispensationalism; and which is, in fact, “what every Christian must assume when he approaches the scriptures.” The specific content of this necessary hermeneutic which you propose is,

1. That God has communicated authoritatively in the form of human language.

2. Because of that presupposition [of authoritative communication], every document in the canon demands a reading on its own terms;
3. Because of that presupposition, the referent (the object of knowledge to which the symbols of language reach) and the sense (the proposition which the symbols form) of every text in the canon must remain stable.

Concerning these propositions, you add the following clarifying and emphasizing statements:

1. To say otherwise is to undermine the way language itself works.
2. The Dispensationalist hermeneutic must be assumed if one is going to argue against it.

The latter of these is particularly important, because it clarifies your intention of making the first three propositions identical with your understanding of what constitutes “the Dispensationalist hermeneutic.” And as it is the dispensational hermeneutic which I am interested in critiquing, it would perhaps be advantageous to examine these propositions, with respect both to their inherent reasonableness and their proposed conclusive force (i.e. dispensationalism).

The first proposition is one which, I trust, we have no real need to discuss. I would affirm its validity as heartily as you.

The second, however, is, in my estimation, a blatant non-sequitur. If there is a necessary syllogistic pathway from the first proposition to the next, by all means trace it for me; in the meantime, I have no trouble imagining a world in which God communicates authoritatively, and in which he communicates via a system of interdependent revelations. In fact, such texts as Hebrews 1:1,2 and I Peter 1:10-12 indicate a previous revelatory history which was varied, imperfect, and dependent upon the fuller revelation of Christ for the truest and fullest significance of its meaning.

The third is worded with an unfortunate element of ambiguity. By “stable” do you simply mean, “eternally containing the entirety of its significations within itself”? If this is your intended meaning, one that leaves completely undefined the interpreter of or the levels of the information propositionally conveyed, then I have no issue with it. I cannot, however, suppose that to be your meaning, as it does not necessarily lead to dispensationalism. What I must suppose you mean, therefore, is that each textual morpheme codifies an obvious, immediate referent; and that, beyond this “natural” understanding, no “secondary,” or “hidden,” or “spiritually-informed,” referent can possibly exist. This is where your first clarifying statement becomes essential for understanding the ramifications of your hermeneutic. In essence, you are saying that a unilateral field of linguistic codification is necessary for the transmission of any information whatsoever. But even the most cursory examination of language will reveal that this idea is simply not tenable. In order to facilitate the transmission of information, at

least two things are necessary: a language which codifies external realities; and an intelligence which contains the information necessary to decodify its symbols. Hence, letters on paper or vocalized sound waves, as the case may be, are simply things-in-themselves, or primary phenomena, to animals or humans with no understanding of the particular language being employed. With enough information, however, a recipient can make the logical steps necessary to begin at four letters on a page (e.g. “Rock”) and arrive at a mental apprehension of a physical object composed variously of silica, mica, etc. This level of communication is what you seem to be arguing for: a simple, unilateral decodification informed by one level of previously existent knowledge. However, the very idea of language involves the necessity of the abstraction of objective realities, such as sounds and letters. Which is a significant principle for the following reason: if it is possible to convey objective truth based on human ability to see letters and jump to a materially unrelated object (a rock); then it must be equally possible for them to see a rock and jump to some other materially unrelated object (e.g. Christ). All that is necessary for this apprehension of information is an extension of prior interpretive knowledge. Essentially, it is identical to the most basic level of linguistic communication.

Furthermore, if the linguistic transmission of information involved the need for one “stable” referent for each morpheme, the possibility of any abstraction at all would perhaps be eliminated. At the least it would be dealt a very serious blow. What infant is there, in learning to speak, that is able to

make an immediate jump from the code-sounds of such words as “selfishness,” “love,” “security,” “comfort,” and so on, to the abstractions that they signify, without any intervening steps? Without exception, I think you will find that infants learn the meaning of such abstractions by means of quasi-relatedness to certain essentially unrelated objective realities. An infant learns what it is to love by relating the word first to a series of events, actions, etc., that he sees in others, and which his mother commends to him, along with such enforcing observations as, “you need to be loving.” Initially, therefore, when he hears “love,” he is only able to decodify the term to the level of a series of actions. Eventually, he is able to take his decodification to a secondary step, and relate those actions to an abstract reality behind them. This secondary level of linguistic reference is therefore vital for abstract communication. It certainly does not “undermine the way language itself works.”

If there is the possibility of certain, reliable communication in a multi-level field of codification, provided the necessary interpretive information is available, the question now becomes, “What information is necessary to arrive at the secondary codifications of scriptural morphemes?” Certainly, even the most staunch dispensationalist would recognize the multiplicity of levels of codification to some extent. When Christ calls Herod a “fox,” the immediate referent of that morpheme is simply a four-legged animal. However, given certain information — the nature of foxes, the cultural understanding of the comparison, the nature of King Herod, etc. — the interpreter can arrive at a secondary level of information and assume certain abstract

things about Herod. If this cultural, biological interpretive information is solid enough for a certain apprehension of secondary levels of meaning in a text, then we must be forced to ask the question, what is it about Christ-centered relevance through the inspired writings of the apostles that makes it a less solid informational basis for interpreting “that Rock” on a secondary level? Is the later clarification of God himself less reasonable than simple “obvious allusive material” for determining a secondary meaning? Why is it obvious that someone referring to a person as a “fox” involves at least two levels of decodification for genuine understanding? It must be simply that the author who codified a four-legged beast as the linguistic morpheme “fox” gave sufficient evidence through context, etc., that he was also codifying that four-legged beast as the abstraction of “cunning.” If the authorial intent of a morpheme clearly involves a secondary meaning, either through his own first-level interpretation or through a self-evident set of circumstances, then no dispensationalist denies that secondary meaning. With one exception: the first-level interpretation of the Author of the entirety of biblical revelation. If God codifies the abstraction of his own chosen people related to him in a national sense with the historical reality of an objective people, the Jews; and later clarifies that even this external object was a code for those related to him spiritually in the covenant of grace (as, for example, in Romans 2, 4, 9, Galatians 3, 4, Ephesians 2,3, etc.) — if God himself so interprets the primary codification as explicable in terms of a secondary level of codification, then how can we deny the legitimacy of this dual-level transmission of information —

particularly when we affirm the legitimacy of dual-level hermeneutics all the time with such statements as, “he has a cold heart.”?

If the foregoing is true, then your statement that any multi-level hermeneutic undermines the nature of language is patently false. But to take the argument a step further, I would suggest that a multi-level understanding of scriptures is necessary to understand the whole. Let’s walk through a couple of syllogisms:

Major Premise: The referent of a linguistic code must remain stable and unchanged for the transmission of information.

Minor Premise: The referent of “rock” in Exodus 17:6 is a physical/geological outcropping.

Minor Premise: Some degree of change is inherent in the interpretation that sees the referent of “rock” as Christ.

Conclusion: Therefore, the hermeneutic that sees the referent of “rock” in Exodus 17:6 as Christ destroys the possibility of the transmission of information.

Now, another:

Major Premise: In I Corinthians 10, Paul declares that the referent of “rock” in Exodus 17:6 is Christ.

Minor Premise: The equation of “rock” with Christ destroys the possibility of the transmission of information.

Conclusion: I Corinthians 10 destroys the possibility of the transmission of information.

I could continue with these syllogisms, but I think my point is clear: what you see as a necessary hermeneutic for understanding scriptures in reality destroys the reliability of those scriptures. That I am not dealing with a straw man, but with your hermeneutic genuinely perceived, should be patently clear: your hermeneutic would strictly forbid me to go straight to Exodus 17 and interpret “rock” as “Christ” on pains of the utter dissolution of communicative ability. When Paul does this very thing, he must not be subscribing to a similar view of hermeneutics. And if Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, evinces a substantially different hermeneutic than you had presupposed, the choice which therefore confronts you between his hermeneutic and yours should be an easy one for a Christian affirming the inerrancy of scriptures to make. In the end, it must boil down to a recognition of the Author of scriptures, and his authorial (not to mention divine) prerogatives. If I, as an author, told a story — or as a painter sketched a picture, or as a sculptor formed a statue, etc. — and then decided to explain in first-level language the second-level significance that I intended that work to have, as its author I would have every right to do so. Any hermeneutic which demands that God must inspire each individual book so that it may be fully apprehended by “a reading on its own terms,” and allows him no authorial liberty to foreshadow in second-level symbols what he intends to clarify in subsequent revelatory books through first-level language — any such hermeneutic is dangerously

presumptive, and flies in the face of clear New Testament interpretive patterns.

Please understand my comments as I intend them: written in love from one worshipper of Christ to another. I write because I am convinced of the truth and importance of these things, and I trust that God will use your studies as well as mine for the purpose of the mutual edification of Christ's body, until we all arrive at the unity of the full faith.

In Christ,
Nathan

WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY?



AT FIRST glance, it is apparent that the Bible is a very complex book: it was written in three different languages, by dozens of human authors, over the course of many centuries, and in a wide variety of styles and genres. However, beneath this dauntingly complicated surface, there must be a unified purpose and message; for behind all of the human authors and historical circumstances in which it came to man, there is one true Author, the God of creation, who set forth in this book just what he wanted mankind to know. So what is that unified message of the Bible? How does one go about relating all of its various styles and books into a mutually-interpretive volume? Bible scholars have suggested a variety of methods for structuring the unfolding story of special revelation, and have come up with numerous ideas for a central theme or themes which bind everything together. Perhaps the most compelling of these attempts, and the idea which most rigorously allows the Bible itself to indicate its own major emphases and underlying

structural elements, is commonly called Covenant Theology.

However, the sad truth is that, in contemporary Evangelicalism, many believers have only a very fuzzy understanding (at best) of this helpful and biblically-faithful way of understanding the over-arching message of the scriptures. And furthermore, in the author's experience, there are few teachings which will enable a Christian to make better and more fruitful use of his scripture-reading than the basic components of Covenant Theology – understand these few, scriptural themes, and you will be able to mark out and follow the general flow of the unfolding saga of redemptive history, as recorded in God's Word. And so, although it may be a naively ambitious undertaking, in light of the massive volumes written on this very topic by some of the most gifted and knowledgeable Bible-scholars God has given the Church, it has become a burden of mine to compose a very brief and simple introduction to that manner of understanding the Bible which we call Covenant Theology.

The Purpose of the Bible Story

From the first, it is apparent that the Bible tells the story of God's powerful work of creation; and then continues with the story of his gracious work of redemption. In other words, it basically gives a history of mankind, from God's perspective. As one reads this history, it becomes quickly apparent that God has intentionally designed history, and so works that it unfolds according to his own master plan (see

Ephesians 1:11; Numbers 23:19). But what is that master plan? What was the purpose of creation, and what is the purpose for its continuing existence?

Fortunately, God has given us some teaching on his purpose for the world: everything he created and every way in which he continues to govern his creation is done to display his glory (see Romans 11:36; Revelation 4:11; Isaiah 43:7). Another way of saying this is, everything that God has done, and that he has recorded for us in his word, is done to display who he is. Ultimately, this purpose of self-display included God's sending his Son to reveal his true nature to the world (see John 1:14,18; Hebrews 1:1-3). The advent and work of Jesus Christ is the ultimate purpose of history, for it is the ultimate display of who God is. Which leads us to an understanding for the purpose of redemptive history, over and above the purpose for creation: the nature of God is too manifoldly rich to be displayed in the wonderful work of creation alone. For the display of such attributes as God's just wrath, his essential, unearned love, his free mercy and grace, his vengeance against sin, he designed the perfect plan of redemption. And in the story of redemption, both those to whom God gives his free mercy and those from whom he withholds it are created to display who he is – they are created for his glory (see Romans 9:22-24; Ephesians 2:7).

The Basic Structure of Covenant Theology

What does all of this have to do with Covenant Theology? Basically, Covenant Theology attempts to unfold the biblical story with constant reference to the

universal display and glorification of God. From the beginning of Genesis, God created mankind with the purpose of having him display God's own nature, ruling in justice and righteousness over the rest of creation, in analogy of God's own righteous and universal rule. When man failed in that original intent, God then promised that he would send a man, born of a woman, who would accomplish this original design, and so exercise a God-like rule, and display the Divine image to perfection (Genesis 3:15; see also Hebrews 2:6-10).

But how does this kingdom of righteousness, which displays the divine image, grow and advance from the first creation to the final, consummate new creation? That is where the covenants come in. Covenant Theology differs from other systems in that it sees the biblical structure giving great weight and importance to a series of divine covenants. These covenants are like the framework of a house – without them, all the doctrines and stories in the Bible fall down into a hopelessly confused jumble of unrelated bits of information. The story of creation and redemption is the story of the divine establishment of a few all-important covenants, the divine response to covenant-failure, and the divine fulfillment of the covenant-promises. Without understanding the nature and purposes of these covenants, one cannot hope to understand why God reacts as he does to the sticky problem of sinful humans who were created to enjoy fellowship with a holy God and exercise dominion in the image of God.

So what are these covenants? Theologians speak, first, of a Covenant of Redemption, made between the members of the Godhead; second, of a

Covenant of Works, made between God and man; and third, of a Covenant of Grace; which is basically a repetition to man of the first Covenant of Works, with the added proviso that a Redeemer would be provided to fulfill the required works in the place of all covenant-members, as their federal head. Let's look at each of these three covenants in a little more detail.

The Covenant of Redemption

The inter-Triune Covenant of Redemption is the foundational Covenant, and serves as the unshakable basis for the Covenants of Works and Grace. This Covenant entails God's eternal plan of redemption, in which each member of the Godhead had a role that he solemnly agreed to undertake, in pursuit of a mutually-determined goal. Ephesians one, verses three through fourteen, gives a basic summary of this eternal purpose: the Father planning redemption and choosing out members from the human race; the Son accomplishing that redemption as the incarnate substitute and federal head for those chosen members; and the Holy Spirit applying that fully accomplished redemption in human time.

This solemn agreement between the Father and the Son, in which the Father promises a chosen people to the Son, in exchange for the Son's vicarious work of earning a positive righteousness and suffering the covenant-penalty of disobedience in behalf of that chosen people, is spoken of at several points in the scriptures. Psalm 2:8 relates the Father swearing to the Son, whom he would anoint as the Messiah-King: "Ask of me, and I shall give you the nations for your

inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.” Later, the prophet Isaiah expressed the essence of this covenantal agreement in more precise terms: “when you shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:10-11). And finally, in the gospel of John this idea of a certain people covenanted to the Son in exchange for his work of redemption comes to the fore many times (see, for instance, John 6:39,65; 13:3; 17:11,24).

This Covenant is vital, first, because it is the ultimate reason that the other two covenants were enacted at all. Before human time, the Father designed to glorify the Son, and the Son to glorify the Father, in this precise way. This inter-Triune pact of mutual glorification was the reason for creation and human history, with the first Covenant of Works, man's fall, and the subsequent Covenant of Grace. But even beyond this foundational significance, the Covenant of Redemption demonstrates to us something of God's nature. Because God, in all his glory, is invisible to the human eye, we can only come to know him through his works. And the Covenant of Redemption is the reflection, in works, of the essential nature of God. The essential nature of the Trinity concerns the relationship of the different persons of the Godhead to each other; the economical Trinity concerns the relationship of the different persons of the Godhead to their mutual plan of redemption. And we could never understand the mystery of the all-

glorious Trinity in its essence, if we didn't glimpse the all-glorious Trinity in its economy. This also tells us something of man's basic nature as the divine image-bearer. Just as the Trinity is covenantal in nature, so man was created as a covenantal creature. Part of what it means to reflect God's image is to be involved with other humans, and indeed with God himself, in a solemn covenant. The Covenant with man did not come as an afterthought: it was an integral part of what man was created to be, enjoying fellowship with God in analogy to the fellowship within the Trinity; and to work out God's dominion with covenantal responsibility, in analogy to the relationship between the Father and the Son, with regard to their work. And now, with the foundation laid, let us look at the first Covenant established with mankind.

The Covenant of Works

When God created man, and placed him in the Garden of Eden, he immediately set him in a covenantal context. Within this covenant (as in all covenants) were the following elements: sovereignly-mandated commandments (positively, to be fruitful and exercise dominion over the earth, and negatively, not to eat of the fruit of the specified tree); promises of reward, upon the fulfillment of those commandments (eternal life and joy in fellowship with God); and threats of punishment, in the event of disobedience (death and separation from God). In addition to these elements, we see the first instance of a covenantal sacrament. Because man is so designed that he needs a visible means of signifying invisible

covenant realities, God condescended to confirm the covenant through a physical sign and seal. In the garden, this was the Tree of Life. Later covenants would have signs such as the rainbow; circumcision; and baptism and the Lord's Supper. If the first man, Adam, had passed the covenant-test of obedience to God's commandments, he would have earned the reward of everlasting, joyful fellowship with God. And since he, as the first man, was functioning as the representative head of the race, he would have earned those blessings for all of his descendants (see Romans 5:12-21).

However, Adam failed in his covenant obligation, and earned the promised curse for himself and his descendants. As promised, this curse came; but in an unforeseen act of free mercy, God established a second, gracious covenant with fallen man. Before we talk about this Covenant of Grace, however, we need to mention another Covenant, which, unlike the Covenant of Grace, and like the first Covenant with Adam, was conditioned on works.

After God tested Adam in a conditional Covenant of works, he promised that a human Seed would be confronted with the same test, but would be victorious. Later, when God called out Abraham into a new, covenantal relationship with himself, he promised that this covenant victory and blessing would come through his seed. A few generations later, Abraham's seed had become a great nation; and God brought them (as Abraham's seed) through precisely the same test as he had set before Adam. Unlike Adam, the very fact that God had brought them out of Egypt, to establish his covenant with them, was gracious and undeserved. But like Adam, the final

secular of their corporate, national blessings, and their right to reside forevermore in the promised land of God's presence and fellowship (analogous to the Garden of Eden), was conditioned on their obedience to God's commandments. Over and over, God reminded them, if you obey, you shall live long lives in the promised land; but if you disobey, you will be driven out. And finally, like Adam, national Israel failed, and was driven out.

However, God's purpose was not yet accomplished: and so, just as he promised to Abraham, he finally produced one from his seed (the promised Christ) who would undergo the same probationary test, but be victorious. Thus Christ's forty days of testing in the wilderness correspond to Israel's forty years of testing in the wilderness, which itself corresponds to Adam's time of testing in the Garden. But, unlike Adam and national Israel, this one promised Seed was ultimately triumphant (see Galatians 3:10-16; II Corinthians 1:20).

It may be asked, Why was a new Covenant of Works inaugurated after the failure of the first, and the establishment of a better and eternal covenant? First, we must be certain that it was not added as another way to righteousness and life. In fact, confusion upon that very point brought condemnation, and the stern rebuke of the Apostle Paul (see Galatians 3:10-12). We must also emphasize that it did not negate the Covenant of Promise, made with Abraham (Galatians 3:17-18). On the contrary, it was a Covenant made with national Israel, not as a condition of eternal life, which, as the Abrahamic promise made clear, was possible only through faith; but as a condition for continuing in a land which

symbolized fellowship with God. And it was made to teach of Christ, the Guarantor and Fulfiller of the Covenant of Grace. It did this, first, by revealing and stirring up sin in man, and so rendering him guilty and needy of a Redeemer (Romans 7:7-12). Second, it formed a nation and worship-cult that would exemplify in many types and patterns just who this Christ would be, and what he would accomplish (especially in the tabernacle and sacrificial system). And third, it gave more explicit testimony to the eternal, moral law and righteousness of God, that it might be more fully known exactly what sort of marvelous righteousness the Christ would actually accomplish (cf. Matthew 3:15; Hebrews 2:10).

The Covenant of Grace

We have left only to mention the final covenant – the Covenant of Grace. This is the unexpected covenant that God so mercifully inaugurated after man had failed to obey the first covenant. In this covenant, God unilaterally promised to have mercy upon sinful man, apart from any good works. But how could he do this, without renegeing on the first Covenant of Works? He did this, not by abrogating the works which he had initially said must be fulfilled – but by promising to send a representative who would fulfill them in man's behalf. He first inaugurated this covenant with Adam, immediately after the Fall; but he would cut this same basic covenant with Abraham, some time later, with a ceremony and a promise that would become definitive for the rest of redemptive history.

In this Abrahamic covenant (see Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-16), God gave the same promise to Abraham that he had offered as a mere condition to Adam in the Garden – that is, the prospect of eternal fellowship and joy with God. But whereas he had commanded of Adam some conditions prior to the enjoyment of this reward, in his covenant with Abraham, he solemnly undertook to fulfill these obligations himself. And even beyond this, the curse of death and separation that Adam had already merited he laid upon himself, in the event of covenant unfaithfulness – and hence, he solemnly passed through the divided animals, and took upon himself the curse of a bloody death if the covenant should not remain firm.

Of course, this is exactly what God did some two thousand years later, when he sent the long-awaited Messiah. This Messiah, who was God in the flesh, took upon himself the punishment of death for the covenant-disobedience of his people, just as God had signified he would do in that ceremony with Abraham. And so were fulfilled both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace in the earthly ministry of Christ. Jesus of Nazareth entered into the Covenant of Works, and merited the covenant blessings from the Father. Then, he suffered the penalties of covenant-disobedience in the place of God's chosen people; and in so doing, he also fulfilled the promise to Abraham and made firm the Covenant of Grace.

Before we conclude, we must mention two more covenants, given in expression of the post-Fall Covenant of Grace. The first of these, the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9), was given in response to the

uncertain state of the earth, after God had cursed it for man's sake. Even though man, through disobedience, had lost his ability to rule over creation according to God's design, yet God's purpose remained inviolable: he would have a perfect earth over which a perfect man would rule. And so, as a first taste of this ultimate design, he promised that he would not utterly destroy the earth, as he had in the flood. Instead, he would ultimately renew it and restore it to perfection (see Isaiah 25). This is a unilateral Covenant of Grace, as may be seen from the sign of the rainbow: just as God had symbolically taken the pains of death upon himself in his Covenant with Abraham, so he symbolically drew back a bow against himself, in a gesture that, upon the pains of a bloody death, he would not completely destroy the earth, as it ought to have been destroyed in accordance with the first Covenant made with Adam.

The final covenant that serves a pivotal role in biblical history is the Covenant made with King David (II Samuel 7). Just as God had initially designed for man to rule over creation in righteousness; and just as he had promised that the fulfillment of this design would come from a seed of the woman, and, more specifically, of the seed of Abraham; so he promised to David, Abraham's son, that the promised Seed would come from his line, and would rule forever as man had been created to do from the beginning. And so Christ, when he had accomplished our redemption, ascended to sit upon the throne of David, where he would rule for all eternity (see Acts 2:29-36).

Conclusion

So in the end, although the Bible is a richly diverse book, its basic message is surprisingly simple: God decided to display his glorious nature by creating mankind, who would reign over the world in display of the divine image, and enjoy covenantal fellowship with God, in the manner of the inter-Triune fellowship of love. When man failed in this first covenant relationship, God graciously promised to send a Redeemer, who would undertake the covenant obligations in man's behalf, and win for mankind (all whom the Father had chosen to give him) the blessings that the first covenant held forth on a condition. The rest of the Bible is all about how God enters human history to choose out a people and accomplish this intention – all to his glory alone. The blessed end and eternal triumph of this design finally reaches its ultimate fruition when the great effects of Christ's great redemption change the earth to a place of eternal fruitfulness, inhabited by an eternally-saved people, fellowshiping in joy with God in their midst. The bible begins with man losing the joy of fellowship with God. It ends, most appropriately, like this:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people,

and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son (Revelation 21:1-7).

How does all this come about? Well, my friend, the story rides upon the establishment and ultimate fulfillment of several divine covenants. Upon these covenants, all redemptive history hangs.

THE MOSAIC COVENANT: WORKS OR GRACE?



THE WESTMINSTER Confession of Faith, speaking of the unity of the Covenant of Grace from the time immediately after the Fall and forever thereafter, states, “This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel” (WCF 7:5). In this brief summation, we may observe two things about the Mosaic administration of the Covenant: first, it was fundamentally an expression of the Covenant of Grace, and thus held forth the gospel to the people of God “by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come”; (WCF 7:5); and second, it was nevertheless in a sense utterly distinct from the New Covenant, even on so central an issue as the gospel itself. It was, in fact, appropriately designated a covenant of “law,” not just as acts of obedience flowing from gratefulness for the gospel, but as contradistinct from the very “Gospel” itself. In other words, it was, in one sense, in full continuity

with the gospel first proclaimed to Abraham and consummated in Christ; and in another sense, of an entirely different legal principle.

Throughout the history of Reformed scholarship, different theologians have struggled to account for this complex and sometimes confusing character of the Mosaic Covenant. Many historic Reformed scholars have emphasized the legal aspect of the Covenant, and portrayed it as an essentially different kind of covenant than that granted to Abraham (e.g. Witsius, Owen, and Charles Hodge); others have equally emphasized its continuity with the other administrations of the Covenant of Grace, to the minimization of any essential difference whatsoever (most notably John Murray, although many – one could perhaps say most – modern Reformed scholars have taken the same basic trajectory). I would like to suggest, however, that in this particular debate, it is indeed possible to “have your cake and eat it too”. That is, the Covenant given on Mount Sinai was in fact a republication of the original Covenant of Works established with Adam, and a summation of the natural law still binding upon all men everywhere; but for all that, it is not therefore at odds with the Covenant of Grace inaugurated immediately after the Fall (Genesis 3:15), but is rather an organically-connected and progressive-oriented administration of that one Covenant. Many of the things that different theologians have expressed in their treatments of the Sinaitic Covenant are not mutually exclusive of each other, but rather complementary⁹.

⁹ I gladly acknowledge my debt to the contributors to *The Law Is Not of Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), and in particular, Brenton C. Ferry, whose taxonomy was helpful for crystallizing my own thoughts on this question.

In substantiation of this opinion, let me give just a few aspects of the Mosaic Covenant that distinguish it as an administration of the Covenant of Grace, and then a few aspects that distinguish it as a republication of the Covenant of Works, at one and the same time.

The Mosaic Covenant as an Administration of the Covenant of Grace

The Mosaic Covenant was not just an expression of the Covenant of Grace, as the Westminster Confession makes clear, but it was an administration that made a definite advance in clarity as concerns the very essence of the Covenant of Grace. To substantiate this opinion, let me give a quick reminder of how the Covenant of Grace is pictured in its inauguration after the Fall and its most important reiteration in the Abrahamic Promise.

When the Covenant of Grace was first inaugurated with Adam, it is important to realize, first, that the Covenant of Works had already been given and broken; and second, that the Covenant of Grace gave no indication of defaulting on that first broken covenant – it was not a simple “do-over” or another option that set aside the first without satisfaction. The Covenant of Works had promised life for perfect obedience and death for disobedience; and the Covenant of Grace was not a new “blank slate” that allowed God to renege on what he had already solemnly declared.

What then was it about this new covenant that set it so drastically apart from the Covenant of Works preceding it? Only this, it reiterated the Covenant of

Works with one added proviso: God himself would unilaterally provide a federal head who would certainly fulfill its terms. The Serpent had managed to tempt Adam to break the terms of the Covenant, but now God, at his own expense, would send a Seed to represent his people, and overturn the initial victory of the Serpent. This, of course, would involve the suffering of the coming federal head, the second Adam who would represent the whole people – for the Serpent would bruise his heel. Nevertheless, he would win an eternal victory and destroy the Serpent forever¹⁰.

When we get to the covenant made with Abraham, we find the same truth even more forcefully demonstrated. The one element that stands out in the Covenant made with Abraham is its unconditional promise of God's eternal favor; and yet, even though grace is unilaterally promised, the broken Covenant of Works is still not ignored; instead, God makes more firm his intention to send a Seed who would act as the federal head of his people, and fulfill the Covenant of Works that still cried out for satisfaction. Thus, the Seed promised to Adam is now promised to Abraham, and it is foreshadowed that this Seed would suffer a bloody death in the place of his people (Genesis 22); or, as God elsewhere made clear, it is promised that God himself would suffer alone the penalties demanded by the Covenant of Works, in order to make firm his Covenant of Grace with Abraham. Thus, he alone walked through the severed animal halves, and thereby solemnly confirmed his gracious promises to Abraham (Genesis 15).

10 See Genesis 3:15

Now, when we arrive at Sinai, we see the same basic pattern displayed even more clearly; there, a huge advance is made in setting forth the nature of the Covenant of Grace as the republished Covenant of Works, with an added provision of a perfect, divine Mediator and federal head. On Mount Sinai, the works that God requires to be perfectly fulfilled are set forth more clearly than ever before in the giving of the Law, and most especially the Decalogue; and furthermore, the sanctions called down for transgression and the rewards promised for perfect obedience, viz. life in the land where God himself dwells, are made much more clear and specific. But at the same time, the promise of the coming Seed and the nature of his redemptive and substitutionary work are made vastly more clear in the sacrificial and high-priestly ordinances, the festivals, and all the types and ceremonies that Moses enjoined upon the people. So in that sense, it is not just an administration of the same Covenant of Grace, but a giant-step forward in clarity and specificity of the promise of Christ.

To be a little more specific, let me suggest four broad ways in which the Covenant of Grace is advanced in the Mosaic Administration: first, the essential reward unilaterally promised in the Covenant of Grace is dwelling in the presence of God: and who precisely this God is is revealed more clearly than ever before in many ways, such as Moses' being hidden in the cleft of the rock to see God's glory, hear his Name, and proclaim it to the people (Exodus 34).

Second, there was a clearer revelation of the righteous requirements of God, which was a step forward in the Covenant of Grace in two senses; first, in that it defined very concretely just what the second

federal head had to perform in order to make good upon the promises given to (postlapsarian) Adam and Abraham; and second, in that it showed more particularly just what the Covenant of Grace promised to save *to*. God's covenant promised to save us – and the Law showed what that salvation would make of us, it catalogued many of God's own characteristics that we would be made to reflect by the terms of his gracious promise.

Third, there was a vastly clearer portrayal of the nature and manifold aspects of the redemptive work that the Covenant of Grace promised, in the construction of the tabernacle, all the ceremonies, types, promises, and so on. Just who the promised Seed should be and what he should accomplish are given in much more detailed terms.

Fourth and finally, the Mosaic administration actually accomplished the first, imperfect, temporary fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. On Sinai in very fact, God made a great nation of Abraham's seed, and set about to bring them indeed into the promised land of his presence, and to make them a kingdom of priests. This fulfillment was imperfect and temporary, and the very saints themselves looked ahead to a better city, “which has foundations” (Hebrews 11:10); and yet, even for its imperfection, it was another step taken toward the ultimate fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace.

The Mosaic Covenant as a Republication of the Covenant of Works

So then, the covenant made on Sinai was in some sense an administration of and advance upon the Covenant of Grace; but in some other, equally notable ways, it was a republication of the Covenant of Works. When we look to the Pentateuch with an unjaundiced eye, nothing could be clearer than the works-principle breathed out everywhere in its pages, that the one who does all of the things written in the Law will live by them; and similarly, nothing could be more clear than the fact that Paul also sees a definite works-principle at work in the Mosaic Law, which is utterly distinct from the faith-principle at work in the gospel and the Abrahamic Promise (see Romans 10 and Galatians 3:1-5:6). The nature of the Mosaic administration as a Covenant of Grace cannot overturn its distinctive character of Law; on the contrary, the legal, binding principle of “Do this and live” lays the foundation apart from which the Covenant of Grace cannot function. It shows, in a word, how God can both “be just *and* the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

So what are some specific purposes of this clear republication of the Covenant of Works on Mount Sinai? One is a purpose of typological instruction. The promises proffered to Israel were imperfect, but they were nevertheless really instructive of the eternal promises given to Abraham. The history of Israel demonstrated in very poignant terms that, if God's people were to inhabit the land where God's presence dwells, they must obey God's Law. In this sole sense, sincere, imperfect obedience was sufficient to establish them in the land (just because the land was imperfect and God's presence was there only imperfectly, not in the consummate way the perfect

new earth will experience). And at the same time, this imperfect picture was destined from the beginning to fail, and thus give way to the true, antitypical fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, of which this was but the mediate, typical fulfillment (see Deuteronomy 31-32).

Second and relatedly, Israel under the Sinaitic Covenant was held forth to the world as the example *par excellence* of the condition of fallen mankind still under the Covenant of Works, which remains in existence to this day, written on the hearts of men everywhere as the natural law – a point which the first two chapters of Romans seeks to establish. The consciences of all men testify to the moral code that God has enjoined upon them and also, significantly, that violation merits death (Romans 1:32); however, this natural law is everywhere perverted and obscured. But in Old Covenant Israel the principle of natural law, and the fact that its violation merits death and expulsion from God's presence, and moreover, just what that natural law entails, is held forth brilliantly in the Decalogue and the history of exile. The history of Israel, then, in this sense is given as a solemn warning of the terrors of the Covenant of Works.

A third purpose of the republication of the Covenant of Works on Mount Sinai is perhaps the most important, and in fact the purpose with which Paul draws his key discussion in Galatians to a climax: the Law, as a republished Covenant of Works, was given as a pedagogue to stir up and show men their sinfulness, and demonstrate beyond cavil their desperate need for the very Mediator promised in the

Covenant of Grace and signified in the ceremonial law given on Mount Sinai.

In sum, then, although Sinai was, in a sense, a considerable advance in the economy of the Covenant of Grace, that advance was firmly grounded in the republication of an unmerciful and unflinching Covenant of Works. Without the law principle shouting out in terms that could not be ignored, “Cursed is everyone who does not do all of these commandments!” (see Deuteronomy 27:26), the gospel principle that says “The Lord your God will circumcise your heart,” the Christ will come down from heaven and go beyond the sea so that you might do them (see Deuteronomy 30:1-14) would be slighted and despised. The Law principle, set forth in uncompromising terms throughout the Pentateuch, showed the desperate need for the gospel principle of a federal head who would satisfy the curse and merit the blessing that the Law held forth. Which is nothing less than to say, the very manner in which the Sinaitic Covenant was an advance upon the Covenant of Grace demands that it also be a most uncompromising republication of the Covenant of Works as that which, in our desperate need, the coming Seed would fulfill for us.

This dual “law/gospel” nature of the Mosaic Covenant, in that it demands for the Law to be fulfilled but freely promises a Savior to fulfill it, is not only clearly seen in the harmonious but antithetical principles summed up in Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:1-14; it is also the only assessment that makes sense of Paul’s complex (and superficially contradictory!) treatment of the Pentateuch in Romans 10 and Galatians 3-5.

This assessment is of course only the briefest overview, provided without argumentation or substantiation; but I think, as a general thesis, it will bear the weight of rigorous scholarly analysis. A compelling first step, in the same basic direction as this overview suggests, has already been taken in *The Law Is Not of Faith*, ed.s Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David Van Drumen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009). It is my hope that this helpful work will be a major impetus to re-examine much of the modern tendency to steer clear of the historically and scripturally viable republication thesis.

POEMS



OF DISPENSATIONALISM
AND COVENANT THEOLOGY

The Dragon and the Whore

or

A Parable for America in the Twenty-First Century

The death-stroke fell; still reeling at the blow,
The Dragon roared in mortal agony
And spewed hot venom at the woman's seed,
Contesting fiercely him who crushed him so.
Ah, vainly! for his people straight did flee
Into the arms that stripped their ancient Foe:
Yes, he was strong to save the falt'ring least,
And he was fairer than the Dragon dread,
And his sweet strength prevailed against the Beast.

Arose the Dragon's whore; lips full and red
Dripped honied sweets into the perfumed air,

Hot overtures suffused with fragrant breath;
Her silken robes with playful hands she spread,
Enrapturing white breasts thus laying bare:
Could no one smell the burning hell beneath?
None but the wisest. Look! the nation races
To throw themselves upon her hot embraces;
“How blessed we are!” they laugh, – “The Beast is
dead!”
Is all the world come thronging to her bed?

When Died the Beautiful?

When died the beautiful? Above the din
Of modern mock and clamor, Truth’s lone voice,
Once sad and lovely, now but adds the noise
Of banal chatter – now the poet’s pen
Is silenced by the chatty screen – oh, when
Did regal Truth, once crowned with solemn joys,
Go walking out dressed as the peasant boys,
And royal Right take on the hue of Sin?
When died the beautiful? Do they not know,
Nor understand that Truth turned trivial
Is thus less true by half – that the great Foe
Of right religion is the cretin soul
Who damns the truth with jest? When came it so?
When failed man’s heart? When died the beautiful?

Songs of Redemption

1. ***Christ Promised***

Standing in my shame,
Naked and alone;
No one left to blame;
The fault was all my own.

The Serpent sowed the lie,
Mine only was the fall;
Now cursed is all my race,
Now death has come on all.

Is this to be the end,
Forever lost and dead?
But no! the promise comes,
“I send a conq’ring Seed.”

*So send the Seed,
Look from above,
Behold our need,
Send forth your Love –*

*Bruise under us
The Serpent’s head;
We hope in Christ and Christ alone,
So send the Seed!*

Living without God,
Idols in my hand –
Then mercy’s promise comes:
“Get unto a land

“Where I will be your God,
And with you I shall dwell;
All nations will be blessed.”
So come Immanuel!

*So send the Seed,
Look from above,
Behold our need,
Send forth your Love –*

*Bruise under us
The Serpent’s head;
We hope in Christ and Christ alone,
So send the Seed!*

In God’s own time the Seed was lifted on a cross
To crush the Serpent’s head and to reverse our loss!

*You sent the Seed,
From up above,
You saw our need,
You sent your Love –*

*Bruise under us
The Serpent’s head;
We hope in Christ and Christ alone,
Our conq’ring Seed!*

2. **Christ Suffering**

Behold the man condemned to die –
Behold him broken, bruised, and battered on the
tree!

No common criminal, he hangs upon his cross
Beneath the wrath of God that should have come on
me.

*He was wounded for my sins,
Poured out his soul, what more was left for him to
give?
His bloody side flows with my peace and
righteousness –
And in his death I live!*

Behold the Lamb, our sacrifice –
Behold him spotless, pure, acceptable to God!
He has conquered hell and set the captives free,
And he has bought my perfect pardon with his
blood.

*He was wounded for my sins,
Poured out his soul, what more was left for him to
give?
His bloody side flows with my peace and
righteousness –
And in his death I live!*

For your body, thank you, Jesus!
Thank you, Jesus, for your shed blood!
In your death I live!

You have bled for me,
You gave your life for me, and
You have won my peace, and
I have died with you and now I live!

3. *Christ Triumphant*

Men's Chorus: He is risen again,
He is risen indeed,
He is Lord of the living,
Lord of the dead!

Ladies' Chorus: He is risen again,
He is risen indeed,
He is Lord of the living,
Lord of the dead!

Men: O Death, where is your sting?
Ladies: *He has broken it!*
Men: O Grave, where is your victory?
Ladies: *He has conquered it!*

Men: O Death, where is your sting?
Ladies: *He has broken it!*
Men: O Grave, where is your victory?
Ladies: *He has conquered it!*

Men: He is risen again –
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*
Men: He is risen indeed
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*

All: He is risen again,
He is risen indeed,
He is Lord of the living,
Lord of the dead!

Men: The Serpent lost at his own game –
Ladies: *He is alive!*

Men: Put him to an open shame –
Ladies: *He is alive!*

Men: The Serpent lost at his own game –
Ladies: *He is alive!*
Men: Put him to an open shame –
Ladies: *He is alive!*

Men: He is risen again –
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*
Men: He is risen indeed
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*

All: He is risen again,
He is risen indeed,
He is Lord of the living,
Lord of the dead!

Men: Made the universe his own –
Ladies: *He made it all!*
Men: Put all things beneath his throne –
Ladies: *He bought it all!*

Men: Raised his church up from the dead –
Ladies: *And gave us peace!*
Men: Praise to our exalted Head –
Ladies: *For we are his!*

Men: He is risen again –
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*
Men: He is risen indeed
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*

All: He is risen again,

He is risen indeed,
He is Lord of the living,
Lord of the dead!

All: He is risen again,
 He is risen indeed,
 He is Lord of the living,
 Lord of the dead!

Men: He is risen again –
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*
Men: He is risen indeed
Ladies: *He is alive, he is alive!*

All: He is alive, he is alive!

4. ***Christ Interceding***

Covered in my shame and stained by sin,
How did I sink into this pit again?
Like a dog to its vomit, like a sow to the mud –
Who will plead my case before the holy God?

*I will come before my God,
He will shower grace on me;
How can he refuse my cries,
When he hears my Savior's plea?*

When the Devil comes accusing me before the
throne,
I will rest my soul in righteousness that's not my
own;
Who can condemn me? Christ will intercede –

By his wounds from sin and guilt I have been freed!

No one evermore can lay to my account my sin,
Now that Jesus Christ my Savior died and rose again;
When the Tempter whispers judgment on my sinful
soul,
These three words will send him back to hell: Paid in
full!

*I will come before my God,
He will shower grace on me;
How can he refuse my cries,
When he hears my Savior's plea?*

I will come to God, Jesus is my plea –
I will come to God, Jesus is my plea –
I will come to God, Jesus is my plea –
I will come to God, Jesus is my plea!

*I will come before my God,
He will shower grace on me;
How can he refuse my cries,
When he hears my Savior's plea?*

I will come before my God.

My Credo

Trace the sunbeam to the sun;
Trace the river to the sea;
Trace all pleasures to the One
Who is Pleasure perfectly.

Basileus¹¹

Prologue

The Argument

*Apostrophe to Nebuchadnezzar*¹² – *Reflection upon the same* – *Petition to the Spirit of Truth* – *The theme laid out in brief*

O Head of gold¹³! whose Babylonian might
Subdued the nations, at whose outstretched hand
Innumerable minions, scarlet-clad¹⁴,
O'erswept earth's mighty kingdoms, riding forth
Conquering and to conquer, till the world
Came trembling forth to stoop before your throne,
Entreating mercy; nor, O gracious king,
Were they rejected; thus your kingdom grew
And far excelled all others that had been
Or yet would be, as Bashan's mighty oak¹⁵
Excels the flowers of the field – free grace,
Administered in royal wisdom, worked
Together with unswayed dominion

11 Greek: “King”

12 An “apostrophe” is an address made to an object or a person who is incapable of answering. In this instance, the proposed answer is formulated on the basis of Nebuchadnezzar's decree as given in Daniel chapter four. The author is here dialoguing with an account left by Nebuchadnezzar as if he were dialoguing with him in person.

13 In Daniel chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a statue with a head of gold, which Daniel interpreted for him as King Nebuchadnezzar himself, the ruler of the highest and most glorious of the world empires of history.

14 Cf. Nahum 2:3, where the Babylonians prophesied to destroy Nineveh are described as “valiant men in scarlet”.

15 Cf. Isaiah 2:13

And made the tree no human hand could fell¹⁶
A haven for all creatures of the earth, –
Fair haven! splendor as had not been seen
Since cherubs barred the gates of Paradise¹⁷
Against mankind decked Babylon the Great;
Unconquerable city! This you made
A garden fit for gods¹⁸, your sovereign sway
Adorned in splendor fitted for a king.

Tell me, O King, what wisdom did you learn
When in the flush of splendor and mad pride
The kingdom and the glory and the might,
Aye! even human reason fled from you,
And driven out you made your home with beasts?

At this he started: from his furrowed brow
The color fled, and he was grim and pale,
His lips long-frozen in a sickly smile
Bespeaking sorrow mixed with wisdom; thus,
For some long moments bitter memories,
Breaking upon the floodgate of his lips
As waters rise against a weakened dam
And cannot overflow it, till at once,
Resistance overcome, they thunder forth,
So suddenly his thoughts gave way to speech¹⁹:
‘Why do you call me king? Those seven years
I crept upon the earth, wet with the dew,
My food the grass, my hair my covering
(Grown thick as eagles’ plumage), as the ox,
Walking in ways marked out for me, no more
A ruler of my own base passions than

16 Cf. Daniel 4:10-12

17 Cf. Genesis 3:24

18 The hanging gardens which Nebuchadnezzar built for his wife are considered one of the seven wonders of the world.

19 The basic premise of the following monologue is adapted from Daniel chapter four.

I ever had been over other men, –
I was then what I was, and I am now
No more, no less a king than I was then.
What wisdom? – here he flung his arm across
The city's wide expanse – One man is born
To conquer nations, one to gather crusts
Until he find no more and fade away,
Alone, unloved – Are they then different? No,
Each one according to his nature lives
And dies; as are the cattle, so is man,
Except that cattle will not mock themselves,
And madly clamor, "I have done this thing."
All are corrupt, and so will all admit
Of one another, but in each man's heart,
He is the one exception. I have learned
But this: that man who madly goes astray
Can never thereby frustrate God's design.
Each thinks he is a king, but so to think
Does not make him a king. There is but One
Who reigns in earth and heaven, whose sure will
Cannot be hindered: to the Lord on high
Belongs the Kingdom; he alone is King,
And sets men up or takes down as he will.'

He spoke and he was still; and at his word
Warriors and mighty men, high kings of old,
Heroes, and names of great renown, fond tales
Of romance and high passion, daring deeds,
Illustrious acts, fierce wars, wise statesmanship,
Beauty that launched a thousand ships, dark wrath
That burned a hundred towers, histories
Of all things great, high, noble, lofty, good,
Were shattered as one dashes on a rock
A crystal mirror, but there still gleam forth
Flashes of glory, traces darting out

Of what was once both whole and fair, but now
Can only tell the glory that once was
In broken fragments.

Thus earth's broken kings
Give broken witness to the King of kings;
And thus must I, whose nature is to sing
Of what is good, now turn my theme to him²⁰.

Spirit of Truth²¹! who speak not of yourself,
But open blinded eyes to see the King²²,
Anoint my heart that I may know all things²³,
Anoint my pen to pour forth what I know
In floods that heal the nations, take hot coals
From off the sacred altar, touch my lips,
That I, mere man, mere *sinful* man, undone
Before the presence of the King of kings,
In blood-bought purity may take the theme
That burning seraphs, veiled before your throne,
Scarce dare to speak, as meek and worshipful
They thunder your thrice-holy²⁴. Theme too high,
Too high for dust of dust! but dust once touched
By grace and glory, how can it not sing?
O take these broken offerings, Most High,
These broken shards that, broken though they be,

20 All of us have been so designed that we must worship that which appears to us most beautiful. When our eyes have been opened to see the glory of Christ, we cannot but worship him.

21 It has been conventional to begin epic poetry with an invocation to a Muse, a Greek divinity of the Arts supposed to have power to assist the poet to sing; in this case, the author, having touched upon a theme too high for such superstition, is moved instead to petition the Spirit of God who delights to open hearts to embrace the knowledge of the King who is to be the poem's protagonist.

22 Cf. John 16:13

23 As the Spirit is said to do in I John 2:20

24 The preceding has been adapted from the account of the prophet Isaiah's commission, recorded in Isaiah chapter six.

Reflect in broken rays unbroken Light,
The glory of the King above all kings!

The Most High spoke: and at his mighty Word
The worlds sprang into being and were good²⁵;
The kingdom was his own, his workmanship,
He reigned, and all was light, until the Foe,
In serpentine deception, sowed the lie
And darkness came.

But darkness was a lie,
And could not reign. In righteousness and wrath
The Most High thundered judgment from his throne,
Still ruling o'er the world, though marred by sin,
Still ruling o'er the lying treachery
That worked his will²⁶: for in the ages past
The Most High covenanted with the Word
To give to him an everlasting throne,
A Kingdom of Redemption²⁷, to outshine
The kingdom of creation, as the sun
Outshines the moon; rejoicing at his word,
The Eternal Son took on himself the task
To recreate, repair, restore, renew
The rebel broken by his treachery,
Display the riches of his glorious grace²⁸,
And win an everlasting Kingdom. Fierce
And furious was the warfare of the Foe,
And of that war, and of the promised King,
And of the victory so hardly won
Long ages after, this is now the tale.

25 Cf. Genesis 1:1; John 1:1

26 Cf. Acts 4:26-28

27 Cf. Psalm 2:7-8

28 Cf. Ephesians 1:3-7; Ephesians 2:4-7

Basileus

Book I – The Coming of the King

The Argument

The covenant made with David – the decline of the Kingdom – the promise of the prophets – the rise of Rome and the Idumean king – 1st portent: the Star of the East – 2nd portent: Gabriel’s message to Mary and Joseph – 3rd portent: the conception of John – 4th portent: Gabriel’s appearance to the shepherds – the birth of the King – his humility considered – his greatness considered – the conjunction of greatness and humility evidenced by his first visitors – the testimony of Simeon and Anna – the wrath of the Idumean – the flight to Egypt – the rage of the Dragon

King David meant to build the Lord a house²⁹,
And this is how it happened: after that
The Lord had given rest on every side,
And made secure the kingdom in his hand,
And so confirmed the promises he made
By Samuel the prophet (this is he
Who by divine decree made David king,
Anointing him with oil when a boy)³⁰ –
After all this, enriched by victory,
And pleased that God should dwell in Israel

29 The following is adapted from 2 Samuel 7.

30 Cf. 1 Samuel 16:1-13

As he had told their father Abraham³¹,
He set aside a vast and plenteous store
To make the temple where might ever dwell
God's presence. So he purposed, but that night
The Lord appeared to Nathan in a dream,
Commanding thus: Tell David now, your king
And my servant, that what he purposes
He shall not do. Have I commanded this,
Or do I need a house in which to dwell,
When all the earth is mine, and all the heavens
Cannot contain me³²? Tell him this instead:
I took him from the pasture, for I planned
To give to him a kingdom that should be
Eternal as the heavens; I decreed,
And will not take it back, that I should have
A people and a kingdom, priests to me,
And I will be their God forever; when
The first man, Adam, turned away from me
And cleaved unto the Serpent, then I spoke,
And will fulfill it, that of Adam's race
I still will have my people – from his seed
Will rise One who shall crush the Serpent's head,
And win redemption³³. Now, will David build
A house for me? No, I will build for him
A house that cannot fall, for of his seed
I will raise up the King of whom I spoke,
The everlasting King, who shall destroy
The Serpent's work, and win a glorious name
And people as the stars of heaven. He
Will sit upon the throne that I have given
To David, my beloved servant; of

31 Cf. Genesis 17:3-8

32 Cf. 2 Chronicles 6:18

33 Cf. Genesis 3:15

His kingdom and increase shall be no end³⁴.
So Nathan spoke, and David was content,
And Solomon, his son, then built the house.

Many long years then passed, after this oath,
And many kings arose from David's line,
And sat upon his throne; but nevermore
Was found a king as fit to rule as he,
Nor was the kingdom ever as it was
In David's reign. For after Solomon
Had turned away his heart to other gods,
God took from him ten tribes³⁵, and many times
The two tribes, Benjamin and Judah, were
Hard-pressed by enemies, and plague and drought
Oppressed the land, for they had turned aside
To wickedness, until there finally came
Proud Babylon, which toppled David's throne,
Broke down his city walls, and carried off
The people captive, and took the temple gold³⁶:
The nation was in exile, and the King
For which they waited almost was forgot.

In the beginning, Darkness covered all
The vast and trackless earth, and o'er its deep
And turbid waters, Chaos reigned supreme;
But hovering above its swirling depths,
As broods a mother hen above her chicks,
The Spirit of God was working out his will,
And drawing out of grim Confusion's lair
His wise, well-ordered principles and plans:
Darkness gave birth to Light, and sterile waves
Soon teemed with life by a creative grace³⁷;

34 Cf. Isaiah 9:6-7

35 Cf. 1 Kings 11:31-36

36 Cf. 2 Kings 25

37 Cf. Genesis 1:1-3, 20-21

But in the vaster, wilder waste of sin,
What greater grace will bring forth life again?
Spirit of prophecy! come brood once more
Upon this waste and trackless land, where now
Confusion reigns again. For light is lost:
It is become a region of deep gloom,
And all its people dwell in shades of death³⁸.

How paltry are man's purposes, how weak
His will, how short his memory! But so
It is not with the Lord. The promised King
He still had not forgotten, nor would let
His scattered people yet forget; and so,
Through many dark years, his prophets raised a voice
In witness to the King that still should come³⁹,
A King and more, for he should be the Son
Of God and Man, the Lord of heaven and earth,
And David's God, although his Son⁴⁰; for this
The prophets call his name – Immanuel
(For he shall be God with us)⁴¹; and, though God,
As man should suffer more than any man,
And, being numbered with transgressors, smite
That old Serpent a mighty blow, from which
He never should recover; but his own,
The people God had given him, ah, them
In triumph he should lead beyond the world,
And give them an eternal kingdom⁴². Yet,
For all their labors, they were only mocked,
And some put into stocks, and some in pits
Cast down, and some were beaten, stoned, and

38 Cf. Isaiah 24:1-12; 8:21-9:2

39 E.g. Isaiah 16:5; Jeremiah 33:15-17; Ezekiel 37:24-27

40 Cf. Isaiah 9:6-7; Psalm 110

41 Cf. Isaiah 7:14

42 Cf. Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Isaiah 66:19-24

killed⁴³.

*Long have your people lain in darkness deep;
When will the darkness give way to the Sun,
And Morning dry the eyes of them who weep?*

*O Sun of Righteousness, make haste to dawn,
That we may go out as the calves and leap,
That we may see your light, and rise, and run⁴⁴!*

O iron feet, O cruel iron feet!
How have you trodden down the world of men,
How have you crushed all kingdoms that opposed,
And wrought your iron will upon them all!
Cold iron feet! beware, lest, mixed with clay,
You lose your strength, and, while you are at ease,
The Stone unmade with hands come hurling down,
And grind to powder you and all your hosts⁴⁵!
So arose Rome, a monstrous, ten-horned beast⁴⁶,
Whose kingdom spread o'er all the earth. Judah,
Who these six hundred years have had no throne,
Who will arise to take up David's crown?
Who will be set up, once again to rule
Your nation with a firm and gentle rod?
Will David's Branch⁴⁷ now come? But no, the throne
Is given to your older brother; he,
The Idumean⁴⁸, Rome's puppet of blood,
Will rise to spill the blood of many sons,

43 Cf. Hebrews 11:32-40

44 Cf. Malachi 4:2

45 Cf. Daniel 2:34-35

46 Cf. Daniel 7:7-9

47 Cf. Isaiah 11:1

48 The Idumeans were descended from Esau, the older brother of Israel.

And sate his cruelty with your daughters' bones.

*O Sun of Righteousness, make haste to dawn!
Oh, how we languish in this darkness deep,
Oh, how we stumble, and there is no Sun.*

'What star is this that lights the midnight sky?'
So did they wonder, they who heard of old
The Jewish prophecies, that there should rise
A King that evermore should rule the earth –
'What star is this? in truth it is a star
That shines with glory, shines as it had been
In God's own counsel.' Then they understood,
And said, 'It is a portent.' So they came
With gifts fit for a king, and sought its source,
The child for whom the star did shine, as this
Should be the King of kings. And thus they made
Their journey westward, following ever on,
Till they should know this portent's fiery tale⁴⁹.

And who is this, that, brighter than the star,
Shines brilliantly before a humble maid,
The Lord's young servant? It is Gabriel,
God's mighty warrior⁵⁰; hear his thundering voice:

'Hail, highly favored, you that have been graced
Above all women, hail! for you shall bear
A Son to whom the Lord shall give the throne
Of David; he shall reign forevermore,
And never shall his kingdom end. His name
Shall be called "Jesus," because he shall save
His people from their sins⁵¹. He shall be high,

49 Cf. Matthew 2:1-12

50 "Gabriel" means "mighty warrior of God".

51 "Jesus" means "savior".

For he shall be the Son of the Most High.
Think not, "How shall this be? I am a maid
That have not known a man." – the Holy Ghost
Will come upon you, so the Son you bear,
Your seed, shall have no father, but the Lord,
The God of heaven shall be his Father; thus,
He will be holy, God and man, and he
Alone will reign exalted⁵².'

He was gone,
And Mary, left alone then, treasured up
These sayings in her heart. To her betrothed,
Joseph (with whom she had not come together),
The angel likewise in a dream appeared⁵³,
And this too was a portent, as the star.

The highest angel and the highest star
In all the heavens thus their task fulfilled
To go before the King of kings, presage
His soon arrival, and make straight his way.
Nor were they all, these glorious presages,
For soon there came out from a barren womb
One who should be the greatest among men⁵⁴,
A prophet such as never had been known,
The Forerunner; now, this was John, who came
Into the world to baptize, and prepare
A people for the King. Of his glad task,
Hear now Isaiah, God's great prophet, speak:

'The voice of one in desert places cries!
What cries he? Make the highest mountains plains,
Fill up the lowest valleys, and prepare

52 Cf. Luke 1:26-35

53 Cf. Matthew 1:18-25

54 Cf. Matthew 11:11

The way by which the King of kings shall come.’

So John the Baptist came, as Gabriel
Had told his father, Zechariah, who,
While disbelieving, was struck dumb, until
The child was born to her who was called barren,
And that in old age⁵⁵. This miracle of birth,
And John, the child who made straight the way,
Was a third portent, great and terrible.

Such portents, various and wonderful,
What could they mean, but that the One of whom
They told should be the greatest King of all,
The Ruler of the universe, the sum
Of history, the Reason for the world! –
So great, so terrible, that mankind’s great
And noble kings, creation’s highest stars,
Bear witness to him, he must surely be
Too great to condescend to lowly men!
But Gabriel’s work is not yet done: to men
Poor and despised, who watch their little flock
In the cold hills of Judah he is sent
To bring the message. Look! how flashes round
His brilliance, so that all at once fall down,
As if dead; so to reassure their hearts
He tells them,

‘Fear not, shepherds, for behold,
I bring to you good tidings of great joy,
And peace to men of God’s goodwill; take heart,
For unto you is born in Bethlehem,
In David’s city, David’s Son and Heir,
The Savior, the Messiah, God and King!
This is how you shall know him: wrapped about

55 Cf. Luke 1:5-25

In swaddling clothes, he shall be laid to rest
In a coarse feeding-trough for beasts.'

And then,
The world ignited with the matchless light
Of many angels, shouting with their might,
'Glory to God in the highest!' Thundering
Across the night, resounding through the hills,
It finally faded from the earth, and yet,
Within the shepherds' hearts it echoes still.
At this last portent came the shepherds rude,
To bow before the long-awaited King⁵⁶.
O world of men, the day has finally come,
That day for which the saints so long have yearned –
Oh, longed-for since that first great Fall had brought
Death and destruction, sickness, pain, and tears,
The venom of the Serpent's bite – desired
And blessed day, how do we love your light!
For in your breast there lies the promised Seed,
The King of history, the Conqueror
Of that old Serpent, the Deliverer
Of those who bear his venom in their souls.
O blessed night, the King has now been born!
But what is this, what humble place is this,
To shelter him so highly testified
By angels, men, and creatures? what rough place
In which to hide the King above all kings?
How humble is this King surpassing great!
He made the world, and came a man despised
Among the men he made⁵⁷; he came to rule,
And took up residence within a stall,
A shelter for the beasts of humble men:

56 Cf. Luke 2:8-18

57 Cf. John 1:10-11

How humble, yet how great! Oh, paradox
More sweetly strange than all the riddles dark
Of all the wisest men who ever lived!
And so this babe, more humble than the least
And lowliest of all that walked the earth,
Yet greater far than all the highest kings
Who ever ruled in puffed-up majesty –
Before this babe within his trough, there bow
Both kings and peasants, shepherds and magi.
Yes, he is great so we might bow in fear,
And he is meek, that we might dare to come⁵⁸.

‘He came unto his own, and was despised’:
Ah! wonder greater than all wonders yet
Conceived of Lust and brought to birth by Sin,
More monstrous than all that misshapen race
Of Guilt, the bastard children of the Snake:
Will men despise their Maker? will the pot
Deride the Potter⁵⁹? That were cause enough
For all the pangs of fieriest hell; –
But when the Potter breaks upon the wheel
His own self for his self-willed shards, and when
The Maker pours out to the bloody ground
His very soul, to bring back to himself
The men who had despised his royal word –
When thus such condescension meets such grace,
And even God's dear Love is so despised,
What punishment awaits so gross a sin⁶⁰?
What grim fate lurks beyond that ringing cry
Of damning reprobation so severe?

58 Cf. Psalm 2:11

59 Cf. Isaiah 45:9-11

60 Cf. Hebrews 10:28-29

'He came unto his own, and was despised'...

But not by all, for in the Temple mount
There dwelt a faithful priest, old Simeon,
Who long had waited for Messiah's birth,
And knew from God that he would not see death
Until he saw the King. This Simeon,
Beholding Jesus coming the eighth day
After his birth, took up the babe, and said,

'O Master, you may now let go in peace
Your servant, for my eyes have seen the King,
The Savior of the world, Israel's Hope
And Glory, and the Light of all the world!'

And so too Anna, that old prophetess,
A widow eighty years and four, who kept
Always within the Temple, to await
The promised Christ, when she saw Jesus come,
Praised God, and told all Judah she had seen
The Lord's redemption⁶¹.

Thus it was that Christ,
The long-awaited Kings of kings was born,
Surrounded by all great and glorious signs,
And wrapped in meekness, yet unrecognized
By all but just a few rough peasant men,
Some Eastern kings, a prophetess, and a priest.

So he came, and though the world knew not, yet
knew

That Dragon dread, the ancient Serpent; he,
Inciting Herod, poured out all the blood
Of many innocents, and Rachel wept,

61 Cf. Luke 2:21-30

And got no comfort⁶². Fierce and furious
Was his mad onslaught, and the child's father
Was forced to flee to Egypt with the babe.
And how they fared, and how the Father called
His Son from Egypt, and how, finally,
This long-awaited Seed took up his arms
And struck the death-blow to the Dragon fierce,
Requires another tale.

62 Cf. Matthew 2:13-18

APPENDIX 1

Dispensationalism – Categorized Scripture List



Introduction

Dispensationalism is basically the method of interpreting the scriptures that sees two distinct peoples of God, with two distinct destinies: Israel and the Church. In various forms and among various groups, this idea has had a widespread influence – but is it biblical? Following is a select list of tenets that many contemporary mainstream Dispensationalists would hold to, and a list of scripture passages that address these tenets. The list of distinctives represents a wide segment of popular Dispensational teachings; however, Dispensationalism is by no means a monolithic entity, and many self-professed Dispensationalists, particularly in the Progressive school, would not adhere to many of its points.

- 1) The Church is not the continuation of God's Old Testament people, but a distinct body born on the Day of Pentecost.
- 2) The Church is never equated with Israel in the New Testament, and Christians are not Jews, true Israel, etc.
- 3) The prophecies made to Israel in the Old Testament are not being fulfilled in the Church, nor will they ever be.
- 4) The Church does not participate in the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament; it is for ethnic Israel, and will be established in a future millennial kingdom.

- 5) The Old Testament saints were saved by faith alone, on the basis of the Calvary-work of Christ alone; however, the object of their faith was not Christ, but rather the revelation peculiar to their dispensation.
- 6) The Old Testament saints did not know of the coming "Church Age," of the resurrection of Christ, or basically, of what we today call the gospel.
- 7) When Jesus came to earth, he offered the Jews a physical kingdom, but they rejected him.
- 8) When Jesus proclaimed "the gospel of the Kingdom," it was the news about how ethnic Jews might enter and find rewards in this physical kingdom, and is to be distinguished from the gospel as defined in I Corinthians 15:3-4, which the apostles later proclaimed to the church.
- 9) After the Jews rejected Jesus' kingdom offer, he inaugurated a parenthetical "Church Age," which will be concluded immediately before God again takes up his dealings with his national people, ethnic Israel.
- 10) During the "Church Age," Jesus is not reigning from the throne of David; he is engaged instead in his priestly work, and his kingly work will take place in the future millennial kingdom.
- 11) At some unspecified but imminent time, Jesus will return (but not all the way to earth, just to the air) and rapture his Church, also called his Bride; for the following seven years, they will feast with him at the marriage supper of the Lamb; meanwhile, on earth, he will begin to deal with his national people, ethnic Israel, again, calling them to himself and preserving them in the midst of seven years of great tribulation; at the midpoint of which, the Antichrist will set himself up as god in the rebuilt Jewish temple, and demand worship from the world.
- 12) After these seven years, Christ will return, this time all the way to earth. He will defeat the forces of evil, bind Satan and cast him into a pit, and inaugurate the physical Jewish Kingdom that he had offered during his life on earth. The Jews who survived the tribulation will populate the earth during this blessed golden era, and the Christians will reign spiritually, in glorified bodies.

- 13) After these thousand years, Satan will be released and will gather an army from the offspring of the Jews who survived the tribulation. He will be finally defeated and cast into hell. At this time, the wicked dead will be resurrected and judged, whereas the righteous dead had already been resurrected one-thousand-seven years previously, at the rapture. Christ will then usher in the New Heavens and New Earth, and the destinies of all mankind will be finalized. Dispensationalists are divided as to whether or not there will remain a distinction between Christians and Jews in the New Earth.

Scriptures

1. The People of God

- A) *From the beginning, God selected one people alone, from all the earth.*

Deu 7:6 "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deu 10:15 Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.

Deu 14:2 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Isa 41:8-9 But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off";

- B) *This people would belong to him forever.*

1Ki 6:13 And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel."

1Ch 17:9 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall waste them no more, as formerly,

Isa 60:19-21 The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.

C) *He would cast off, or exile this people for a time, for covenant unfaithfulness.*

Deu 28:63-68 And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. "And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, 'If only it were evening!' and at evening you shall say, 'If only it were morning!' because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see. And the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves

for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer."

2Ki 17:20-24 And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight. When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin. The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day. And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities.

2Ch 36:13-21 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem. The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he

brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

Hos 1:4-6 And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.

Hos 1:9 And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

D) However, he would then gather them together again, and restore them.

Deu 30:4-9 If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today. The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in

all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers,

Isa 10:21-23 A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.

Hos 1:7 But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.

Hos 1:10-11 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Amo 9:11 "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old,

E) When he restored them, he would also expand them, forming them anew from every people on earth.

Isa 2:1-3 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the

LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isa 11:9-16 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples--of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

Isa 19:23-25 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."

Isa 24:13-15 For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done. They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty of the LORD they shout from the west. Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; in the coastlands of the sea, give glory to the name of the LORD, the God of Israel.

Isa 42:4-12 He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them." Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the habitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the coastlands.

Isa 49:1-12 Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God." And

now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him-- for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength--he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, 'Come out,' to those who are in darkness, 'Appear.' They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene."

Isa 51:5 My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.

Isa 60:1-9 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you

shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house. Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? For the coastlands shall hope for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from afar, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has made you beautiful.

Isa 66:10-24 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance." For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies. "For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many. "Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD. "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations

and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD. "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

Hos 2:23 and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

Zec 2:10-13 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And the LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem." Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

Mal 1:11 For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering.

For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

F) *The New Testament Church is the continuation of this one people.*

Act 15:12-18 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, "'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.'

Rom 9:23-26 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory--even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

Rom 11:11-32 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance

mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. *[Whether or not one sees a future for ethnic Israel in this passage is beside the point: in any case, there is only one people of God, represented by the*

one olive tree. Believing Gentiles have been grafted into this one tree, and unbelieving Jews broken off; but when they are grafted back in, it will be the same tree into which the Gentiles were grafted, God's only people, true Israel, his Church.]

Gal 3:7-8 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

Gal 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Eph 2:11-22 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands--remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in

whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Eph 3:5-6 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

G) *Hence, New Testament believers are called Jews, Abraham's seed, etc.*

Rom 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Rom 4:11-12 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Rom 9:6-8 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Gal 3:6-7 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

Gal 3:26-29 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Gal 4:21-31 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Gal 6:16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and *[that is, "even"]* upon the Israel of God. *[The Greek conjunction may mean either "and" or "even"/"namely"; hence the context must determine the meaning. If it is taken in the sense of "and," so that "the Israel of God," is a different body from the Church, then Paul is contradicting himself and undermining the whole point he has been making throughout his letter! However, if it means "even," then*

the clear assertion that those who follow the “rule” of boasting only in the cross are in fact “the Israel of God,” becomes a very fitting conclusion, and reiterates all that he has been teaching.]

Phi 3:3 For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh--

Heb 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

1Pe 2:9-12 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. *[Some have said that these Jewish terms are applied to the Church by way of analogy, not identification. However, when Peter goes on to speak of these believers (some of whom are ethnic Gentiles) in contrast with the “Gentiles,” he makes it clear that he actually is intending to refer to them as “Jews,” the well-known opposite of “Gentiles”.]*

Rev 2:9 "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

2. The Fulfillment of Prophecy

A) *The true heir of the Old Testament promises is not ethnic Israel, but only Christ, the one Seed of Abraham.*

Gal 3:16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

- Thus, everyone who is in Christ, which includes all believers, is a descendant of Abraham and an heir of the promises made to him.

Gal 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

B) *The true fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies is frequently indicated in the New Testament.*

- The prophecy of restoring Israel was fulfilled by the calling of the Gentiles to be God's people.

Act 15:13-18 (quoting Amos 9:11-12) After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, "'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.'

Rom 9:22-26 (quoting Hosea 1:10; 2:23) What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels

of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory--even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" *[The verses that Paul is quoting from Hosea are clearly speaking of "the house of Israel," and say that she will be cast off, and no longer God's people; but then restored, and God's people again. Paul is here saying that this restoration of Israel as God's people is being fulfilled by God's calling out a people "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles".]*

- The prophecy of the New Covenant, made "with the house of Israel" (see Jeremiah 31:31-34), is fulfilled in the New Testament Church.

Heb 8:6-13 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his

neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Heb 10:14-18 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Mat 26:26-28 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Mar 14:22-24 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

Luk 22:19-20 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

1Co 11:23-25 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

2Co 3:5-6 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

- Some other prophecies and types interpreted in the New Testament

Mat 2:14-15 (quoting Hosea 11:1) And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." *[In context, Hosea is clearly referring to Israel; hence, Matthew sees Jesus as the true Israel, and the antitype of Israel's history.]*

Mat 17:10-13 (referring to Malachi 4:5) And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

Joh 2:19-22 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews

then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. *[Not only does Jesus here equate the Old Testament temple imagery with his own body, by means of which the presence of God truly was brought down to man; but furthermore, John explains that believing this Christ-centered interpretation was in fact to believe the Old Testament scriptures themselves.]*

Act 2:14-21 (quoting Joel 2:28-32) But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' *[Most Dispensationalists will say that this prophecy is referring to Jesus' second coming, as their hermeneutic demands; but Peter clearly declares that it is being fulfilled in this age.]*

Act 2:25-32 (quoting Psalm 16:8-11) For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me,

for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Act 2:33-36 (quoting Psalm 110:1) Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Rom 4:13-17 (quoting Genesis 17:5) For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring--not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it

is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. *[According to Paul, the promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations was fulfilled when he became the father of all those who believed, from all the Gentile peoples.]*

Gal 4:22-31 (quoting Isaiah 54:1 and Genesis 21:10)
For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Heb 9:1-12 (interpreting the symbolism of the tabernacle and its worship services) Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a

second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

[When one allows God himself to interpret the meaning of his prophecies through later revelation, it becomes impossible to employ a naturalistic, Dispensational hermeneutic. Dispensationalists claim to have a literal hermeneutic, taking prophecies in a simple, material sense unless the immediate context demands otherwise. The problem with this approach is that it arrives at interpretations which are later contradicted by the New Testament. In opposition to this principle, Covenant Theologians recognize the validity of "the analogy of faith," that is, that the best interpreter of

scriptures is other scriptures. The hermeneutic which allows the Author to foreshadow spiritual realities through physical means, and later interpret them in clear, didactic writing, is actually a more natural and literal hermeneutic than one which demands a physical/material sense unless an immediate absurdity arises thereby, even when other scriptures contradict this physical/material sense. The basic question is this: will our hermeneutic allow God to explain himself, or will it allow our own human understanding of what is more literal to negate the interpretation of God himself?]

- C) *Those to whom the Old Testament promises were first made understood them to mean more than the merely physical.*

Heb 11:9-10 By faith he [Abraham] went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Heb 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Heb 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the

dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Heb 11:24-26 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Heb 11:39-40 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

3. The Faith of Old Testament believers

A) The Old Testament saints believed in Christ.

Gen 3:14-15 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Gen 3:21 And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Gen 4:3-5 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. *[In these passages, we have all the elements of the basic gospel message: God would send a Deliverer, born of a woman, who would crush the serpent's head, but be mortally wounded in the conflict. That he would be ultimately victorious demands a resurrection. This*

gospel message was illustrated in God's killing an innocent animal to cover man's shame; and in Abel's blood sacrifice, we see an indication of his understanding of these basic truths.]

Job 19:25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth [*lit., "arise upon the dust"*]. [*Throughout the Book of Job, probably the first canonical scriptures ever written, the expression "to be upon the dust" ("lie down upon the dust," etc.) clearly means, "to die" (see Job 17:16; 20:11; 21:26; 34:15). Hence, the phrase, "to arise upon the dust" means, "to rise from the dead".]*

Isa 53:1-12 Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his

soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. [*Even in the New Testament, there is no clearer declaration of the gospel than we find here.*]

B) The New Testament authors recognized that the Old Testament saints knew of Christ.

Act 2:25-31 (quoting Psalm 16:8-11) For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence." "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."

Mat 13:17 Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Luk 24:25-27 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Act 26:22-23 To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

1Pe 1:10-12 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

4. The Kingdom of God

A) *Christ announced the arrival of the Kingdom, he did not merely "offer" it.*

Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Mat 11:11-12 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. [*Here, Christ*

speaks of the Kingdom as of something that people have already been entering since the days of John the Baptist; hence, he could not be referring to a future, physical kingdom that he was only offering – no one would have entered that Kingdom yet. But Dispensationalists will say that even today no one has entered it.]

Mat 12:28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. *[Jesus did cast out demons; therefore, according to him, the Kingdom had already come.]*

Mat 16:18-19 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." *[Here, the establishment of the Church is seen in parallel with entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.]*

B) If Christ had truly been offering a physical Kingdom, the Jews would not have rejected it.

Joh 6:15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

C) Christ and the apostles spoke of the Kingdom as one that now has only a spiritual presence, in our midst.

Luk 17:20-21 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Joh 18:36-37 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be

delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world--to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

D) *The Church today is the Kingdom, and Christians are Kingdom citizens.*

Mar 9:1 And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." *[Since the entire generation alive when Christ was on earth has died, the Kingdom must have come already; therefore, it cannot be a future, thousand-year reign.]*

1Co 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. *[The power that Paul was speaking of was already operative in the Church, as the context makes clear; therefore, the Church was to him essentially the same as the Kingdom.]*

Col 1:13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

Rev 1:5-6 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Rev 1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance

that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

E) Christ sent the apostles out to proclaim the same gospel of the kingdom that he had proclaimed.

Mat 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

F) This the apostles did.

Act 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Act 20:24-25 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

Act 28:23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

Act 28:30-31 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

G) Christ is now reigning from the throne of David.

Act 2:30-36 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would

set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

1Co 15:20-28 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Eph 1:18-23 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every

name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Heb 1:8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

5. The Millennium

- A) *The rapture of the Church will occur after the revealing of the "man of lawlessness," whom most Dispensationalists believe to be the Antichrist.*

2Th 2:1-5 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? *[Most Dispensationalists say that this sitting in the Temple will occur at the midpoint of the tribulation; hence, the rapture of the Church cannot take place at least until the second half of the tribulation (in the Dispensational scheme).]*

- The rapture is called a "meeting" in the air, which was originally a technical term used of the procession that would come out of a city to greet a visiting dignitary, and escort him immediately back to the city, in great splendor; and later came to be used when one would go out to meet a person, and then follow him along the way in which he was already going; hence, the term likely indicates that

the rapture will be a similar event, in which the saints are gathered up to meet Jesus, and follow immediately behind him as he continues on to judge the earth.

1Th 4:14-18 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet [Greek, "apantesis"] the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Act 28:14-15 There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet [Greek, "apantesis"] us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.

Mar 14:13 And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet [Greek, "apantao"] you. Follow him,

Act 16:16-17 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met [Greek, "apantao"] by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."

B) The rescue of the church and the eternal destruction of the wicked will occur at the same time.

2Th 1:6-10 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Mat 24:29-31 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Mat 25:31-46 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we

see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

1Co 15:51-57 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2Pe 3:3-14 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that

the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. *[Here, immediately before the dissolution of the heavens and earth in fervent heat, people are saying that all things are continuing in the same way they always have; which could not be said following all the events of Dispensational eschatology. Furthermore, the delay is intended to bring in the full measure of those who should repent and be added to the Church, and also provides a basis for Peter's exhortation to contemporary believers to be watchful, looking for this final, catastrophic day. He does not exhort us to be watchful for the appearing of Christ as that which rescues us from the earth, but leaves one-thousand-seven years of history afterward; but for the appearing of Christ as that which brings the final destruction of the world.]*

C) *The resurrection of the righteous dead and the wicked dead will occur at the same time.*

Dan 12:1-2 "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Joh 5:28-29 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

D) *Revelation chapter twenty must be interpreted in light of its genre:*

- Revelation is a book full of symbolic visions and numbers.

Rev 1:4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, *[Unless there are literally seven Holy Spirits, the reader has to acknowledge a symbolic use of numbers here.]*

Rev 1:20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Rev 17:9-12 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come,

and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

- In other places in Revelation, the final consummation of all history has already been reached; therefore, chapter twenty is likely another "recapitulation," a different symbolic way of describing the New Testament era, followed by a description of the end of history.

Rev 11:15-19 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Rev 14:14-16 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully

ripe." So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Rev 16:17-21 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Rev 19:11-21 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast and the

kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

- The “first resurrection” corresponds well with other New Testament teaching on the present resurrection life of believers.

Rom 6:3-4 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Col 3:1-3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

1Jo 3:14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Eph 2:4-6 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we

were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Col 2:11-12 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

- The binding of Satan corresponds well with related New Testament teaching.

Mat 12:26-29 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

Luk 10:17-18 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Joh 12:31-33 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Joh 16:8-11 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not

believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Heb 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

- The more obscure, apocalyptic visions of John should be interpreted in light of the clearer, didactic epistles of the New Testament, which we have already examined.

APPENDIX 2

Theological FAQs



1. What is the Bible about?

The bible gives an overview of world history from God's own perspective, with its doxological (i.e. God-glorifying) purpose, divine superintendence, and victorious end, all minutely planned out before the creation of the world (Isa. 46:9-10; Mat. 25:34; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8); and according to this divine perspective on history, all things were designed to be brought together in Christ, who is the reason for world history and the one in whom all things are summed up (Eph. 1:9-12; Col. 1:13-20). Thus, when he was on the earth, Jesus taught that the entire bible, from the first books of Moses to the last books of the prophets, was written to testify of him and his redemptive work alone (Jn. 5:39-40; Luk. 24:25-27, 44-48).

The great theme of the bible is the redemption of mankind, and the eternal growth of the Kingdom of God (Isa. 9:7; Rev. 5:9), which is swelled by the legions of sinners chosen before the foundation of the world to know God's unmerited grace, and so to magnify his mercy (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 9:23-24; Eph. 2:7; 3:21). Its great hero is Jesus Christ, who entered into an eternal covenant with the Father to redeem a people (Psalm 2:7-9; John 17:1-5), and who was then made the Guarantor of an eternal covenant that God made with fallen mankind, to save them and bring them back into his presence. Thus, he was promised immediately after Adam's fall, in Genesis 3:15; and the rest of the bible unfolds that first gospel promise, and shows the great steps that God took throughout human history to foreshadow Christ,

confirm the promise of his coming, and prepare to bring him into the world to fulfill the promise “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4-5). The climax of the bible and of all human history is the Cross of Calvary, where Jesus, the promised Christ, fully accomplished the covenanted redemption, offering himself up as an atoning sacrifice for all the people that he had covenanted with the Father to save (cf. Gal. 6:14). The great conclusion of the bible is paradise regained, where God dwells once again in the midst of his redeemed people, with Jesus Christ, their Immanuel, enjoying eternal fellowship with them, and exulting in their unending praises (Rev. 21:1-5).

This great theme of the bible, the redemption of a people through the promised Christ, was designed ultimately as the self-revelation of all the inexhaustible and diversely excellent glory of God, so that his people might glorify him for all eternity (Psalm 79:9; Isaiah 43:6-7, 25).

2. What makes the bible unique?

The bible is unique in that it is the only book that is fully human and also eminently divine. As a divine book, the bible is perfect, infallible, and inspired by God (II. Pet. 1:20,21; II Tim. 3:16,17; Lk. 21:33; Is. 55:11); it reveals God's own plan, will, motives and agenda (Isaiah 45:21-23); and it cannot be truly understood by anyone who is not taught by the Holy Spirit of God (I Cor. 2:12-16). And yet, it is also a thoroughly human book, and was written by human authors, each displaying his own unique style and personality; moreover, it was written in human languages, within the context of human history, and to address human needs. As the bible's great hero is Jesus Christ, who is eternally God and became fully human to reveal the nature of God to mankind (Jn. 1:14, 18), this dual nature of the bible is appropriate and necessary for the accurate portrayal of its great Protagonist.

The bible is thus the one complete and fully sufficient testimony of the God who created us, containing within its pages everything that he has determined that we could need to be pleasing to him, and live the lives he created us to live; this is why many of the Reformed creeds and confessions speak of the bible as “our only standard for faith and practice”.

3. Can anyone read and understand the bible on his own?

The bible teaches that natural man will never be able to understand its truth on his own; for only the Spirit of God, who understands the mind of God, can reveal the truths of God, which are in direct opposition to the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 2:10-16; cf. Acts 8:30-31). However, when the bible is read or heard, the Spirit works as he chooses, giving understanding and producing faith in many who hear (Jn. 3:4-12; 16:7-14; cf. Acts 16:14). Therefore, it is of great benefit for anyone who so desires to study the bible, knowing that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17), and that God gives his wisdom liberally to all men who ask him in faith (James 1:5-6); indeed, no one who hungers and thirsts for God's truth will be turned away, if he cries out to the Savior and applies himself to study the bible, for Jesus has invited us all with these words, “If anyone thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7:37).

For all true believers, who have come to Christ in faith, there is every reason to be confident in studying the bible, for the apostle Paul tells us that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16); and elsewhere, the apostle John tells us that we all have knowledge, and understand the truth, because the Spirit has given us an anointing so that we might not be deceived by the lies of the enemy (1 Jn. 2:20-27).

4. Does the Church have to interpret the bible?

In this era of redemptive history, God has chosen to preserve his truth within the universal Church that he established with his blood; and hence he calls the Church “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), and exhorts believers to obey the Church's elders who labor in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17); however, the bible also indicates that it is necessary and honorable for individual believers to be studying the scriptures daily, to see if the things taught by the Church leaders, no matter how prominent they might be, are according to the bible (Acts 17:11).

Furthermore, although we acknowledge that the truth is preserved in the holy and universal Church, we must realize that

it takes biblical discernment even to recognize what the true Church is; for the bible speaks of many false prophets and false doctrines arising up in the midst of the Church, and even indicates that entire churches may become apostate (1 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:13-17; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Rev. 2:5; 13:11); so that, to recognize what constitutes the Church in which the truth of the bible has been preserved, one must understand what the bible teaches, and realize that no “church” which denies the gospel proclaimed in the bible is a true church at all. Thus, the apostle Paul exalts the gospel which he had proclaimed of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, far above any other authority, whether earthly or heavenly, saying that if any apostle or teacher or angel from heaven, or even himself should proclaim a different gospel, he would be eternally accursed (Gal. 1:6-10); and to this list, we may add any falsely-named “church”.

Thus, recognizing that God has superintended the preservation and formulation of the doctrinal truths of the bible through the history of the Church, no individual believer ought to be so presumptuous as to go lightly against the clear doctrinal statements of the early ecumenical councils on such doctrines as the Trinitarian conception of God and the acceptance of the several books of the canon; but neither will any believer find it a legitimate excuse that they are submitting to the authority of the “church” when they accept any of the blasphemous and unbiblical teaching that has sprung up in many corrupt false churches, according to prophecy. For any so-called “church” that has corrupted the gospel is a false church, and ought not be obeyed even for a moment.

5. What principles of interpretation are necessary to study the bible?

If we desire to study the bible, we must realize from the outset that there are certain rules or principles that we must keep in mind, if we would understand it accurately, and so be able to apply it appropriately. The study of the principles of interpretation that we use to help us understand the bible is called “hermeneutics”; and the hermeneutic that we have when

we approach the text is of paramount concern, because it will shape our understanding of everything we read.

Although many Christians may not even know what the term “hermeneutics” means, yet in truth, everyone has a hermeneutic which governs how he understands and applies the scriptures. In contemporary western Evangelicalism, a post-modern, individualistic hermeneutic is the norm, and so home bible studies are often designed on the principle of going around the room and asking what a particular verse or passage “means to me”; and in answering that question, no one is right or wrong, but everyone can glean little tidbits of inspiring thoughts that they find personally encouraging or applicational. This hermeneutic is very destructive to a Christian's ability to understand what the bible is really saying, and has the effect of confirming him in his own wisdom, instead of casting him on the wisdom of God, as he has expressed himself in the bible.

There are many other influential and destructive hermeneutics in currency today, such as a literalistic reading of Old Testament prophecy which refuses to accept the New Testament teaching that all prophecies have found their fulfillment in Christ, and are inherited by everyone who is in Christ; so in order to avoid these and other false hermeneutics, it is important to know what the true and proper principles of hermeneutics are. At the most basic level, a proper hermeneutic will be characterized by the following adjectives: grammatical, historical, contextual, and Christ-centered; all of which will be examined a little more carefully in the following questions.

6. What does the term “grammatical-historical hermeneutic” mean, and why is it important?

In 1515 AD, Martin Luther rejected the elaborate four-fold hermeneutic that had been predominant throughout the Medieval centuries, and which led to some very far-fetched allegorizing of the bible, leaving scriptural interpretation in the hands of the experts, who alone were capable of figuring out the secret things that bible passages really meant. This would eventually lead to the great Protestant Reformation, which is therefore, most fundamentally, a hermeneutically-driven

struggle. In place of this allegorical hermeneutic, Luther proposed what he termed a “grammatical-historical” hermeneutic.

According to Luther's new hermeneutic, which was actually just the recovered hermeneutic of the earliest Church Fathers, each bible passage had one basic meaning, which was firmly rooted in historical truth, and related accurately according to the common principles of human language. Thus, it was “historical,” relating real, interconnected historical events, that must be acknowledged and understood before the various teachings of the bible could make sense or have application; and “grammatical,” using language the way any normal person would. This grammatical-historical hermeneutic is absolutely vital, for it tethers the truth of the scriptures to real, historical events, that have a real impact on our life; and it gives us a way to study the scriptures with confidence, according to well-established dictates of human language.

7. Is a “grammatical-historical hermeneutic” different from a “Christ-centered hermeneutic”?

According to Martin Luther, who led the return to a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, there was no difference whatsoever between that and the “hermeneutic of Christ”; in fact, his grammatical-historical hermeneutic was, in his own words, simply the interpretation that “drives home Christ”. Or, as he elsewhere expressed it, “He who would read the Bible must simply take heed that he does not err, for the Scripture may permit itself to be stretched and led, but let no one lead it according to his own inclinations but let him lead it to its source, that is, the cross of Christ. Then he will surely strike the center.” In other words, all the teaching of the bible is intended to point the way to the Cross of Calvary, which is its great climax, and that apart from which nothing makes sense or can be understood.

This means that a grammatical-historical hermeneutic is not antagonistic to typology; and demands that the bible be read, in every part, as an eminently Christian document. Unfortunately, many Christians today miss this point, and think that the Old

Testament is primarily about Israel, and only contains a few prophecies about Christ, scattered here and there. To see Christ in anything other than an explicit prophecy is “allegorizing,” and is thus a breach of the grammatical-historical hermeneutic. In reality, this is a naturalistic, or literalizing hermeneutic, and certainly not the hermeneutic of the reformers, who taught, with very good reason, that a proper hermeneutic sees Christ displayed everywhere, foreshadowed, typified, promised, and prepared for in the Old Testament, and bringing all its mysteries and hidden gospel-treasures to light in his life and accomplishment in the New Testament. In other words, to quote the Church Father Augustine, “The Old [Testament] is in the New revealed, the New is in the Old concealed”.

8. Is the whole bible about Christ, or just the New Testament?

According to the New Testament, and to Christ himself, the entire corpus of Old Testament scriptures teach of Christ in every part; thus, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for failing to see him in the Old Testament (John 5:39-40); he calls his own disciples fools and slow of heart not to see how, from the first books of Moses to the last of the prophets, the Old Testament taught of Christ's passion and victorious ascension (Luke 24:25-27); and then, he opens their hearts to understand that everything in the Law, Psalms, and Prophets (shorthand for the entire Old Testament scriptures) taught of his suffering, death, resurrection, and the resultant spread of the gospel to all the nations (Luke 24:44-48).

Many of these truths that Christ proclaimed were not apparent on the surface, but, after he had come and fulfilled everything written, then the way in which the scriptures had foreshadowed his life and ministry ahead of time was brought to light, and could be examined and understood. That this was in fact the case, and that the Old Testament scriptures contained hidden truths which could not be fully understood until the coming of Christ, was recognized even by the very prophets who wrote those scriptures; thus, Peter tells us that they knew they were speaking of things that were primarily for us who would live after the ministry of Christ, and that things concerning the passion

and the following glories of Christ would be revealed to us, through their writings, that they could only wonder about (1 Peter 1:10-12). Paul sums this all up very well in Romans 16:25-27, where he teaches that his gospel, i.e., the proclamation of Christ, was hidden in previous ages, but was now being revealed – *through the Old Testament scriptures!* In other words, the message of Christ was in the Old Testament, but it was hidden until Christ came and brought the types and shadows to light, through his ministry on earth and afterward.

9. Isn't it reading too much into the Old Testament to see references to Christ on every page?

The fact that the message of Christ crucified and exalted is whispered on every page of the Old Testament is argued for throughout the New Testament, and may be clearly discerned in how the first apostles interpreted and applied various Old Testament passages in their sermons and writings (e.g. Acts 2:22-36; 15:12-21; 1 Cor. 10:1-13, to name but a very few). A good exemplary passage would be Hebrews 8:5, which refers to the Old Testament tabernacle and priestly duties as “types and shadows”. Then, after expressing this hermeneutical principle of typology, the author goes on for several chapters to show how this part of the Old Testament finds its perfect fulfillment in Christ. And furthermore, he is not content to speak merely of the sacrificial system, but finds in historical persons, such as Melchizedek (Hebrews 7), in prophecies written to the House of Israel, such as Jeremiah 31:33 (Hebrews 8), and in various psalms, written in different times and contexts (e.g. Hebrews 1:5-14; 2:5-18; 10:5-10, etc.) clear references both to Christ, who fulfills everything written, and to the Church, for whom everything was fulfilled, and who is the true heir of all the Old Testament promises.

The fact that the New Testament authors, without exception, displayed this hermeneutic whenever they addressed the Old Testament, and that they did so in accordance with what Christ had taught them of himself, from all the Old Testament scriptures (Luke 24:44-48), gives us good and necessary warrant for reading the Old Testament in the same way: looking for types and shadows of the coming Christ, which were at first obscure,

but which may be understood now that Jesus has suffered and entered his glory, in every feature of the Old Testament, including historical events, persons, places, prophecies, psalms, sacrificial laws, and so on. In short, not just every page, but every feature of the Old Testament text has things to teach us about Christ, which we may understand now that Christ has been glorified; and to refuse to see Christ in all these ways is to rob ourselves of the greatest treasures and truths of the bible.

10. Wasn't the Old Testament written especially to the Jews, so that it doesn't apply in the same way to Christians?

The Old Testament was written particularly to the Jews, whom God called out from all the nations to be his special people (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:6); and so, Paul speaks of the privilege of the Jews as being very great, and consisting most especially in this, that they were given the oracles of God (Romans 3:1-2). Elsewhere, Paul consistently speaks of the Jews as having a definite temporal priority in God's redemptive design (just as Christ had taught before him, cf. Matthew 15:24), declaring that the gospel was for the Jew first, and only afterwards for the Gentile (Romans 1:16-17).

However, the Jews ought to have recognized and embraced Christ, because they had been instructed of him in the scriptures; and indeed, their forefathers, to whom the gospel first came, looked ahead to Christ in true faith and rejoiced (e.g. John 8:56; Hebrews 11:13-16); but as a whole, they rejected him instead, and so all those who disbelieved were cast off. But even this rejection and casting-off of the majority of the Jews was not without a purpose; for Paul teaches that, according to God's plan, the Gentiles would be brought in to know God's mercy through the stumbling of the Jews. Thus, many Jews would be broken off from God's people, but his nation would then be expanded, as many Gentiles were grafted into Israel by faith (see Romans 11).

This means that true Israel, and the true Jewish people, are not simply those ethnically descended from Abraham, but they are rather the remnant of ethnic Jews who believe, together with those Gentiles who have been made a part of true Israel through faith. Thus, the New Testament often speaks of Christians,

whether Jew or Gentile, as the true Jews (e.g. Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; 4:21-31; 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6; Phil. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 2:9). This means that all the promises and teachings of the Old Testament scriptures, which were written for the Jews, belong to us who are in Christ, the one true Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), for we are now Abraham's children through faith, and thus heirs of the promises made to Abraham and his offspring (Gal. 3:26-29).

11. What does the term “sensus plenior” mean?

“Sensus plenior” is a Latin term which means, literally, “fuller sense,” or “deeper meaning”. The term “sensus plenior” is used to refer to those passages which, at their most obvious level speak of one person or event, but which also have a deeper meaning hinted at through that specific event in question. In other words, “sensus plenior” is the term which acknowledges that some historical persons and events in the Old Testament are really “types,” and that the passages treating of those persons and events speak not just of themselves alone, but also of the “antitypes” (i.e., the fulfillments of the types) which they foreshadow.

A good example of a case in which the principle of “sensus plenior” must be applied is Moses' striking the rock in the wilderness, so that water flowed out to nourish the people. This passage relates a very real historical event, and its most basic level of meaning refers simply to a physical rock that flowed with physical water; but this event was also a type of how Christ, the Rock of our Salvation, was struck with the rod of divine justice, and henceforth there flowed from his wounded body the forgiveness and spiritual life that we need. In other words, there is a “sensus plenior,” or deeper meaning to this event than just the real, historical occurrence. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul gives express instruction for us to see a “sensus plenior” in this passage; and a little later, he says that all the things recorded in the Old Testament were written as “types” for our instruction (1 Cor. 10:11), thus giving us warrant to see a “sensus plenior” in all the scriptures.

12. Is a grammatical-historical hermeneutic opposed to *sensus plenior*?

Although it is a common sentiment today to deny that a literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic could allow for any *sensus plenior* in the text of scriptures, because it would violate the principle of each text having only one meaning, the simple fact is that this understanding is based more upon a naturalistic, or literalizing hermeneutic, than the grammatical-historical hermeneutic of the Church Fathers and Reformers. But more to the point, this denial of *sensus plenior* is in direct contradiction to the testimony of the scriptures themselves, as to how they should be read and understood. Throughout the Old Testament, the bible gives explicit indication that the historical events and persons recorded, although they must be read “literally” as actual events in time and space, very often signify something deeper, that has to do with God's eternal design; for instance, Jacob and Esau's struggling together in the womb, although a real historical occurrence, is expressly said to indicate the future struggle of the nations of Israel and Edom (Gen. 25:22-23); and so also with many other things.

Furthermore, the New Testament teaches both by clear declaration and example that the whole Old Testament has a spiritual and Christ-centered meaning, to which all the recorded historical occurrences point (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 8:5; Luke 24:44-48; and also Gal. 4:21-31; 1 Pet. 3:20-22; Mat. 2:15; 12:39-40). Moreover, the prophecies which had to do with Israel, the tabernacle, and so on, had a deeper meaning, involving Christ and the Church, and were ultimately fulfilled according to this deeper meaning (cf. Acts 15:14-17; Heb. 8:8-13; 10:14-22; 2 Cor. 1:20); the Psalms, although they often had an immediate reference to David, still had an ultimate reference to Christ, the seed of David (cf. Mat. 13:35; John 13:18; Acts 2:25-32; Heb. 2:11-14); and so with every part of the Old Testament (e.g. Eph. 5:30-32).

Often, those who argue against any *sensus plenior* in scripture indicate that, to allow this deeper sense would be to open up the bible to fanciful allegorizing, according to the whims of the interpreter; but in fact, the principle of *sensus plenior*, or in

other words, the typological understanding of every part of the Old Testament, is vastly different from fanciful allegorizing, for it is rooted in actual, concrete history, and tethered always to Christ and his redemptive work alone; these principles, which are borne out everywhere in New Testament expositions of Old Testament scriptures, will keep all interpretation from wandering astray from the truth.

13. What does the term “analogy of faith mean?”

The “analogy of faith” is a reformed hermeneutical principle which states that, since all scriptures are harmoniously united with no essential contradictions, therefore, every proposed interpretation of any passage must be compared with what the other parts of the bible teach. In other words, the “faith,” or body of doctrine, which the scriptures as a whole proclaim will not be contradicted in any way by any passage. Therefore, if two or three different interpretations of a verse are equally possible, any interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of any other scriptures must be ruled out from the beginning.

Another related principle, that is very helpful in interpreting prophecy and apocalyptic literature in particular, is that the clear must interpret the unclear. In other words, a very specific interpretation of the highly symbolic visions of John's apocalypse, for example, may never “trump” the clear teachings of Paul's epistles, which are more didactic and less symbolic, and hence more clear.

14. What is Dispensationalism?

Dispensationalism is a relatively modern hermeneutic, or way of interpreting the scriptures, that has roots in the teachings of John Darby, was greatly popularized by C. I. Scofield, through the notes in his study bible, became influential through the establishment of Dallas Theological Seminary and many of its professors, including Lewis Sperry Chafer and Charles Ryrie, and has been greatly sensationalized and made influential at a popular level through the fiction and dramatic predictions and interpretations of authors such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye. Today, Dispensationalism is hugely influential worldwide, having

a significant impact not just on the doctrine of the Church, but even on global politics, as the Dispensationally-driven Christian Zionist movement, championed by such men as John Hagee, has largely shaped America's Middle Eastern policies for many years.

Dispensationalism is by no means a monolithic school of thought, and ranges from some very extreme errors on the far right, such as the teaching that modern orthodox Jews who reject Christ may still be saved through the Torah, to the much more conservative and scholarly beliefs of the Progressive Dispensationalists such as Craig Blaising and Darrel Bock; but in essence, it may be summed up as the method of interpreting the scriptures which sees two distinct peoples of God, with two distinct destinies: Israel and the Church. The most common form of classic (sometimes called “revised”) Dispensationalism adheres to the following points of belief:

- 1) The Church is not the continuation of God's Old Testament people, but a distinct body born on the Day of Pentecost.
- 2) The Church is never equated with Israel in the New Testament, and Christians are not Jews, true Israel, etc.
- 3) The prophecies made to Israel in the Old Testament are not being fulfilled in the Church, nor will they ever be.
- 4) The Church does not participate in the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament; it is for ethnic Israel, and will be established in a future millennial kingdom.
- 5) The Old Testament saints were saved by faith alone, on the basis of the Calvary-work of Christ alone; however, the object of their faith was not Christ, but rather the revelation peculiar to their dispensation.
- 6) The Old Testament saints did not know of the coming “Church Age,” of the resurrection of Christ, or basically, of what we today call the gospel.
- 7) When Jesus came to earth, he offered the Jews a physical kingdom, but they rejected him.
- 8) When Jesus proclaimed “the gospel of the Kingdom,” it was the news about how ethnic Jews might enter and find rewards in this physical kingdom, and is to be distinguished from the gospel as defined in I Corinthians

15:3-4, which the apostles later proclaimed to the church.

- 9) After the Jews rejected Jesus' kingdom offer, he inaugurated a parenthetical "Church Age," which will be concluded immediately before God again takes up his dealings with his national people, ethnic Israel.
- 10) During the "Church Age," Jesus is not reigning from the throne of David; he is engaged instead in his priestly work, and his kingly work will take place in the future millennial kingdom.
- 11) At some unspecified but imminent time, Jesus will return (but not all the way to earth, just to the air) and rapture his Church, also called his Bride; for the following seven years, they will feast with him at the marriage supper of the Lamb; meanwhile, on earth, he will begin to deal with his national people, ethnic Israel, again, calling them to himself and preserving them in the midst of seven years of great tribulation; at the midpoint of which, the Antichrist will set himself up as god in the rebuilt Jewish temple, and demand worship from the world.
- 12) After these seven years, Christ will return, this time all the way to earth. He will defeat the forces of evil, bind Satan and cast him into a pit, and inaugurate the physical Jewish Kingdom that he had offered during his life on earth. The Jews who survived the tribulation will populate the earth during this blessed golden era, and the Christians will reign spiritually, in glorified bodies.
- 13) After these thousand years, Satan will be released and will gather an army from the offspring of the Jews who survived the tribulation. He will be finally defeated and cast into hell. At this time, the wicked dead will be resurrected and judged, whereas the righteous dead had already been resurrected one-thousand-seven years previously, at the rapture. Christ will then usher in the New Heavens and New Earth, and the destinies of all mankind will be finalized. Dispensationalists are divided as to whether or not there will remain a distinction between Christians and Jews in the New Earth.

15. Is Dispensationalism biblical?

According to influential author Charles Ryrie, whose views are perhaps the most representative of popular Dispensationalism, there are three “sine qua non,” (i.e. non-negotiables) of what constitutes Dispensationalism: a doxological view of history (i.e., with the ultimate purpose of glorifying God), a literal hermeneutic (i.e. method of interpreting the bible), and an ongoing distinction between the two peoples of God, Israel and the Church. A doxological purpose for all of history is certainly not unique to Dispensationalism, however, and is affirmed by many non-Dispensational theologians; so the question of whether or not Dispensationalism is biblical must hinge on what the bible says about the latter two points: its “literal” way of understanding the bible, particularly as it relates to Old Testament prophecies; and its insistence on two peoples of God.

Fortunately, the biblical evidence is not lacking for either of these questions: Dispensationalism teaches that all the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament must be fulfilled to ethnic Israel, in a literal way, that is, in a way that mandates the continuation of all the Old Testament types, regardless of whether or not the anti-types, or ultimate fulfillment of those types have come: for example, the physical land of Palestine must belong by divine right to the ethnic Jews, who will one day possess all its geographical borders in fulfillment of the prophecy of Israel's restoration. However, the bible explicitly declares that all those prophecies have already been fulfilled in the coming of Christ, and are for all who believe in Christ; the land promise made to Abraham is now too great to be fulfilled in the Middle East alone, and so Romans 4:13 says that he was promised to inherit the whole world; and his offspring who inherit it with him are not just believing ethnic Jews, but also his Gentile children by faith (Romans 4:11-17); in fact, all the promises made to Abraham (and to every Old Testament saint) were ultimately fulfilled in Christ, the true Seed of Abraham (2 Cor. 1:20; Gal. 3:16), and so they belong to all who are in Christ, and therefore a part of Abraham's seed (Gal.3:26-29). Further examples of how the New Testament interprets prophecies made to Israel, showing beyond doubt that they are now being fulfilled in the Church, include Acts 15:14-17; Hebrews 8; 10:14-18.

The second “sine qua non” of Dispensationalism, that there is an ongoing distinction between Israel and the Church, is likewise argued against throughout the New Testament, even as was anticipated in the Old Testament. To cite one of many possible examples, in Isaiah 66:18-24, the prophet looks ahead to a time when God would choose people from every nation, and make them his true priests and Levites; and in the New Testament, we find proof that this time has come. The New Testament passages that indicate that Christians are true Jews (some of them very explicitly) include these: Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; 4:21-31; 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6; Phil. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 2:9. So then, these “sine qua non” of Dispensationalism prove to be utterly unbiblical and are explicitly argued against in the scriptures.

16. Does the bible teach a pre-tribulational rapture?

The doctrine of a pre-tribulational rapture is not clearly taught anywhere in the scriptures, but is an inference based upon several Dispensational premises: first, that the second coming of Christ is imminent (that is, that there are no prophetic events which must precede it); second, that the “Church Age” is a parenthetical part of God’s redemptive sign, and that he will one day revert to dealing with his earthly people, the Jews; and third, that the time in which he will deal with these Jews will be a seven-year period known as the Great Tribulation, which is yet to come. So then, if Christ could come back at any time, and yet, there are still at least seven years of tribulation to come in world history, then he must be coming back before those seven years, to take away his Church, so that he can focus again on Israel.

The problems with this teaching are numerous. Most fundamentally, it is built upon the faulty supposition that there are two peoples of God (concerning which, see the previous question, “Is Dispensationalism biblical?”); and it is also interesting to note that, according to 2 Thes. 2:1-12, the church’s being gathered together to Christ cannot precede the exaltation of the “Son of Perdition,” who, according to Dispensational teaching is the antichrist, that will exalt himself in the new Jewish temple at the midpoint of the tribulation; so, even if one accepts the Dispensational teachings regarding all the events and

timing of the seven years of tribulation (which is unwarranted anyway!), the “rapture of the church” cannot come before three and a half years of the tribulation, at least.

Basically, all of the intricate chronologies of the rapture and events of the tribulation are not found in scriptures, but mandated by the false presupposition that the Church and Israel are two distinct peoples of God, and that, since God is not fulfilling his promises to Israel in the present age, he must be planning on doing it later, after he has removed the Church. But in contradiction to this philosophically-derived schematic, the bible often speaks of the second coming of Christ as an event that no one can know the precise timing of, but may recognize signs of its approaching (Mat. 24:32-42; 1 Thes. 5:1-6); and that will involve contemporaneously the resurrection and judging of both the wicked and righteous, the creation of the new heavens and earth, etc. (Mat. 24:29-31; 25:31-46; John 5:25-29; 2 Thes. 1:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:23-26, 51-58).

17. Does the bible teach that in the end times there will be a restored Jewish state and a restored temple?

In the Old Testament, the bible does indeed prophesy that Israel will be restored and a more glorious temple will be rebuilt (e.g. Amos 9:11-12; Ezekiel 40-48). The preliminary fulfillment of this prophecy came with the return from exile, and the rebuilding of the temple under Nehemiah and Ezra; however, this was just a taste, or down payment, of the ultimate fulfillment.

When Jesus came to this earth, his incarnation truly brought the presence of God to the world of men, as the tabernacle and temple had been designed to do; and hence, John says that he “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14). Thus, when he purged the temple, he prophesied that the temple would be destroyed and rebuilt after three days; but he was speaking of his own body, which is the true temple (John 2:13-22). After this ultimate temple-rebuilding, which occurred in the resurrection of Jesus, there was no longer a need for the typological temple of stone in Jerusalem, so Jesus prophesied its destruction, which happened in 70 AD (Matthew 24:1-2). Today, the prophecy of the restored temple and the restored Jewish people is being fulfilled, not in a

temple of stone, for that has been destroyed in the presence of the body of Christ, which is the ultimate Temple of God, but in the spiritual body of Christ, the Church, which has become the "Israel of God" (see Gal. 6:16; and also Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; 4:21-31; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6; Phil. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 2:9), and which God is now making into a holy Temple, built upon Christ the Cornerstone (see 1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rev. 3:12).

One of the clearest and most monumental Old Testament prophecies regarding the restoration of the tabernacle may be found in Amos 9:11-12; and in Acts 15:14-17, James clearly teaches that this passage is being fulfilled in the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles; so in sum yes, the bible prophecies of a restored Jewish nation and temple, but then goes on to teach that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus' becoming the true and final Temple of God, and subsequently in his making his people a holy temple in the Lord, where God's presence might dwell among them, even today.

18. Does the bible teach that there are two peoples of God, Israel and the Church?

Not only does the bible not teach that there are two distinct peoples of God, Israel and the Church, but it is very explicitly opposed to this idea. For one thing, the Church existed in the Old Testament, long before the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 7:38); and furthermore, the clear teaching of the New Testament is that the modern day Church is really just the expansion of God's people Israel. According to Paul, being an Israelite has never been based merely on outward ethnicity (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-8); but those who have been called according to God's promise are Abraham's true seed (Rom. 9:8). Hence, all who have faith are Abraham's children, and the true Israel of God (Rom. 4:11-17; Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; 4:21-31; 6:16; Phil. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 2:9).

When Paul deals extensively with the whole question of the place of Jews and Gentiles in the people of God, in Romans 11, he shows that there is just one people, symbolized by one good olive tree; unbelieving ethnic Jews may be broken off of that tree of

true Israel and believing Gentiles may be grafted in; but there is still one tree, one body, one people of God. Thus, Paul teaches elsewhere that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in Christ (Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 3:11), but that all believers are members of the same body, citizens of the one commonwealth of Israel, inheritors of all the promises made to Abraham (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6; Gal. 4:26-31; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 12:22-23). In short, there is and always has been one people of God, and that people includes all those who are grafted in to God's "good olive tree" to become Abraham's children by faith, whether ethnic Jews or Gentiles.

19. What is Amillennialism?

"Amillennialism" comes from a term that means, literally, "no thousand years". Thus, it is essentially a way of interpreting Revelation 20, which six times mentions a period of a thousand years, during which Satan is bound and believers reign with Christ. Amillennialists believe that there will be no future thousand-year period of time when the Kingdom of God will be visibly flourishing in the world, and the whole earth will be fruitful and at peace. Instead, Revelation 20 is one of a series of visions, each of which describes the entire period of time between Christ's first and second comings in a different manner. The millennial Kingdom is taking place now, for Satan has been bound by Christ's work on the cross, so that he can no longer hold all the nations in deception; and believers, who seem to be persecuted and afflicted, are really reigning with Christ, and causing his Kingdom, which does not now come visibly, to spread to every corner of the earth. There is a difference of opinion in amillennial interpretation over whether those who reign with Christ are believers who are still alive, or those who have died in the Lord, and are now in his presence.

Some amillennialists object to the term "amillennialism," because they do not properly believe that there is no millenium, they just believe that the millennium spoken of in Revelation 20 is taking place now, and thus there will be no future golden age of the Kingdom, prior to Christ's coming and ushering in the eternal state.

20. What is Postmillennialism?

“Postmillennialism” comes from a term that means, literally, “after the thousand years”. Thus, it is essentially a way of interpreting Revelation 20, which six times mentions a period of a thousand years, during which Satan is bound and believers reign with Christ. Postmillennialists believe that Christ will return after a future golden age of prosperity on the earth, during which time the gospel will have been fruitful in all the world, bringing peace and security to all. Postmillennialists look to the many prophecies in the Old Testament which speak of a coming time of great blessing and prosperity (e.g. Psalm 22:25-31; Psalm 72; Isaiah 2:1-5), and see those passages as demanding a future period of gospel success that will be vastly greater and fundamentally different from what Church history has displayed so far, of the Kingdom spreading in the midst of much affliction and persecution. In the Postmillennial interpretation, Revelation 20 is a passage which describes this future period of blessing that the Old Testament prophets look ahead to.

While some Postmillennialists believe that the future golden age of the earth will be literally and precisely one thousand years in duration, many of them see the “thousand years” as a more poetic way of speaking, and only believe that there will be a lengthy time of peace and well-being on the earth in the future, but not necessarily exactly one thousand years.

21. What is Premillennialism?

“Premillennialism comes from a term that means, literally, “before the thousand years”. Thus, it is essentially a way of interpreting Revelation 20, which six times mentions a period of a thousand years, during which Satan is bound and believers reign with Christ. Premillennialists believe that Christ will return and establish his Kingdom on earth, and that he will be visibly present for a thousand years, reigning over all the earth in an age of peace and prosperity. Then, after this thousand-year visible reign of Christ on earth, he will quell a final rebellion, enter into his last judgment, and finally usher in the eternal state, with its new heavens and new earth.

Premillennialists usually take a linear view of Revelation chapters 4 through 22, seeing all the visions and events spoken of in those chapters, not as different ways of describing the same period of time, but as one chronologically unfolding prophecy. Hence, since Christ's thousand-year reign is spoken of after all the events leading up to chapter 20, it must take place after all these prophesied events. Thus, it is still future. Christ's reigning for a thousand years is also understood to be speaking of his visible presence on the earth, and so he will return to the earth, sometime in the future, but before the thousand years.

22. Is Premillennialism always dispensational?

Although premillennialism is often seen as a dispensational way of understanding Revelation 20, and while many premillennialists are in fact dispensationalists, there is nevertheless nothing about premillennialism in itself that demands dispensationalism. In fact, in early Church history, more than a thousand years before the development of dispensational theology, there was a group called the Chiliasts (from the Greek word for “thousand years”), which held to a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. In recent history, there have still been some premillennialists who are not dispensational, most notably George Ladd. Many of these prefer to distance themselves from dispensational theology by using the term “historic premillennialism,” as opposed to “dispensational premillennialism”.

The basic difference between historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism consists in the latter's insistence on maintaining a distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church. According to dispensationalists, the millennium will be the period of history in which God reverts back to fulfilling his Old Testament promises made to ethnic Israel, after this parenthetical “Church Age” in which we live is concluded. Hence, the millennium will be a state of Jewish ascendancy over all the world, complete with a renewed Jewish temple and priesthood. The Christians who reign with Christ will all have been given eternal, glorified bodies, and will reign spiritually, while the Jews will own the world physically, and will live, marry, and die (although evincing incredible longevity), just as people have

throughout the history of the world. It is only after this thousand-year period, in which God fulfills his promises to ethnic Israel, that Christ will put down a final rebellion and usher in the eternal state, with its New Heavens and New Earth. Historic Premillennialism requires none of this strict dichotomy between God's spiritual people the Church, and his physical people, ethnic Israel; it merely looks ahead to a time when Christ will reign visibly on the earth, before he brings in the eternal state.

23. Does the bible clearly teach pre-, a-, or postmillennialism?

While the bible does clearly teach against the Dispensational variety of premillennialism (see questions 18-21 above), it is much more open to historic premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Both premillennialists and postmillennialists will look to Old Testament prophecies of a golden age of gospel success on the earth (e.g. Psalm 22:25-31; Psalm 72; Isaiah 2:1-5), and say that the nature of these prophecies requires a time in which the earth will not be in its eternal state, when no one marries or dies any more, but vastly more prosperous than it is now, when the Church is always afflicted and persecuted. Amillennialists, on the other hand, look to the many New Testament passages that suggest that, when Christ returns, he will at once raise the wicked and righteous dead, enact his final judgment, dissolve the old heavens and earth, and bring in the new, eternal state. When he comes, the Church will still have her enemies and persecutors, and evil men and imposters will be waxing worse and worse (see Dan. 12:1-2; Mat. 24:29-31; 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; 2 Thes. 1:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 2 Pet. 3:3-14). All of the Old Testament prophecies they would see as having either a spiritual fulfillment, so that the prophecy of a lion's lying down with a lamb, for instance, could be fulfilled by the gospel's bringing together in peace and love representatives of two different tribes that had historically hated and killed each other. Of course, this sort of thing is happening all over the world, wherever the gospel is going out. And then, amillennialists see the nature of some of those prophecies employed by post- and premillennialists as demanding a final fulfillment in the eternal state. Today in the Church, we receive a

foretaste of those prophecies; but we will not see them perfectly fulfilled until God creates the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwell.

Amillennialists probably have the most solid case for their interpretation of Revelation 20. Passages such as 2 Thes. 1:6-10, which clearly teach that Christ's coming and eternally judging the wicked, while glorifying the saints, will take place at a time when there is persecution of the Church. Against premillennialism, Christ's coming demands an immediate and final judgment and establishment of the eternal state. Against postmillennialism, his coming will not be after a golden era, but in the midst of the same sort of persecution that the Thessalonian church was even then experiencing. Then, the mention of Satan's binding, in Revelation 20, corresponds well with related New Testament teaching (see Mat. 12:26-29; Luke 10:17-18; John 12:31-33; 16:8-11; Heb. 2:14-15). And it is only reasonable that the highly symbolic, and most likely recapitulatory visions of John's Apocalypse should be interpreted in light of the clearer didactic teachings of the New Testament epistles. However, it should also be acknowledged that historic premillennialists and postmillennialists have reasonable arguments for their convictions, which should not be scoffed at.

24. What is Covenant Theology?

Covenant Theology is a framework for understanding the overarching storyline of the bible, which emphasizes that God's redemptive plan and his dealings with mankind are without exception worked out in accordance with the covenants that he has sovereignly established. Although the importance of the divine covenants has been realized since the time of the earliest church fathers, Covenant Theology was not articulated as a thoroughly developed system, taking into account the entire extent of biblical revelation, until the days of the sixteenth and seventeenth century reformers, such as the influential Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a landmark seventeenth century document that displays a robust, fully-developed Covenant Theology throughout.

Basically, Covenant Theology organizes biblical revelation around three unified but distinct covenants: the Covenant of Redemption, between the persons of the Trinity in eternity past, in which the Father promises to give a people to the Son as his inheritance, and the Son undertakes to redeem them; the Covenant of Works, which God enjoined upon Adam in the Garden, solemnly promising him eternal life if he passed the probationary test in the Garden of Eden (also, many covenant theologians see the covenant given on Mount Sinai as being in some sense a republication of the Covenant of Works); and finally, the Covenant of Grace, which God first entered into with Adam immediately after the Fall, when he promised to send a Seed of the woman, who would defeat the tempting serpent (Gen. 3:15). In the Covenant of Grace, God promises a champion to fulfill the broken Covenant of Works as a federal representative of his people, and so to earn its blessings in their behalf. All the later covenants of the bible, such as those which God confirmed to Noah, Abraham, David, and the New Covenant which promises to fulfill these prior covenants in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, are all organically connected, essentially being different administrations of the one eternal Covenant of Grace, which build upon each other and are all brought to completion in the New Covenant which Christ inaugurated with his shed blood.

Different theologians, have proposed several different definitions of a biblical covenant; but perhaps the best is O. Palmer Robertson's phrase, "A bond-in-blood sovereignly administered" (*The Christ of the Covenants*, P&R Publishing, p. 15). Covenants are typically characterized by a visible sign and seal, which serves to "remind" God of his promises to those whom he has entered into covenant with. Some examples of these covenant signs are the rainbow, given to Noah; circumcision, given to Abraham; and baptism and the Lord's Supper, given to believers after the coming of Christ.

25. Why is Covenant Theology important?

If Covenant Theology is what it claims to be, that is, if it is the framework laying out the biblical understanding of the only manner in which the God of history has ever dealt with his

people or revealed himself to them, then its importance should be obvious. If we are not in covenant with God, we will never know him at all. And if we do not understand the importance of the covenants, we will not be able to make much sense of vast portions of the bible. What was it, in the simplest mode of expression, that Jesus shed his blood to accomplish? According to his own words at the last Supper, the significance of his death was summed up in one term, "New Covenant" (Matthew 26:28). If we do not understand covenant terminology, this will leave us at best with a very fuzzy understanding of the benefits of Christ's death; and if we do not understand the unity and organic connectedness of the divine covenants, we will miss the coherence of the bible, the unity of God's redemptive design, and the centrality of the Christ of the covenants, who is the bible's great hero.

In a simple yet profound and provocative article introducing to a modern audience the monumental work of Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* (reprinted in 1990 by den Dulk Christian Foundation), J. I. Packer sums up the importance of Covenant Theology in three statements: first, "the gospel of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame," since the gospel promises are all invitations to sinners to enter into the Covenant of Grace, and enjoy its benefits. Second, "the Word of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame," since the story that forms "the backbone of the bible," a story with one great Hero and the one great work that he undertakes to perform, "has to do with man's covenant relationship with God first ruined then restored"; and further,

the unifying strands that bind together the books of the Bible are, *first*, the one covenant promise, sloganized as "I will be your God, and you shall be my people," which God was fulfilling to his elect all through his successive orderings of covenant faith and life; *second*, the one messenger and mediator of the covenant, Jesus Christ the God-man, prophet and king, priest and sacrifice, the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy and New Testament proclamation; *third*, the one people of God, the covenant community, the company of the elect, whom God brings

to faith and keeps in faith, from Abel, Noah and Abraham through the remnant of Israel to the worldwide New Testament church of believing Jews and Gentiles; and *fourth*, the one pattern of covenant piety, consisting of faith, repentance, love, joy, praise, hope, hatred of sin, desire for sanctity, a spirit of prayer, and readiness to battle the world, the flesh, and the devil in order to glorify God . . . a pattern displayed most fully, perhaps, in Luther's "little Bible," the Psalter, but seen also in the lives of God's servants in both Testaments and reflected more or less fully in each single one of the Old and New Testament books.

Third, "the reality of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame," since God has revealed his essential inter-trinitarian love and unity, and the otherwise unfathomable attributes of his person, such as his utter faithfulness, righteousness, and sovereign mercy, only in and through the Covenant which he worked out in human history, and which is an expression and reflection of the trinitarian Covenant of Redemption, that displays the fullness of God's essential nature in an economic and tangible way, so that men might both learn who he is and be brought into a personal relationship with him (all quoted portions above are taken from Packer's introductory article in the above-mentioned work).

26. Is Covenant Theology the same as Replacement Theology?

It is not uncommon today to hear the argument advanced that Covenant Theology is anti-semitic, because it teaches that the New Testament Church replaces God's Old Testament people, ethnic Israel. Some of these critics of Covenant Theology use the pejorative term "Replacement Theology" to describe what they believe Covenant Theology teaches.

However, this term is an inaccurate and unfair representation of Covenant Theology: while it is true that Covenant Theology emphasizes the unity of God's people throughout redemptive history, and denies that the Church is a distinct people of God that exists alongside his other people, ethnic Israel (as does the

bible, see questions 19-22 above); yet it most certainly does not teach that the Church “replaces” Israel. Quite to the contrary, it teaches that the Church has been in existence ever since God first established his Covenant of Grace with Adam, and that, while the Church was composed of the believing remnant of national Israel during the Old Testament era, God's design was always to expand it and bring all the nations into its fold, just as he promised Abraham (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:7-9). Today he has done that, and so now, his Church is composed both of the believing remnant of the Jewish nation, as it always has been, and also of a believing remnant of the Gentiles, who have been grafted in and made a part of the same body. So Israel has not been replaced, it has just been expanded to include Abraham's children by faith from every nation on earth.

Sadly, some Christian theologians of the past have in fact been anti-semitic, both before and after the crystallization of the biblical framework of Covenant Theology; but anti-semitism is not at all intrinsic to Covenant Theology which, when properly understood, demands an ongoing acceptance of the believing remnant of the Jewish nation as a necessary part of God's Church (see Romans 11).

27. What is the difference between the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and the Covenant of Redemption?

Covenant Theology sees three basic, comprehensive covenants which structure all of redemptive history from eternity past to eternity future. All of these covenants, though each one is distinct, are very closely interconnected. The most fundamental of these three covenants is what theologians call the “Covenant of Redemption”. This refers to the inter-trinitarian pact made in eternity past, in which the Father designed, the Son agreed to undertake, and the Spirit agreed to apply the results of redemption. In this first divine covenant, every person whom Christ would redeem, and whom he would be given as the reward for his sufferings, was chosen by the Father before the worlds were ever created.

The Covenant of Works is related to the Covenant of Redemption in that it sets the stage for the work that the Son undertook to accomplish, and gives the terms of what he would have to do in the pursuance of the redemption that he had covenanted with the Father to provide for his people. In this covenant, the Father lays certain stipulations upon man, his climactic creature formed in his image, with the promise of eternal life in his most blessed presence as the outcome of successfully fulfilling his terms. If Christ would accomplish what the Covenant of Redemption requires of him, then, he must fulfill the terms of the Covenant of Works perfectly; he must do so as a man; and he must do so as the federal head or representative of the people he had covenanted to save.

Finally, the Covenant of Grace is closely related to the Covenant of Works in that it is basically a republication of that Covenant, and promises the same end of eternal life in God's presence, on the condition of the perfect fulfillment of God's commands. However, it has an added proviso: because Adam, the first federal head of the human race, failed to keep the terms of the covenant, God freely promised to send a new federal head, the Christ, to do what Adam had failed to do, and to win the rewards of the covenant that Adam had broken. Of course, as this broken Covenant already demanded punishment, the Christ was also required to satisfy the curse that Adam had called down upon himself and his descendants. In the Covenant of Grace, God unilaterally promises the reward of his eternal, favorable presence, and he pledges by his own person and at his own expense to do so. This may be seen in the animal he provided and killed to clothe Adam's shame, in the bow drawn back against himself after Noah's flood, in his walking alone through the severed animal halves before Abraham, etc. And ultimately, it was fulfilled when Christ underwent the covenant curses for us who had merited them in Adam; and won for us as our new federal head, by a life of perfect obedience, all the covenant blessings. All of the historical covenants mentioned in the scriptures are organically-connected expressions or administrations of the Covenant of Grace.

28. Is there a biblical basis for the Covenant of Works?

Although the term “Covenant of Works” is not a biblical designation, and although the word “covenant” is not used to describe God’s relationship with Adam in the Garden, there are several reasons for believing that the idea is eminently biblical, even if the precise term is not. First, creation itself is portrayed in the scriptures as existing in a covenantal relationship with God (Jeremiah 33:20-26); and if creation in general is established in covenant with God, how much more must the climactic figure of creation, the man created in God’s own image, necessarily be in covenant with God from his very creation? Second, the account of man’s creation in Genesis very clearly displays all the elements that characterize later covenants: first, a preamble emphasizing the greatness of God as seen in his prior works (1:1-27; 2:5-9); second, particular stipulations placed upon those with whom God is entering into relationship (1:28; 2:15-17); third, the negative sanction of death, in the case of disobedience (2:18); which gives warrant for understanding, fourth, an implied positive sanction of eternal life for obedience (analysis above taken largely from Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology*, Mentor 2008, p. 118). Third, the creation account provides a description of what appears to be functioning as a covenant sign, or sacrament, in the Tree of Life. Fourth, the most likely translation of Hosea 6:7, “They like Adam have transgressed the covenant,” gives a definite indication that a covenant was made with Adam at the time of his creation. Fifth, and most importantly, the language and teaching of Romans 5:12-21 demands an understanding of Adam as our federal head, or covenant representative. In this passage, which is monumentally important for Covenant Theology, Adam is depicted as our first federal head, whose failure rendered us all guilty before God; but in contrast to Adam, Christ, our second federal head, rendered to God a perfect righteousness, and his success established us as righteous before God. If, therefore, Christ was accomplishing our salvation as a federal champion in the Covenant of Grace, whose terms he fulfilled for us; then this passage indisputably casts Adam in the same role, that is, as our federal head undertaking (but failing) to fulfill the terms of a covenant for us. Hence, his failure in the Garden was manifestly a transgression of a

covenant; and this covenant has long been called the Covenant of Works.

Some theologians believe that the term “Covenant of Works” detracts from the personal and favorable relationship that first existed between God and man, and de-emphasizes the unmerited benevolence and kindness of God toward men from the beginning of creation; and so, certain other terms have been suggested instead of “Covenant of Works,” including, “Covenant of Nature,” “Covenant of Life,” “Covenant of Creation,” and “Covenant of Eden”.

29. Is there a biblical basis for the Covenant of Grace?

Although the term “Covenant of Grace” is not a biblical designation, the concept, emphasizing the unity and coherence of God's covenanted promise to redeem a people for the sake of his name, is most certainly biblical. The existence of one unified Covenant of Grace is indicated by the nature of God's first gospel-promise in Genesis 3:15, which promises a coming Redeemer that will be born of the woman's seed. The rest of the bible unfolds and makes ever more clear and specific the way in which this promise will come to fruition; and each successive covenant that God makes with his people is another step taken toward the fulfillment of that original covenant promise. The covenants in history, therefore, do not replace or abrogate the first covenant made with Adam after the Fall, but build upon and preserve it. If, as Paul so adamantly argued, the Covenant made on Mount Sinai could not abrogate the Abrahamic Promise (Gal. 3:15-24), then how could any later covenant abrogate the first gospel promise made to Adam?

Although someone might balk at the gospel promise of Genesis 3:15's being called a covenant, its nature as a sovereignly administered bond of promised grace, ratified over the shedding of sacrificial blood (Gen. 3:21), is clearly cast in covenantal terms. Furthermore, the first time the term “covenant” appears in the bible, in the days of Noah, God tells Noah, “I will establish,” or “confirm” (not “cut,” or “inaugurate”), “my covenant with you”; which indicates the Noah was aware of a

covenant already in force when God came to him, which could be nothing other than the promise given to Adam.

We must take care not to minimize the specific, historical covenants that God cut with men at different times, including the Noahic, Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Davidic, and the New Covenant which brings all others to fulfillment; but neither must we miss the organic connection and unity between them all, as they unfold God's unified plan of redemption one step at a time, until the promised Christ finally comes and brings them all to perfect fruition.

30. Is there a biblical basis for the Covenant of Redemption?

Although the term "Covenant of Redemption" is not a biblical designation, the teaching that, from before the creation of the world, the persons of the Trinity entered into a solemn pact to accomplish the work of redemption, the Father promising to give a people to the Son as his inheritance, the Son undertaking to accomplish their redemption, and the Spirit covenanting to testify to Christ, and apply his redemption to his people's hearts, is most evidently biblical. Thus, according to the divine testimony, the Lamb was already considered as "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8) so certainly was the agreement to accomplish redemption established before history.

Several biblical passages give clear testimony to the concept of the Covenant of Redemption. One of the primary is Psalm 2, which depicts Christ relating the terms of the Covenant that the Father had established with him. Isaiah 53:10-12 also speaks of the covenantal agreement between the Father and the Son in the accomplishing of redemption; and Ephesians 1:3-14 gives a trinitarian picture of the roles that each person of the godhead undertook from eternity to perform. However, the clearest and best passages depicting the Covenant of Redemption are to be found in the Gospel of John. There, Jesus repeatedly speaks of the work that the Father gave him to do, the glorious reward that he was promised, and the sending of the Spirit to apply the benefits of his redemption and bring about in fact the promised reward of a redeemed people, that was merited by the Son's unerring obedience to the Father (see John 5:17-31, 36-37, 43;

6:37-40, 57; 7:28-29, 38-39; 8:16-19, 26-29, 38, 42, 49-54; 9:4;
10:14-18, 25-30, 36-38; 12:23-28, 44-50; 13:3, 20, 31-32; 14:9-
14, 16-20, 24-26; 15:8-15, 24-27; 16:7-16, 27-28; 17).