

Dispensationalism: An Abbreviated Critique

By Grover Gunn

This essay "*Dispensationalism: An Abbreviated Critique*" is an abbreviated version of book *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, And Tomorrow* by Grover Gunn and Curtis Crenshaw. The full book is posted at www.monergism.com. Copies of the book may be obtained from Amazon.com.

Author: Grover Gunn is the former pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Winona, MS (2009 to 2012). This article is posted with Rev. Gunn’s permission.

Table Of Contents:

- Defining the Basic System 2
- Israel and the Church, Part One 4
- Israel and the Church, Part Two..... 6
- Israel and the Church, Part Three..... 8
- The New Covenant..... 11
- How They Argue Their Case 13
- Literalism 16
- Interpreting the Prophets..... 19
- Rightly Dividing the Word 22
- Christian Zionism..... 24
- Thy Kingdom Come..... 28
- Old Testament Salvation..... 31
- Summary of Objectionable Teaching 33
- End Notes 34

Defining the Basic System

One does not have to look far today to find Christians who have been influenced in their understanding of prophecy and the church by dispensationalism. I wonder though how many of these people have consistently thought through dispensationalism as a system, have become familiar with the controlling presuppositions of this system, and know (and comfortably accept) all the major theological and exegetical implications of this system. My own conviction is that many people who are now favorably disposed toward dispensationalism would not be if they were only better exposed to the dispensational theological system and better read in the more theologically oriented dispensational writings such as Chafer's *Systematic Theology*.

A person's theological system is his basic understanding of what the overall teachings of Scripture are and how they interrelate. A verse of Scripture taken strictly alone can often have more than one meaning. One important characteristic of the correct meaning of any verse is that the correct meaning must harmonize with the overall teaching of Scripture, which is summarized in the theological system. The interpreter's job is on the one hand to interpret Scripture with the help of his theological system, and on the other hand to constantly evaluate and adjust his system in the light of Scripture. The interpreter must ever seek to insure that his theological system is indeed consistent with all the teachings of Scripture and also logically consistent within itself. This is a lifelong process for the interpreter. Really it is a lives' long process since the interpreter always builds on the work of previous interpreters and since the job is never completely finished.

What many do not realize is that the basic assumptions of dispensationalism as a theological system directly contradict certain teachings that have predominated in the Christian church throughout the centuries. The dispensationalists themselves have said that their system, which first began to be taught in the early nineteenth century, is actually a rediscovery of truths lost since the early days of Christianity. When I was a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, Alan Boyd was definitely one of the most intellectually gifted students there at that time. He studied in the original Greek the early church writings up to the death of Justin Martyr in order to gather evidence that dispensationalism was indeed the system of early Christianity. Specifically, he was historically evaluating in a master's thesis Dr. Charles C. Ryrie's claim: "Premillennialism is the historic faith of the Church."¹ Alan's conclusion was that Dr. Ryrie's statement was invalid,² and he stated "based on classroom and private discussion," that Dr. Ryrie had "clarified his position on these matters."³ Alan found the prophetic "beliefs of the period studied" to be "generally inimical to those of the modern system."⁴ He discovered that the premillennialists in the early church "were a rather limited number."⁵ He concluded that those church fathers who were premillennial, such as Papias and Justin Martyr, had little in common with modern day dispensationalists.⁶ Alan as a dispensationalist explained his findings as an example of the rapid loss of New Testament truth in the early church.⁷ In other words, there is no extant concrete evidence that dispensationalism or anything significantly resembling it was ever taught in the church any time until the nineteenth century.

Dispensationalists like to contrast themselves with covenant theologians because they can claim that covenant theology is almost as recent a theological innovation as is dispensationalism. What they are referring to is the relatively recent development of the doctrine of the covenant of works. I personally do not believe this is a valid comparison. Dispensationalism is a foundational system that offered a new and different paradigm for understanding the church and prophecy. The covenant of works is a relatively minor doctrine that built on a previously accepted doctrinal foundation and that is not universally accepted among opponents of dispensationalism. In the chapters that follow, I will be contrasting dispensationalism not with the covenant of works but with reformed theology, the theology of the protestant reformation as systematized by John Calvin and his followers.

What are these modern dispensational assumptions that contradict basic, historic Christian teachings? To put it simply, historic Christianity has held that the Bible contains a unified progression of revelation in which God has one basic people (the people of God through the ages, the universal church). While acknowledging that God's final purpose in every detail of history is His own glory, the church has historically held that God's plan to save a people through the death of Christ is the unifying purpose that runs like a scarlet thread through all of redemptive history from Genesis to Revelation. In contrast, dispensationalists hold Biblical revelation to be an interrupted progression in which God has two basic peoples (the earthly seed Israel and the heavenly seed, the church). Dispensationalists tend in various degrees to deny that redemption through Christ is the basic unifying purpose in Scripture⁸ and to deny the basic continuity of God's plan of salvation in the Old and New Testaments. This two people view of redemptive history can also lead to strong theorized dichotomies between law and grace, between conditional and unconditional covenants, between earthly and heavenly purposes, and between Jewish and Christian end time prophetic events.

When one examines in more detail the basics of the dispensational system, one finds three bedrock concepts. The first of these is a literalistic and Jewish understanding of Old Testament prophecy and the Messianic kingdom such that these require a future fulfillment in terms of a resurrected Old Testament order with certain enhancements and variations. The dispensationalist argues that the nature of the kingdom announced by John the Baptist and offered by Jesus Christ should be understood in terms of the popular Jewish understanding of the kingdom at that time, and that the Jews at that time were expecting a literal restoration of Davidic political rule. Similarly, the dispensationalist views the Messianic kingdom as a glorified extension of the Mosaic ceremonial law and the Davidic political kingdom.

In reality, there is no strong evidence of a unified Jewish view of the kingdom at the time of Christ. The Jewish understanding of the Messiah and the coming kingdom was varied. What we do know is that among the various understandings of the Messianic kingdom at the time of Christ, there was a national and political hope that expected the earthly restoration of an idealized Davidic kingdom with deliverance from national enemies and the national exaltation of Israel. The disciples at times gave possible evidence of being influenced by such a view of the kingdom.² The dispensationalist assumes that this nationalistic and Jewish understanding of the kingdom was the correct view.

Perhaps the best way to explain an overly literalistic interpretation is with an example. Consider Zechariah 14:6:

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. The prophet here spoke of the worship of Jehovah in terms of the old covenant feast of tabernacles. There are two basic ways to interpret this and other similar prophecies. One could assume that the prophet used an element of worship familiar to his original audience to speak in general of the worship of the living and true God. The prophecy could then have reference to the widespread worship of the God of Israel by Gentiles after Jesus set aside the old covenant system of worship. Or the prophecy could be understood as referring to a yet future Jewish millennium with "the restoration of a priesthood and the reinstatement of a bloody sacrificial system..."¹⁰ From the dispensational perspective, the first suggested interpretation is unacceptably allegorical and the second, properly literal.

This overly literalistic understanding of the prophesied kingdom is the first foundation stone of dispensationalism. The second foundation stone is the parenthesis theory. According to this theory, the church age is an unforeseen parenthesis or interjection in the Jewish program prophesied by the Old Testament prophets. If the Jews had not rejected Jesus, the Jewish kingdom age would have begun at Christ's first coming, according to this theory. But since the Jews did reject Christ, the prophetic program was supposedly interrupted, and the church age, totally unforeseen by the Old Testament prophets, was interjected. The kingdom program is to resume where it left off in the future in the dispensational tribulation

and millennium after the church age. According to dispensationalism, no Old Testament prophecy can refer directly to the parenthetical church age. These prophecies must be fulfilled literally in the context of a recontinued Old Testament Jewish economy. This parenthesis theory is the logical implication of the dispensation literalistic hermeneutic. If the dispensational interpretation of the Old Testament prophets is correct, then these prophecies are not pointing to the church age and there must be a future Jewish age if these prophecies are going to be fulfilled.

This parenthesis view can also be vividly seen in the dispensational interpretation of Daniel's seventy weeks prophecy. According to the dispensationalists, the church age is a prophetically unforeseen parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week of Daniel's seventy weeks.¹¹ The seventieth week is identified with a future seven year tribulation period that precedes the millennium and during which God's program for Israel will be resumed.

In contrast, reformed theology sees the church age as the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies, such as Joel 2:28 at Pentecost¹² or Amos 9:11-12 at the Jerusalem council.¹³ The Old Testament in the reformed system is seen as related to the New Testament like the bud is related to the blossom.

The third foundation stone of the dispensational system is the dichotomy between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. According to dispensationalism, the Old Testament saints are not in the church universal, which is the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ. The New Testament church is God's heavenly people while Old Testament and millennial Israel is God's earthly people. According to the earlier dispensationalists such as Darby, Scofield and Chafer, the earthly seed Israel is to spend eternity on the new earth, and the heavenly seed, the church, is to spend eternity in heaven. More recent dispensationalists have put the saints of all ages together on the new earth in eternity but maintain their dichotomy throughout eternity by eternally excluding Old Testament saints from the Body and Bride of Christ. According to reformed theology, the people of God from all ages will together be members of the Body and Bride of Christ and will enjoy eternity together on the new earth.

Israel and the Church, Part One

The consistent dispensationalist is a theologian in the grip of an idea - the idea that there is a strong dichotomy between Israel and the church. This idea is a relatively modern theory in the history of doctrine that was initially developed and popularized by J. N. Darby (1800-1882), the father of dispensational thought. Darby was meditating on the fact that the true Christian through the baptizing work of the Spirit is in union with Christ and thus is seated with Christ in the heavenlies.¹⁴ With this on his mind, Darby read in Isaiah 32:15-20 about a prophesied outpouring of the Spirit upon Israel that would bring earthly blessings upon the people of God. Darby took this Scriptural data and concluded it to imply a strong contrast between earthly blessings prophesied for Israel and heavenly blessings promised to the Christian in the New Testament. From this came Darby's theory that God has two peoples, an earthly people and a heavenly people. The seed of Abraham that is to number more than the dust of the earth is the earthly people, the Jews; and the seed of Abraham that is to number more than the stars of the heavens is the heavenly people, the church. The earthly seed will inherit the new earth for eternity while the heavenly seed will inherit heaven for eternity. Thus there are two peoples of God, two purposes in history, and two eternal destinies for the saints, according to Darby. These two peoples were also viewed as living under different economies of salvation: the Jews under an economy of law in the Old Testament and in the millennium, and the Christians under an economy of grace in the church age.

Reformed theology, of course, strongly disagrees with this radical dichotomy between Israel and the church. Reformed theologians do recognize Biblical distinctions between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church but not a strong dichotomy. The Biblical distinctions between Old Testament Israel and

the New Testament church basically involve an organic progression analogous to the development of a child into an adult.¹⁵ The organic development brought about during the time of the New Testament includes the unprecedentedly clear revelation through the Incarnate Word and His apostles, the outpouring of the Spirit in unprecedented fullness, the cessation of the burdensome Mosaic ceremonial laws, and the universalization of the kingdom previously limited to the Jewish nation. In the midst of these developmental changes, there was also a strong continuity with the Old Testament program, according to reformed theology.

Here are two antithetically opposed systems in regard to the relationship between Israel and the church. To determine which system is correct, we must go to Scripture. A New Testament passage that speaks to this issue is Ephesians 2:12-21, a passage in which the Apostle Paul contrasts the covenant status of Gentiles in general under the old covenant with that of Gentile Christians under the new covenant. In this passage, Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians of their former spiritual poverty before their coming to faith in Christ in the new covenant age. In verse 12, Paul summarizes what had once been their covenant status:

"... at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Paul then goes on in verse 19 to contrast this former position of spiritual poverty with their covenant status in this age as Gentiles who believe in Christ: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Those who had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" are now "no more strangers and foreigners." The Greek word translated *foreigners* is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to the resident aliens in Israel who could not partake of the Passover.¹⁶ This word literally means "those beside the house." Paul states that these believing Gentiles are no longer foreigners, no longer aliens beside the house of Israel, but are now instead "members of the household of God." The Gentiles in Christ are also now "fellow-citizens with the saints." The word translated *fellow-citizen* in verse 19 is closely related to the word in verse 12 translated *commonwealth* in the King James Version and *citizenship* in the New International Version. The Gentiles in the flesh had been "excluded from citizenship in Israel" (NIV), but the Gentile Christians are now "fellowcitizens with the saints." The "saints" are God's holy people, the people of the covenant. The Christian is a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem¹⁷ and therefore a fellowcitizen with the saints of all ages.¹⁸

In verses 14-16, Paul refers to the peace between Jew and Gentile established by Christ in the church. Then in verse 17, Paul uses the language of Isaiah 57:19 and refers to the Gentiles who heard the gospel as "you which were afar off" and the Jews as "them that were nigh." With this in mind, look at verse 13:

"But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Paul here teaches that the pagan Gentiles who believed in Christ had been "made nigh"; that is, made heirs in new covenant fullness to those Old Testament covenants of promise which formerly had belonged exclusively to "them that were nigh."

This passage is not teaching that Gentile Christians have become members of Old Testament Israel. Ephesians two teaches that Gentile believers have become members of the church of Messianic fullness, which Paul calls "the new man" (verse 15) and which Paul speaks of as a building built upon the foundation of the New Testament apostles and prophets (verse 20). This passage stresses both the newness of the church and the continuity of the church with God's previous covenant program. The answer to Gentile alienation from Israel and her covenants is membership in the new man, which makes one a fellow-citizen with God's covenant people and a member of God's house. These terms have roots in the Old Testament, and this passage fits in well with the reformed teaching that the New Testament church is Old Testament Israel come to new covenant maturity.

The dispensational interpretation of this Ephesians passage puts all its emphasis on the fact that this passage teaches that the New Testament church is a "new man" (verse 15). True, there is a significant newness to the

New Testament church, but dispensationalists totally neglect the equally valid teaching that the New Testament church has a strong relationship of organic continuity with Old Testament Israel.

Another relevant passage is Romans 11, in which Paul discusses the status of Jews in the church age. The olive tree of Romans 11 stands for the privileged position of blessing that belonged to Old Testament Israel.¹⁹ It is an olive tree whose roots are firmly established in the Old Testament covenants made with the Jewish patriarchs. Before looking at Paul's use of the figure, let us examine how we should expect Paul to use the figure if he really were a dispensationalist. Since, according to dispensationalism, all the Jews in this parenthetical age are cut off from their Old Testament privileges, we should expect Paul to teach that all the branches on the olive tree of Israel were broken off at the beginning of the church age. Like the clock of the Jewish prophetic program that supposedly stopped ticking at the beginning of the church age, the old Jewish olive tree would have to stand dormant during the church age until that future tribulation period and millennium when God again resumes the Jewish prophetic program. It would be like the Jewish train that is waiting on the side track until the church train passes by on the track of history, to use another illustration popular with dispensationalists. Also, since according to dispensationalism, God's program for the church is totally distinct from God's program for Israel, we should expect Paul to teach that at the beginning of the church age a new olive tree representing the church was divinely planted. And all the believing Jews who were broken off from the olive tree of dormant Israel and all the believing Gentiles who were formerly in the wild olive tree of paganism are in this age grafted into the olive tree of church blessings. But this, of course, is not what Paul teaches at all. Paul instead teaches that only unbelieving Jews were broken off from the olive tree of Israel. Jews who accepted Christ remained where they always had been - in the olive tree of Israel. And believing Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree of Israel. Again we see that Paul had a reformed perspective, viewing the church as the new Israel.

Another passage which shows the strong continuity between Israel and the church is Hebrews 3:5-6. This passage refers to both Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church as God's house, which demonstrates their unity as the one people of God. This passage builds upon Numbers 12:7, where the term *God's house* definitely does refer to Israel.²⁰ This passage also demonstrates the organic progression between the testaments with its message that the Christ of the new covenant era, who is a Son over God's house, is superior to Moses of the old covenant era, who was a servant in God's house.

Israel and the Church, Part Two

One of the most basic roots of contention between the dispensational system and reformed theology is the relationship of the New Testament church to Old Testament Israel. Dispensationalism views the church age as an interruption in God's program for Israel, as a temporary cessation in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In contrast, reformed theology views the church age as the continuation of God's program for Israel. The church is seen as spiritual Israel come to maturity, and the church age is seen as the fulfillment of much Old Testament prophecy. What is the Biblical relationship of the church to Israel? Is it a relationship of strong dichotomy or a relationship of progressive continuity? That is the question before us.

The New Testament teaching on the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is helpful in answering this question. Revelation 21 reveals that the New Jerusalem is symbolic for the saints of all the ages. The city's twelve foundation stones have on them the names of the twelve apostles, and the city's twelve gates, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.²¹ The foundation stones represent the New Testament saints, and the gates, the Old Testament saints. The New Jerusalem, thus being symbolic for the saints of all the ages, is then designated as being the Bride of Christ,²² which is the church universal, the Body of Christ.²³ This means that both Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church are together in the Body of Christ. The fact that the Old Testament saints are included in the New Jerusalem is further confirmed by Hebrews 12:22-23,

where "the spirits of just men made perfect," a designation most probably inclusive of the Old Testament saints,²⁴ are listed among the citizens of the heavenly city.

Another significant passage that speaks directly to the issue at hand is Matthew 21:43. Here Christ made the following statement to the Jewish leaders near the end of His earthly ministry:

"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof." What is this nation that was given the kingdom of God? The obvious answer is the church, which is elsewhere designated a nation.²⁵ If the church was given the kingdom program that God initiated with Old Testament Israel and rooted in the Old Testament covenants, then there is a strong continuity between Israel and the church. If the church thus assumes the Old Testament kingdom program begun with Old Testament Israel, then the church truly is the Israel of the new covenant.

A common dispensational answer to the above question is that the kingdom will be given "to the nation Israel when she shall turn to the Lord and be saved before entering the millennial kingdom."²⁶ This means that the whole church age must intervene between the first clause of the verse in which the kingdom is taken away from physical Israel and the second clause in which the kingdom is given to another nation!

Additional insight into the transition of the kingdom from Old Testament Israel to the New Testament church can be found in the Biblical teaching on the Messianic Good Shepherd. The Messianic Good Shepherd was both to dispossess the "bad shepherd" leaders of Israel and to judge between members of the flock of Israel.²⁷ Jesus Christ took the kingdom away from the leaders of Israel who had opposed Him and gave the kingdom to the "poor of the flock,"²⁸ the righteous remnant within the nation who were His disciples. In Luke 12:32, Jesus said to His disciples: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." His disciples were the true sheep in Israel, for the true sheep within the flock of Israel were those who recognized the Messianic Shepherd, listened to His teachings, and obediently followed Him.²⁹ Those Jews who rejected Christ did not believe because they were not true sheep.³⁰

Jesus also taught that He also had sheep outside of the fold of His Jewish disciples.³¹ Jesus was here speaking of the Gentiles who would later believe and be incorporated into His church. In John 10:16, Christ said that these Gentile sheep were at that time outside of His present fold of disciples and that He would lead them into His one flock. The word translated *fold* in John 10:16 literally refers to a walled court³² and brings to mind a picture of Israel walled off from the Gentile nations by her ceremonial laws. Jesus was to lead these Gentile sheep into His one flock, "for He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."³³ The new covenant people of God are one flock with no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

The use of the flock metaphor in John 10 demonstrates the relationship of continuity between old covenant Israel and the new covenant church. Both old covenant Israel and the new covenant church are spoken of as God's flock. Christ's sheep are those for whom He savingly died³⁴ and to whom He has given eternal life.³⁵ Since salvation is found in Christ alone, God's true sheep are the saints of all ages.

This message given under the figure of the one flock is similar to the message that Paul teaches in Romans 11 under the figure of the one olive tree. Both John 10 and Romans 11 teach the essential unity of the people of God through the ages as one flock and one olive tree and illustrate the organic progression and the developmental continuity in the transition between the old and new covenants.

Another group of passages that are relevant to our discussion of the continuity question consists of passages which give the church a Jewish name. In Galatians 6:16, Paul says, "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (NIV). Dispensationalists argue that Paul here was referring exclusively to Christian Jews. The problem with this interpretation is that one of Paul's main themes in Galatians is the

teaching that the Jews have no special privileges over the Gentiles in this age. If Paul then gives the Jews in the church a special status or recognition by referring to them exclusively as the Israel of God, then Paul would have destroyed his own argument. He would have played into the hands of the Judaizers by giving them a valid reason for arguing that Gentile Christians could improve their spiritual status by becoming Jewish proselytes as well as Christians. Thus Paul must have been referring to the whole church when he spoke of the Israel of God in Galatians 6:16. The true Israel of God are all those who walk by the rule of glorying only in the cross of Christ.

Elsewhere the church is called the *diaspora*, a technical term for Jews living in Gentile nations³⁶; the twelve tribes³⁷; a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession³⁸; Jews who are Jews inwardly³⁹; the circumcision⁴⁰; comers unto Mount Zion⁴¹; citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem⁴²; children of promise like Isaac⁴³; Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise of Abraham.⁴⁴ In the book of James, the local Christian church is called a synagogue.⁴⁵ A few of these names were given to the church when its membership was predominately Jewish, but the names nevertheless were given to the church. If a dispensationalist tries to avoid this fact by postulating a dichotomy between the early Jewish church and the later Gentile church, then he has adopted into his system one of the distinguishing doctrines of ultra-dispensationalism.

I do not believe there is a strong dichotomy between spiritual Israel and the church as dispensationalists claim. Rather, the real dichotomy is between Old Testament spiritual Israel and New Testament Phariseism, that perversion of genuine Old Testament religion which Christ so strongly condemned and which developed into what is today called normative Judaism.

Israel and the Church, Part Three

The most basic disagreement between dispensationalism and reformed theology centers around the relationship between the New Testament church and Old Testament Israel. According to dispensationalism, the church age is a parenthesis in the Jewish kingdom program prophesied in the Old Testament. The New Testament church at Pentecost is an absolutely new entity, a mystery to which no Old Testament prophecy had directly referred. All the Jewish kingdom prophecies refer to a Jewish millennial kingdom that was postponed until after the unexpected church age because of the Jewish rejection of Jesus. Of course, reformed theology disagrees with this teaching. While recognizing that the church at Pentecost was something new in a relative sense, reformed theologians hold that the church also is the continuation of the old kingdom program begun in the Old Testament. According to reformed theology, the church is spiritual Israel come to dispensational maturity and is the fulfillment of many prophecies made concerning Israel in the Old Testament.

Which of these two opposing views of the relationship between Israel and the church is correct? From the very nature of the question, one should expect to find some clues to the correct answer by studying the New Testament's use of Old Testament prophecy. If the New Testament ever quotes any Old Testament prophecy as referring directly to the New Testament church, then a basic element of the dispensational system is thereby discredited. There are such quotations in the New Testament.

Probably the best known such Old Testament prophecy is Joel 2:28. According to dispensationalists, all the Old Testament prophets were absolutely and completely ignorant of the coming church age. Also, the prophecy of Joel was addressed to Israel and the children of Zion,⁴⁶ not to the church. Since *Israel* means *Israel*, and since *church* means *church*, a prophecy concerning Israel can have no direct relationship to the church, according to the dispensationalists. Now comes the test: What does the New Testament have to say about the fulfillment of Joel 2:28?

We find Joel 2:28 quoted by Simon Peter in Acts 2:16-17 on Pentecost, the birthday of the New Testament church! The Holy Spirit was on that day poured out upon the church in unprecedented fullness, and Peter explained this phenomenon by saying, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," and then by quoting Joel 2:28. If words are to be taken in their normal and literal sense, it is hard to imagine how one could communicate more clearly that an event was a fulfillment of prophecy than with the words this is that. But consistent dispensationalists, because of their presupposed theological system, cannot admit Pentecost to be the outpouring of the Spirit foreseen by the prophet Joel. Dispensationalists believe that Joel's prophesied outpouring will occur in their yet future Jewish millennium, in an age in which there is no baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. There is a note of irony here. The Pentecost outpouring is identified as the baptism of the Holy Spirit,⁴⁷ that divine work that puts one into the Body of Christ, the church universal.⁴⁸ Yet dispensationalists say that the true outpouring, the one genuinely foreseen by the prophet, will occur in an age in which there is no baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. Dispensationalists have no place for either the church or the baptism of the Holy Spirit in their earthly millennial program.

How then do dispensationalists deal with Peter's words at Pentecost? One prominent dispensational writer has said that when Peter said, "this is that," what he really meant was "this is an illustration of that." Other dispensationalists say that Pentecost was but a partial fulfillment of Joel 2 but not at all the fulfillment actually envisioned by the prophet himself. Apparently, dispensationalists can take the words "this is that" in a less than literal sense when it suits their purpose.

Dispensationalists will argue for their futuristic view of Joel's prophecy from the fact that the prophecy mentions cataclysmic events in the heavens. In the Old Testament, however, very similar language was used to describe the national disasters prophesied for Babylon,⁴⁹ Egypt,⁵⁰ and Edom.⁵¹ Since these cataclysmic events in the heavens did not occur literally, then why should we expect a literalistic fulfillment when Joel uses the same general figures? I believe Joel was referring to the national disaster that fell upon national Israel a few decades after Peter's sermon as a consequence of the crime committed a few weeks before Pentecost. When Jesus prophesied this national judgment, he too used similar language.⁵²

Interestingly, ultra-dispensationalists tend to agree with reformed theology that Joel 2 was fulfilled at Pentecost. According to ultra-dispensationalists, there are three peoples of God: Old Testament Israel, the early Jewish Petrine church, and the later Pauline Christian church. Since ultra-dispensationalists associate Pentecost exclusively with the early Jewish church and not with the Christian church, they can allow a fulfillment of Jewish prophecy in Acts and still consistently maintain the dispensational dichotomy between Israel and the Christian church.

Another Old Testament prophecy that is directly related to the church is found in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem council. The issue before the council was the status of Gentile Christians in the church age. Some Jewish Christians were contending that it was necessary for all Gentile Christians to be circumcised and to be required to observe all the Old Testament ceremonial laws. In other words, some Jewish Christians wanted all the Gentile converts to become Jewish proselytes, to become members of Israel in the Old Testament sense. At the Jerusalem council, Peter argued that in the church age, neither Jew nor Gentile had to bear the yoke of observing the ceremonial law in order to receive the full covenantal status of a true Jew. Peter pointed out that God had given the Holy Spirit at Cornelius' house just as freely to uncircumcised Gentile believers as He had given Him to Jewish believers. Paul and Barnabas then related "what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Then James made his climactic speech in which he pointed out that the words of the prophets agreed with what Peter had said about God's taking "out of (the Gentiles) a people for His name" for the first time at Cornelius' house. Here we have the words of the Jewish prophets, who were supposedly ignorant of the church age, agreeing with and confirming an event in the church age. James then paraphrased Amos 9:11-12, a prophecy which promised that sometime after the destruction of northern Israel by Assyria, God would again return to Israel in a visitation of blessing. The prophecy promises that God would then rebuild and restore the Davidic kingdom so that "all the Gentiles

upon whom (God's) name is called" "might seek after the Lord." This Old Testament prophecy spoke about the inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles in the covenantal program. James interpreted this as confirmation that uncircumcised Gentile believers could be members of the New Testament church.

The dispensationalists teach that James was quoting Amos in reference a yet future Jewish millennium and the New Testament church age. This interpretation really seems strange when one takes into account the fact that the dispensational millennium is to be a time of renewed observation of the ceremonial law which separates Jew from Gentile and a time of Jewish superiority over earthly Gentiles. How are such ideas relevant to a council concerned with the religious equality of Christian Gentiles who do not submit to the Jewish ceremonial laws?

I believe the following paraphrase fairly represents the dispensational interpretation of Acts 15:15-17 found in the *Scofield Reference Bible*:

After God has taken out a people for His name from among the Gentiles in order to form the church, the second advent of Christ will occur and Christ will reestablish the Davidic rule over Israel in order that Israelites and millennial Gentiles may seek after the Lord . There are several inaccuracies in the above that make the exegesis unacceptable. First, the phrase "after this" does not mean after the church age at the time of the second coming. "After this" must be related chronologically to the context in Amos. Amos first prophesied the scattering of the northern kingdom of Israel⁵³ which was fulfilled by the Assyrians under Sargon in 722 B.C. The phrase "after this," which is James' paraphrase of Amos' phrase "in that day,"⁵⁴ refers to the time of the Messianic renewal sometime after the prophesied scattering.

Second, the word *first* in the sentence "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name," does not mean first in sequence before a Jewish millennium. James is referring to Peter's testimony concerning the introduction of the Gospel into the house of Cornelius,⁵⁵ where the Gospel was introduced to uncircumcised Gentiles for the first time and thus sequentially first before the miracles wrought among the Gentiles through Paul and Barnabas.

Third, the clause "I will return" does not refer to the second advent. This clause is not found in the Amos passage, and some commentators suggest that it may be based on Jeremiah 12:15 where the return is a return of favor and a divine visitation of blessing. The concept of a visitation of blessing is not uncommon in the Old Testament.⁵⁶

Fourth, the phrase "the residue of men" does not refer to Israel. There is no reference at all to Israel in this quotation from Amos 9. While some dispensationalists do refer this phrase to millennial Gentiles, the *Scofield Reference Bible* specifically identifies this phrase with "Israelites." This phrase "the residue of men" is the Septuagint translation of the original Hebrew "the remnant of Edom." One can view this as a paraphrase that interpretively viewed Edom as symbolic for all the Gentile enemies of Israel.⁵⁷ Or the explanation may be the fact that the early Hebrew text did not have the vowel points and the Hebrew words for Edom and mankind (*adam*) without the vowel pointing are almost identical. Regardless of the correct explanation for the paraphrase, this passage specifically states that the house of David would be reestablished in order that Gentiles might seek the Lord.

Fifth, the dispensational interpretation fails to see the obvious connection between "the heathen, which are called by My name" in Amos 9:12⁵⁸ and Cornelius' household where "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name."⁵⁹ In the dispensational interpretation, the first phrase refers to millennial Gentiles while the second phrase refers to church age Gentiles.

Scofield in his reference Bible notes described this passage in Acts 15 as "dispensationally . . . the most important passage in the New Testament." He was perhaps correct, but not in the sense that he intended. The

correct interpretation of this passage demonstrates that, contrary to dispensational claims, a prophecy concerning Israel and the Jewish Davidic covenant is here declared to be fulfilled in and through the Christian church in the church age.

The New Covenant

Before discussing the new covenant, I would like to review the basic distinction between dispensationalism and reformed theology. This basic distinction revolves around the concepts of **unity** in reference to God's people and **continuity** in reference to God's program. First, according to reformed theology, the people of God in all ages are in union with Christ and are thus together united in the universal church, which is the Body and Bride of Christ. According to dispensationalism, only those who are saved between the Pentecost of Acts 2 and the end time rapture are in the universal church. In other words, Mary, the mother of Jesus, will be in the Bride of Christ, but Joseph her husband who died before Pentecost will be merely a guest at the wedding of the Lamb. Also, John the Apostle will be in the Body of Christ in eternity, but not John the Baptist. According to dispensationalism, the Old Testament saints who died before Acts 2 are not to be made perfect together with the New Testament saints,⁶⁰ but are instead to remain spiritually inferior throughout eternity, never being in the Body and Bride of Christ.

Second, according to reformed theology, the New Testament church is a continuation of the Old Testament program and is directly rooted in the Old Testament covenants. According to dispensationalism, the New Testament church is a parenthesis in the program begun in the Old Testament, not a continuation of the program. They continue the Old Testament program in a future Jewish millennium that is a glorified extension of the Davidic national kingdom and the Old Testament ceremonial laws.

Let us now go on with our examination of the dispensational theory by looking at the dispensational teaching on the new covenant. Since those 27 books of Scripture that were written after the life of Jesus are named the New Testament or covenant, one would expect that all Christians would uncompromisingly acknowledge the Christian nature of the new covenant. Such an acknowledgment, however, is not easy or simple for the consistent dispensationalist.

The classic passage on the new covenant is Jeremiah 31. Please take note: Jeremiah is an Old Testament prophecy, and dispensationalists teach that no Old Testament prophecy can refer directly to the New Testament church. Also, Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy is to be made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,"⁶¹ and dispensationalists teach their strong dichotomy between Israel and the church. In other words, what has a prophecy for Israel to do with the New Testament church in a direct and primary sense? Nothing, says the consistent dispensationalist. So, for the consistent dispensationalist, the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 must be for the Jewish millennium and not for the church age. The problem with this interpretation is it does not harmonize well with the New Testament data on the new covenant.

For example, in Hebrews 8:6-13, the inspired writer referred to Christ as "the mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" and then quoted extensively from the Jeremiah new covenant prophecy.

In Hebrews 10:14-18, the inspired writer quoted from the Jeremiah new covenant prophecy in an argument for the discontinuation of animal sacrifices in the church age. This indeed is ironic, for the dispensationalist refers this Jeremiah new covenant prophecy instead to a Jewish millennium in which animal sacrifices are renewed!

In Hebrews 12:22-24, the new covenant is mentioned along with several Old Testament themes, such as Mount Zion, Jerusalem, and the blood of Abel. This context leaves little doubt that the new covenant here

mentioned is the new covenant prophesied in the Old Testament. Hebrews 12:22-24 relates all of these Old Testament concepts, including the new covenant, directly to the Christian.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul referred to himself and Timothy as "ministers of the new testament." As if to remove any doubt as to what new covenant he was referring to, Paul in verse 3 mentions the Jeremiah new covenant concept of writing on human hearts.⁶²

When Christ inaugurated the Lord's Supper, He said, "This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you."⁶³ What did the Jewish disciples associate with this statement? Undoubtedly they related it to Jeremiah 31. What other new testament (covenant) were they aware of?

Surely you can now see that the consistent dispensationalist has a problem with the new covenant. According to a consistent application of basic dispensational assumptions and the dispensational hermeneutic, the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 is for Israel in a Jewish millennium, not for the New Testament church in the church age. Dispensationalists are divided among three suggested solutions to this serious problem in their system.

Let us begin by examining the theory that is most consistent with dispensational assumptions, the theory of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer and Dr. John F. Walvoord, the first two presidents of Dallas Theological Seminary. This theory asserts that there are two new covenants in Scripture, one for Israel and one for the church. If a new covenant passage seems to relate to Israel, then the passage is referring to the Jewish new covenant of the Jewish millennium. If a new covenant passage seems to relate to the New Testament church, then the passage is referring to the Christian new covenant of the church age. And if a passage is ambiguous, then it somehow relates to both new covenants.⁶⁴ This theory is a pristine and pure application of the dispensational dichotomy between Israel and the church, but it requires amazingly strained exegesis to reconcile it with the Scriptural data. It seems rather obvious that the New Testament data we have already examined not only relates a new covenant to the church but also clearly relates the Jewish Jeremiah 31 new covenant to the church. This theory, the most consistent dispensationally, is the most difficult to defend Scripturally. For this reason, it has not received widespread acceptance among dispensationalists.

A second dispensational theory on the relationship of the church to the new covenant states that the Christian is not at all directly related to the new covenant but is only related to the blood of the new covenant. According to this theory, the blood of Christ was shed primarily to establish a Jewish new covenant with national Israel in the Jewish millennium, and Christ's office as covenant Mediator relates primarily to a Jewish millennial theocratic kingdom. But when God postponed this Jewish millennium and interjected the parenthetical church age, there was enough efficacy in the blood of Christ shed for the Jewish national salvation for it also to be the basis for individual salvation in the church age. According to this theory, the Christian is under the benefits of the new covenant but not under the new covenant itself. This is a very questionable distinction that is nowhere taught in Scripture. Is this theory consistent with Christ's statement, "This cup is the new testament in my blood"? This theory also makes the church age seem embarrassingly secondary to the dispensational Jewish program.

The third theory is probably the most widely accepted among dispensationalists but is also the most inconsistent with dispensational theology. According to this theory, the new covenant is primarily and literally for Israel in a Jewish millennium and is in a secondary and spiritualized sense for the church today. This theory violates the dispensational dichotomy between Israel and the church and the dispensational literalistic hermeneutic. It allows the church to partially fulfill a prophecy made for Israel. If the church can fulfill this Jewish prophecy, then why not others? This theory in effect says that the church can be partially identified with Israel. This theory places the church under a Jewish covenant and gives a church application to a Jewish prophecy. The very criticism of "spiritualizing" and "allegorizing" that the dispensationalists so freely cast at reformed theologians can also be cast at this dispensational theory that is so popular.

The New Testament data on the new covenant fits well with reformed theology. No bending is necessary; no artificial exegesis is required; no hair splitting distinctions are needed. Since the New Testament church is the continuation of the Old Testament kingdom program and is spiritual Israel in this age and is the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies, there is no problem in relating the Jeremiah 31 new covenant to the church in this age as is done by the New Testament writers. The new covenant relates directly to physical Israel only insofar as the Jews accept Christ and are regrafted back into the olive tree of spiritual Israel, which is the church.⁶⁵ The Scriptural data on the new covenant is for the dispensational builders a stone that, though not rejected, does fit rather poorly into their theological structure. They cannot agree how best to cement it onto their system in a fitting manner. In contrast, for the reformed theologian, this stone has become the head of the corner in his system.

How They Argue Their Case

As I analyze my former devotion to the dispensational system, I believe that the dispensational argument that held me most powerfully was the one based on the Scriptural data concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The argument goes like this: it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that puts one into the Body of Christ, which is the church universal⁶⁶; there was no baptism of the Holy Spirit before Acts 2⁶⁷; therefore, none of God's people who died before Acts 2 can be in the church universal; thus, there is an absolute dichotomy between Old Testament Israel and the church. This is a subtle argument that can on the surface appear to be an iron-clad logical deduction from Scriptural data. The apparent strength of this argument, however, is illusionary. Its forcefulness fades into nothingness when one examines its unstated assumptions. We will proceed to examine these hidden assumptions in the penetrating light of Scripture.

First, this dispensational argument assumes that at glorification the Old Testament saints will not be made perfect together with the New Testament saints. It assumes that those advances in spiritual benefits that were historically realized at the inauguration of the New Testament era cannot be applied in glorification to those who died before the New Testament era began in fullness at Acts 2. This assumption contradicts the teaching of Scripture. No one's salvation, whether Old Testament saint or New Testament saint, is made perfect or complete during this life. This completion of the application of salvation occurs at glorification at the return of Christ. The Scriptures clearly teach in Hebrews 11:39-40 that the Old Testament saints will be made perfect together with, not apart from, the New Testament saints because God has provided better benefits for saints in this age of spiritual fullness. Both Old Testament saints and New Testament saints will receive the full benefits of the Trinity's salvific work at glorification, and that includes the post-Pentecost baptism of the Spirit for the Old Testament saints.

Second, this dispensational argument assumes that the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost was totally different in nature from the Spirit's Old Testament ministry of salvation. The Spirit's new covenant ministry can be both significantly superior to and significantly continuous with His old covenant ministry. Was not the Spirit sustaining, renewing, illuminating and gifting the people of God before Pentecost? Was not this work in both ages based on the person, work and covenant headship of Christ? Before Pentecost, the saving work of the Spirit was based on Messianic promises while after Pentecost, the saving work of the Spirit was based on historically realized Messianic accomplishments. The Spirit's present ministry is superior to His old covenant ministry because it no longer relates to the Christ to come but to the Christ who has come and been glorified and who now reigns in power.⁶⁸ The fact that the Spirit was poured out in unprecedented fullness on and after the Pentecost of Acts 2 does not mean that the Spirit had not been previously putting the people of God into covenant union with the Christ who was then yet to come.

Third, this dispensational argument assumes that a sort of salvation was possible in the Old Testament apart from the union with Christ effected by the Spirit. This would mean that Old Testament salvation could not have included those spiritual benefits based upon being put in Christ by the Spirit. This would include even

regeneration,⁶⁹ justification or freedom from divine condemnation,⁷⁰ sanctification or freedom from sin's dominion,⁷¹ and a place in the resurrection of the righteous under the covenant headship of Christ!⁷² Union with Christ to some degree through the work of the Spirit must have been possible in the Old Testament, or there could have been no Old Testament salvation, none at all. Of course, the Old Testament saint did not live in the age of spiritual fullness ushered in by the Son's historic redemptive work, but neither was the Old Testament an age in which all the main effects of the Son's work were absolutely and totally absent! God applied the Son's work to Old Testament believers to some degree even before that work was historically accomplished.

Fifth, there is the fact that the New Testament speaks of salvation in Christ as a participation in the Old Testament covenants of promise.⁷³ This would indeed be ironic if Old Testament salvation were accomplished apart from any union with Christ whatsoever.

There is another dispensational argument that is similar to the above. This argument is based upon the fact that the New Testament refers to the church age as a mystery. In Scripture, a mystery is a previously unknown secret that God has newly revealed. Dispensationalists argue that the church age was a mystery in Old Testament times in an absolute sense. Since the church age was absolutely unknown in the Old Testament, then no Old Testament prophecy could refer to the church age. This means that all Old Testament prophecies about a coming age had to refer to the dispensational Jewish millennium, not to the church age. Then the church age is truly an unforeseen parenthesis in God's program for Israel. The reformed answer to this argument is that the church was a mystery in a relative sense. This answer is based on Ephesians 3:3-6:

"the mystery ..., which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto (God's) holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The *as* here is comparative indicating that the church age was relatively unknown in the Old Testament, not absolutely unknown. Certain characteristics of the church age that are referred to here as a mystery⁷⁴ are elsewhere shown to be predicted in Old Testament prophecy,⁷⁵ which proves the mystery to be relative, not absolute.

Another dispensational argument is based on Christ's statement, "I will build My church."⁷⁶ The dispensationalists argue that if the church were then something just being built, then it could not have existed in Old Testament times. The answer to this argument is simple. The New Testament church at the time of Christ's earthly ministry was both old and new. It was old in that the concept of God's having a church or a called out people was rooted in the Old Testament. The New Testament church is new in that God's people reached a new dispensational maturity at that time due to the historical work of the Son. The Old Testament church was in the infancy of ceremonial shadows and a nationally confined kingdom; the New Testament church was in the maturity of spiritual realities and a universalized kingdom. In the Old Testament, Moses served the church as a servant; in the New Testament, Christ was faithful over the church as a Son.⁷⁷ The newness in Matthew 16:18 is not the concept of a church but the concept of God's people belonging to Christ in a new and intimate way. Christ was referring to the mature church of Messianic realities as opposed to the immature church of Messianic prefigurations. And Christ built the New Testament church not from scratch but out of the material of the Old Testament church, replacing the typological shadows with spiritual substance and expanding the Jewish tent to include the Gentiles.⁷⁸

A very similar argument to this one based on Matthew 16:18, is one based on Ephesians 2:20, where the apostles and prophets are said to be the foundation of the church. If the church is described as a temple founded on the New Testament apostles and on Christ, argues the dispensationalist, then it cannot have an Old Testament foundation. Some might be tempted to answer this by arguing that Ephesians 2:20 teaches that the church is founded on the Old Testament prophets as well as New Testament apostles. It is better to acknowledge that the prophets in Ephesians 2:20 are New Testament prophets.⁷⁹ Ephesians 2:20 is referring to the church in its New Testament manifestation, to the church in its Messianic maturity, and not to the church in its broader sense. The passage that discusses the church in its broader sense with the use of an

architectural figure is Revelation 21:9-14. The word *church* as used in the New Testament can refer broadly to the elect of all ages or it can refer narrowly to the assembly of Old Testament Israel, to the covenant community in its New Testament manifestations, or to a local New Testament congregation. In Ephesians 2:20, the word *church* is not even used directly. The reference is to the "new man,"⁸⁰ which refers to the church in its New Testament form. If one examines the church as the community with God's promise of salvation, its foundation goes ultimately back to the Trinitarian covenant of redemption in eternity past and goes historically back to the promise of the Seed Redeemer give to Adam and Eve after the fall. If one examines the church as a covenant community with a system of sacramental administration, its foundation goes back to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. If one examines the church as the covenant community of Messianic fullness, then its foundation is the historical work of Christ and the New Testament apostles and prophets. Ephesians 2:20 is admittedly a discussion of the church strictly in its New Testament form, but Ephesians 2:12-19 stresses the strong continuity of the New Testament church with Old Testament Israel and with the Old Testament covenants. The reformed theologian acknowledges both the newness of the New Testament church and its continuity with the Old Testament covenant community. The dispensationalist radicalizes the former and denies the latter. Also, the reformed theologian recognizes that the word *church* at times refers to the elect of all the ages⁸¹ and to the assembly of Old Testament Israel.⁸²

I will deal with one last argument that the dispensationalists use. They argue that since the New Testament continues to distinguish between physical Israelites, physical Gentiles and the Christian church,⁸³ then one cannot identify Israel and the church. After all, Israel and the church are kept separate in Scripture. This argument is based upon an overly restricted understanding of the term Israel.

Though the physical Jew may have a sense of racial identity, membership in Israel has never been a strictly racial matter. Israel was the name of the Old Testament covenant community that was distinguished from the nations by the observance of the Old Testament ceremonial laws. Physical descent from Abraham was emphasized, but Gentiles could join Israel through the proselyte laws. In the genealogy of David, we find Tamar the Canaanite, Rahab the harlot from Jericho, and Ruth the Moabitess. A mixed multitude came out of Egypt with the physical descendants of Abraham.⁸⁴ Gentiles throughout the ancient world became Jews in the days of Queen Esther.⁸⁵ During the intertestamental Maccabean era, many Edomites, descendants of Esau, became Jews.⁸⁶

Also, members of Israel could be excommunicated from the covenant community for certain high handed sins. When much of Israel lapsed into idolatry, the prophets spoke of the remnant within the nation who were Jews inwardly as well as outwardly. This concept of being a true inward Jew was stressed by John the Baptist,⁸⁷ Jesus,⁸⁸ and Paul.⁸⁹ One could be a member of Israel physically, nationally, culturally and religiously without being a member of Israel spiritually. In this age of the new covenant, the physical Jew must follow the example of Zacchaeus and believe in Christ in order to be a true son of Abraham.⁹⁰

When the national leaders of Israel hardened their hearts in rejection of the Christ, Jesus took the kingdom from them and gave it to the righteous remnant within the nation who had accepted Him and whom He called the "little flock."⁹¹ For a season, the status of the unbelieving Jews as members of the covenant community with a special interest in God's promises was honored,⁹² but those who hardened in their rejection were eventually pruned off the tree of the true Israel.⁹³ In the book of Acts, we learn how the Gentiles came to be accepted into the covenant community without becoming practicing Jews.⁹⁴ Believing branches from the wild olive tree of the Gentiles were grafted into God's covenant people.⁹⁵ In this new covenant age, many Gentiles have followed the example of the Roman centurion of great faith and have come from east and west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.⁹⁶ Thus, the "new man" of the New Testament church, which consists of both Jew and Gentile, became the true heir of the Old Testament covenant promises.⁹⁷

In the New Testament, one can be a physical Jew and not be a spiritual Jew,⁹⁸ and one could be a physical Gentile and be a spiritual seed of Abraham.⁹⁹ Thus the fact that the word *Israel* can refer to physical Jews or to ethnic Israel or to the religious heirs of the Pharisees does not imply that the church is not spiritual Israel, the true Israel of God¹⁰⁰ and the true heir of the Old Testament covenants.

We also need to realize that while both Christianity and Judaism have roots in the Old Testament religion, only Christianity is the seed according to promise¹⁰¹ and the true heir of the Old Testament covenants. As long as ethnic Israel remains in spiritual hardness and blindness through her rejection of God's Messiah, she remains cut off from spiritual Israel and from the sap of God's saving grace¹⁰² and is an enemy of God concerning the gospel.¹⁰³ At the same time, we need to realize that there is a sense in which ethnic Israel remains beloved of God due to the special role of her fathers in redemptive history and due to her national election under the old covenant.¹⁰⁴ God had chosen ethnic Israel as His people under the old covenant and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."¹⁰⁵ Because of God's respect for ethnic Israel's former participation in the covenant promises, ethnic Israel's apostasy from spiritual Israel will never be full or final. There will always be an elect remnant within ethnic Israel who are Jews inwardly as well as outwardly and thus members of the true Israel of God, which is the Christian church.¹⁰⁶ And ethnic Israel will one day experience a spiritual fullness that will be in direct contrast to the hardness, blindness and stumbling of her national rejection of Jesus.¹⁰⁷ God continues to have a place for ethnic Israel in His prophetic plans in spite of her national stumbling but that future is not divorced from the Christian church. In fact, that future will be realized in and through the Christian church when the cast off natural branches are grafted back into the olive tree through faith in Christ.¹⁰⁸

In summary, we see that dispensationalism overstresses the differences of kind between the Old and New Testaments to the point of neglecting their organic relationship of developmental continuity. Old Testament Israel was the church in infancy; Acts 2 was the church's Bar Mitzvah; the New Testament church is Israel come to maturity. The New Testament church is organically related to Old Testament Israel like a man's adulthood is organically related to that same man's childhood.¹⁰⁹ In such a relationship, there is both newness and continuity.

Literalism

I believe if you were to ask the knowledgeable dispensationalist to specify the most basic and fundamental element in his system, he would probably say consistent literalism or some equivalent expression. The dispensationalist believes that consistent literalism is the basic key to the correct interpretation of Scripture and the only sure hedge against liberalism. The dispensationalist's main criticism of the reformed theologian is that he "spiritualizes" or "allegorizes," which is to say that he is not consistently literal in the dispensational sense of the expression.

This dispensational criticism most often refers to the fact that the reformed theologian takes Old Testament prophecies that speak of Israel and applies them directly to the New Testament church. Many dispensationalists also regard the reformed theologian as an incipient liberal because they believe that it is only the reformed theologian's inconsistency and his failure to apply his non-literal hermeneutic (i.e., system of interpretation) throughout his system of theology that saves him from liberalism. After all, the reformed theologian's "spiritualizing" away Jewish prophecies by applying them directly to the church differs only in degree from the liberal's spiritualizing away the creation account or the virgin birth by saying that these are myths, reasons the dispensationalist. Thus, the dispensationalist is emotionally committed to his literal hermeneutic. The dispensationalist tends to believe that he alone has the moral courage and integrity necessary to accept what Scripture literally teaches.

The importance of consistent literalism to the dispensationalist cannot be overstated. Dispensationalists like to argue that consistent literalism is their first principle and that the dichotomy and parenthesis theories logically follow from the application of this first principle to the study of Scripture. I believe that the reality is the reverse: dispensational interpretation uses the degree of literalism necessary to interpret prophecy in terms of the dispensational dichotomy and parenthesis assumptions.

Certain passages dramatically demonstrate the difficulty in trying to interpret prophecy with so-called consistent literalism. One such class of passages are those which dispensationalists apply to their Jewish millennium and which refer to some ancient enemies of Old Testament Israel which long ago passed out of existence, such as the Ammonites,¹¹⁰ the Assyrians,¹¹¹ the Edomites,¹¹² the Egyptians,¹¹³ and the Moabites.¹¹⁴ Few dispensationalists take these prophecies to refer literally to these ancient peoples whose genetic identities were long ago lost, but if *Israel* must mean *Israel*, then why does not *Edom* have to mean *Edom* or *Assyria*, *Assyria*? Why has not God preserved these ancient peoples like He has the Jewish race for the sake of literal prophetic fulfillment?

Some Old Testament prophecies also mention ancient Jewish family and tribal relationships that were preserved until New Testament times but which have long since been lost through intermarriage?¹¹⁵ God allowed these long preserved Jewish genealogies to be lost when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Once tribal and family relationships are lost, they cannot be restored except by resurrecting the family and tribal heads and starting over again. How are these prophecies going to be fulfilled literally?

The passage most commonly mentioned in discussions of the difficulty presented by dispensational literalism is Ezekiel's temple vision (Ezekiel 40-48). The dispensationalists are looking for a reinstatement of bloody animal sacrifices in a millennial temple built in accordance with the description found in this passage. Dispensationalists are careful to specify that these sacrifices are merely memorials of Christ's death and will be the millennial equivalent of the Lord's Supper. The problem with this is that Ezekiel's vision refers to these sacrifices as literally making atonement.¹¹⁶ Of course, a dispensationalist can go to the book of Hebrews to prove that animal sacrifices in the Old Testament never literally atoned for sin.¹¹⁷ When the Reformed theologian, however, goes to Hebrews to prove that animal sacrifices were done away forever by Christ's once for all offering,¹¹⁸ then that is "theological interpretation" and "reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament," two practices which dispensationalists routinely criticize.

Another area where strict literalism is difficult are those prophecies which dispensationalists interpret as end-time events and which refer to ancient weapons systems. For example, Ezekiel 38-39 is a passage which dispensationalists interpret as referring to an end-time invasion of Israel by a Russian army. And yet the prophecy speaks of this army as equipped with primitive weapons: "shields and bucklers, . . . bows and arrows, and . . . handstaves, and . . . spears."¹¹⁹ These weapons are largely made of wood as evidenced by their being burned as firewood. To teach that the prophet was simply speaking of warfare in terms familiar to ancient Israel would be to compromise the dispensational literal hermeneutic. If the prophet could have prophesied a war with modern weapons in terms of the primitive weapons with which ancient Israel was familiar, then the prophet could also have prophesied the church age in terms of the Old Testament religious system with which ancient Israel was familiar. If the dispensationalist does not interpret the wooden weapons of Ezekiel 39 literally, then he has little basis for crying out "spiritualization" when the Reformed interpreter interprets Ezekiel's temple vision in the chapters immediately following as a prophecy of the church age in terms of the Old Testament religious system.

Another passage where dispensationalists generally insist on strict literality is the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. The new Jerusalem vision of Revelation 21, if interpreted with strict literality, involves the coming down to earth of a city whose length, width and height are each 12,000 stadia (i.e., about 1,500 miles). Of course, God could accomplish such a feat, but is it not more likely that these outrageous dimensions were used intentionally to prevent an overly literal interpretation? Also, the use of the

highly symbolic number 12,000 would seem enough to indicate that this city, which elsewhere is literally said to be the Bride of Christ,¹²⁰ is a symbol for the full number of the people of God of all the ages. The number twelve is associated with the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles¹²¹ and therefore with the covenant people of both ages. The numbers ten and thousand are associated with fullness or completion. Why the insistence on a literal city with such outrageous and disproportionate dimensions relative to planet earth?

Dispensationalists sometimes do lay aside this insistence on literal if possible in prophetic interpretation. For example, in Psalm 22, it was prophesied that the Messiah would be surrounded by "bulls of Bashan." Most interpreters take this prophecy to refer to those people who persecuted our Lord at His passion. One must admit, however, that this interpretation is not a "literal if possible" interpretation of the passage. And yet, I am aware of no dispensationalist who insists in the name of literalism that our Lord at His second advent must suffer again under the threats of literal bulls from literal Bashan in order to fulfill all prophecy literally. Yet these same interpreters argue that Christ will not begin His prophesied Messianic reign until He is ruling from a literal Mount Zion in literal Palestine¹²² even though the New Testament teaches both that Christ obtained His Messianic throne at His ascension into heaven¹²³ and that Mount Zion and Jerusalem in the age are heavenly realities.¹²⁴

The editors of the New Scofield Reference Bible have made a significant admission regarding literalism and the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. They have acknowledged that the animal sacrifices in Ezekiel's temple vision do not need to be interpreted literally but may be validly regarded as a general prophecy of future worship in terms of the Old Testament economy with which the original recipients of the prophecy were familiar.¹²⁵ If this principle can be applied here, then why not elsewhere in other prophecies of the Messianic age? If this principle applies to the sacrifices in Ezekiel's temple vision, then why not also to the entire temple setting? Once this principle is acknowledged in regard to one element of Old Testament worship in a Messianic prophecy, it is arbitrary to deny it in regard to other elements of Old Testament worship and other Messianic prophecies. The more this principle is applied in dispensational interpretation of prophecy, the less Judaistic will be the dispensational millennium and the closer dispensational interpretation will come to traditional reformed prophetic interpretation.

I opened this chapter with some criticisms that dispensationalists have of the Reformed hermeneutic. Allow me to close by answering these criticisms. First, consistent literalism is not the final key to proper Biblical interpretation. It is too subjective and rationalistic. One man's consistency is another man's absurdity. Consistent literalism means that the interpreter must ultimately look to his own personal sense of literary usage to determine the degree of literalism and figurativeness in prophecy.

The proper hermeneutic involves a study of how Scripture interprets other Scripture as a guide to what is Scripturally normal language. If Matthew's interpretation of prophecy seems abnormal to us, then we should adjust our understanding of what normal language is.

The proper hermeneutic involves a willingness to interpret difficult passages of Scripture in the light of the teaching of clearer passages of Scripture. One should not build a theological system on possible interpretations of poetic or apocalyptic passages when those interpretations require one to twist the clear meaning of straightforward didactic passages.

The proper hermeneutic involves a prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies in truth. The interpreter should not be a rationalist who puts his ultimate trust in his own personal sense of language. The interpreter's own personal sense of language is reliable only to the extent that it has been sanctified by the Spirit in truth. The interpreter should humbly acknowledge that his ultimate dependence is on the Spirit's illumination for spiritual discernment and for deliverance from sinful biases and blindnesses. Interpretation

of Scripture is a moral endeavor as well as an intellectual endeavor. We are dependent on the Spirit to help us to understand Scripture as God meant it to be understood.

Second, strict literalism is not the final hedge against liberalism. False teachers defend their distorted theologies both by literalizing Scripture and by allegorizing Scripture. The true hedge against doctrinal distortion is a real submission to the Spirit's illumination of the inspired text. Only here in this double combination of Word and Spirit does one find truth safely hedged against error.

In the last analysis, truth and understanding are gifts from God. As is true with many issues, we in the end come to the apparent antinomy between human responsibility and divine sovereignty. I am morally responsible for seeing and obeying the clear message of Scripture. Apart from Christ, I can do nothing and am spiritually blind and dead. When I do understand and obey God's message, it is an unmerited gift from God. And yet my natural inability and my total dependence on God does not relieve me of my responsibility to use all my God given facilities in an effort to understand His Word. And if I am right and my dispensational friends are wrong in understanding prophecy, I have no basis for boasting. For what do I have that I did not receive? Every good and perfect gift is from above.

Interpreting the Prophets

Interpreting Biblical prophecy is not exactly like reading the morning newspaper. To read Biblical prophecy is to encounter statements about mighty bulls of Bashan, strange composite beasts, armies of locusts, and cataclysmic events in the heavens and on earth. One doesn't often encounter language like that even in the more extravagant tabloids. Interpreting this sort of language is a challenge, especially since we are no longer surrounded by the cultural and linguistic context in which Biblical prophecy was originally given. Interpreting prophecy, however, is a challenge that every Christian should accept. **All** Scripture is profitable for doctrine and instruction, not just the easier to understand portions of Scripture.

The dispensationalist and the Reformed interpreter have basic disagreements about how the language of prophecy should be interpreted. It would be impractical to go through all the prophecies of Scripture in this chapter and to explain the differences between dispensational and reformed approaches to their interpretation. A more practical approach would be to examine some of the general issues in the interpretation of prophecy as these relate to the basic differences between dispensational and reformed prophetic interpretation.

A primary criticism that dispensationalists have of the reformed interpretation of prophecy is that the reformed interpreter treats prophecy with a different hermeneutic (i.e., system of interpretation) than he uses with the rest of Scripture. The basic issue here is the simple question of what was "normal" language when God spoke about the then distant future. Should we expect God to have spoken through the prophets about the then distant future with the same basic language that He used when He chronicled the history of the covenant people? Or should we expect a basic literary difference between Genesis and Zechariah, between 1 Samuel and Daniel, between the Acts of the Apostles and the Apocalypse of John? Is the only literary difference between history and predictive prophecy that one looks at the past and the other at the future? Should we interpret predictive prophecy as if it were prewritten history or futuristic newspaper reporting?

According to reformed interpreters, there is a basic literary difference between historical chronicles and prophetic visions. Many Old Testament prophecies were given in dreams, visions, and dark sayings¹²⁶ in which one should expect to find more figurative speech than in historical accounts or didactic literature. One should not interpret the prophets as if their message is in the simple literary form of prewritten history.

One of the greatest contrasts between the reformed and dispensational understanding of "normal" language in the prophets revolves around the question of whether the prophets ever spoke of the future in terms of the past. The reformed position is that God through the Old Testament prophets revealed selected truths about the then coming church age without revealing everything about the church age. In the Old Testament prophets, God revealed these selected truths about the church age in the descriptive context of the basic Old Testament religious and political economy with which the prophets and their listeners were familiar. God prophetically spoke of the unknown future in terms of then known and understood realities. God led the Old Testament prophets to predict certain essentials of the church age in terms of the concrete details of the Old Testament world even though some of these details would pass away in the coming age. According to the reformed interpreter, this was God's normal way of revealing selected truths about the distant future. According to the dispensationalist, this would have been a deceptive way for God to have spoken about the distant future.¹²⁷

The practical result of the dispensational understanding of "normal" language in prophecy is the dispensational position that no Old Testament prophecy can refer directly to the church age. For example, since the prophecies about Gentiles' worshiping the God of Abraham in the Messianic age are generally given in the descriptive context of the basic Old Testament religious and political economy, these prophecies must be fulfilled in the coming Jewish age when this basic religious and political context will be literally reestablished. The church age, therefore, must be viewed as a totally unrevealed parenthesis in the Jewish program prophesied in the prophets. Dispensationalist Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer gave this description of the parenthesis theory:

"The new divine program (i.e., the church age) had intentionally been unrevealed before its inauguration. It came, therefore, not only with great suddenness, but wholly without Old Testament revelation. The case would be nearly parallel if a new and unpredicted project were to be forced in at this time to supersede Christianity."¹²⁸

Another profitable area to examine is the "normal" interpretation of prophetic types. In using a prophetic type, one takes an event or a person or an institution from the past and uses it to speak of the present or future. The chosen event, person, or institution has both a form and a substance. The substance is the prominent general characteristic and the real essence of the matter, and the form involves all the detailed but incidental specifics. When a prophetic type is used to divinely predict the distant future, it is not normal to expect an exact reproduction of all the incidental details or a reappearance of the literal original.

An example of a prophetic type is found in the prophecy in Amos 9:11-12 about the resurrection of the fallen booth of David. In a previous chapter, we noted the use of this prophecy in Acts 15 and the controversy over whether it refers to the church age or to the dispensational Jewish millennium. There is also controversy over who is meant by the name *David* in the prophecy. Reformed theologians recognize that David was a type of Christ and believe on the basis of typological interpretation that this prophecy concerning King David actually refers to his antitype, King Jesus. Some leading dispensational interpreters who are genuinely striving to be consistently literal instead believe that this prophecy refers to the resurrected Old Testament David who will be given a millennial viceroyship. Literally speaking, David is no more Jesus than Israel is the church. If the prophet had meant Jesus, why did he not say "Son of David"? And if typological interpretation is valid in Amos, then why not also in Ezekiel and elsewhere?

Another good case in point is the Old Testament prophecy that Elijah would precede the coming of the Christ.¹²⁹ Was this prophecy to be fulfilled literally by a resurrected Elijah or typologically? We read in Luke 1:17 that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy by coming "in the spirit and the power of Elias." What is that if not a Scriptural use of a prophetic type? John the Baptist was not the literally resurrected Elijah that the Jews were expecting¹³⁰ but he was the true fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy about Elijah.¹³¹

Another interesting area of study is the New Testament's use of Old Testament prophecy. Dispensationalists routinely claim that every fulfillment of prophecy in the New Testament is a literal fulfillment. That claim simply is not true. Look at the fulfillments of prophecy in Matthew 2:13-18. Hosea 11:1 spoke of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, and Matthew saw Christ's return to Palestine from Egypt as a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1. Jeremiah 31:15 spoke of the weeping of a metaphorical Rachel, the mother of Benjamin, when Jewish captives were deported to Babylon from Ramah, a city in the territory of Benjamin. Matthew saw Herod's slaughter of the babes at Bethlehem (the place of Rachel's grave) as a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15. Were those literal fulfillments of prophecy? No, they were typological fulfillments in which national Israel was a type of Christ, the ultimate Seed of Abraham. God's protecting the nation Israel in Egypt in the nation's infancy during a perilous famine and then calling the nation out of Egypt to Canaan was typologically prophetic of Christ's fleeing to Egypt as an infant until the death of Herod. Also, the grief at Ramah where the Babylonians assembled the last band of Jewish captives was typologically prophetic of Herod's attempt to destroy the Messianic Seed of Abraham. Matthew undoubtedly accepted the concept of the typological fulfillment of prophecy.

A last area to examine is the relative emphasis placed on allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture in the two systems. Reformed prophetic interpretation does place a great emphasis on allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. If Peter indicated that Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit was fulfilled at Pentecost, then that should influence one's interpretation of Joel's prophecy. If Paul said that the true Seed of Abraham is Christ and those who are in covenant union with Christ,¹³² then that fact should influence one's interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant. The supposition here is that the only infallible interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself, and the fallible human interpreter should study this infallible and inspired interpretation of prophecy as a guide to all prophetic interpretation. As someone so poetically expressed it, We should sail our ship of interpretation in the wake of the apostles' hermeneutic. The dispensationalist, however, rejects this as "reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament." The dispensationalist assumes that through an independent and neutral study of the laws of language, one can arrive at the correct understanding of Old Testament prophetic interpretation with no help from New Testament revelation

The reformed interpreter believes that the Old Testament prophets were not intended by God to be as easily understood as certain other portions of Scripture. Many Old Testament prophecies were given in dreams, visions and dark sayings in which one should expect to find somewhat figurative speech and less clear revelation. This view of prophecy is not mere supposition, for Scripture does give concrete indication that the Old Testament prophets were not meant to be the easiest to understand portions of the divine revelation. Moses was said to be superior to the other Old Testament prophets in that God spoke clearly to him and not in dark sayings.¹³³ Not another prophet like Moses, "whom the Lord knew face to face,"¹³⁴ arose until the Christ, who was counted worthy of more glory than Moses¹³⁵ and who was the prophesied Prophet like unto Moses.¹³⁶ Thus, while God spoke in the Old Testament through the prophets "at sundry times and in divers manners," He has "in these last days spoken unto us by His Son," who is "the express image of His person,"¹³⁷ who has seen the Father,¹³⁸ who has explained God,¹³⁹ and who descended from heaven to bear witness to what He has actually seen.¹⁴⁰ Through the inspiration of the outpoured Spirit, this apex of revelation continued with the Apostles.¹⁴¹ The New Testament then is the final, full and most clear revelation of God. The reformed interpreter believes that the New Testament revelation is clearer and easier to comprehend than much of the revelation in the prophets. And the reformed interpreter tends to believe that the less clear passages of Scripture should be interpreted in the light of the relevant clearer passages, not *vice versa*.

The Old Testament is the foundation and background of the New Testament and is indispensable for the proper understanding of the New Testament. The New Testament is the infallible revelation of the divine development of the Old Testament program in the fullness of time and is indispensable for understanding the Old Testament with new covenant clarity. The New Testament tells us about the Old Testament like an oak tree tells us about an acorn. The man who has seen the fully grown oak can better understand the

significance and meaning of the acorn. To use another illustration, the New Testament aids in the understanding of the Old Testament like observing a specimen under a microscope with a higher magnification aids in understanding what is seen with a lower magnification. Let us say that two men are observing a specimen magnified twenty times but that one of them also has seen the same specimen magnified one hundred times. That man who has seen the greater magnification will be aware of details the other man cannot even see, and he will more accurately understand and interpret those details that both men can see with the lesser magnification. According to reformed interpretation, we today, with the aid of the New Testament, can better understand the implications and meaning of the Old Testament than could the original recipients of that revelation because we have had the privilege of observing the same specimen (God's truth) under greater magnification.¹⁴² Many prophets desired to see those things which we have seen but did not see them.¹⁴³

I have tried to contrast the basic differences between the reformed and the dispensational understandings of Old Testament prophecy. These two schools disagree on prophetic interpretation, and the implications of this disagreement are great. If the Reformed principles are correct, then the church age is a continuing fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies about the Messianic age and Old Testament prophecy applies directly to the Christian. If the dispensational principles are correct, then the church age becomes an unrevealed parenthesis in the prophesied Messianic program and Old Testament prophecy applies directly only to the tribulation, the millennium, and eternity. Which principles of prophetic interpretation are correct is an important question with significant theological and exegetical repercussions.

Rightly Dividing the Word

I can distinctly remember the time during my college days when a Christian whom God used in my life gave me a short introduction to dispensationalism. He quoted 2 Timothy 2:15 from the King James Version and pointed out the importance of "rightly dividing the word of truth." He then went over with me the seven dispensations of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. I now doubt that 2 Timothy is directly referring to dividing Biblical history into different economies. The American Standard Version translates this verse "handling aright the word of truth," which I believe better conveys the verse's intent. Nevertheless, regardless of how one interprets that verse, Christians have recognized from earliest times that God has worked through different economies in different ages. Dividing Biblical history into different dispensational periods is not distinctive of dispensationalism. To say that all Christians who do not today offer animal sacrifices and who do not today abstain from pork are at least incipient dispensationalists is extremely simplistic. The particular number and choice of historical division points presented by Scofield do not define dispensationalism either. The true distinctives are found on a more subtle level.

I believe that one can begin to discern some of the real distinctives of dispensationalism by examining Scofield's definition of a dispensation: "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God."¹⁴⁴ It is certainly true that in every divine economy, God gave further revelation of Himself and His will, and man was responsible for responding to that revelation in obedience. It is also true that man apart from God's saving grace will always fail the test of obedience because of man's depraved nature. Yet, while there is truth in Scofield's definition and scheme, there is also oversight and error. Perhaps more significant is the oversight: there is no mention of the progressive revelation of and preparation for the Messianic Seed-Redeemer in each dispensation. For the reformed theologian, Christ and His saving work is the most significant element in each dispensation and is the theme that unifies the progressive and organic development of the Biblical drama. Yet Dr. Charles C. Ryrie says:

"The covenant theologian in his zeal to make Christ all in all is guilty of superimposing Him arbitrarily on the Old Testament. He does the same with the doctrine of the church and with the concept of salvation through faith in Christ."¹⁴⁵

I also mentioned an error in Scofield's definition. I believe one is there at least implicitly. Dispensationalists and reformed theologians tend to disagree as to the relationship that revelation given to past dispensations has to the present dispensation. Dispensationalists tend to teach that such past revelation is not binding today except to the extent that it is reaffirmed in the revelation given specifically for this present dispensation. In contrast, reformed theology teaches that past revelation continues to be binding today except to the extent that it was time bound or situation specific in its original application or to the extent that it has been modified by more recent Biblical revelations. Like Christ, the reformed theologian emphasizes the continuing relevance of God's former revelations,¹⁴⁶ whereas the dispensationalist puts the emphasis on the nonbinding nature of past revelation that is not specifically reaffirmed for today. This difference in emphasis seems to be implied in Scofield's statement that each dispensation is related to "some specific revelation," as if each dispensation is limited to the revelation specifically directed to that dispensation.

In order to really appreciate the distinctives of dispensationalism's "rightly dividing the word," one needs to think through the dispensational explanation of Biblical history. A good place to start is the dispensational teaching on the Abrahamic covenant and the dispensation of promise. Here God provided a salvation administered on a by faith basis and administered without moral conditions. All went well for the people of God until Mount Sinai when, according to Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, a rash and tragic mistake occurred. There the people of God rashly abandoned their unconditional by faith covenant position and instead tragically accepted the conditional and legalistic Mosaic covenant, which they should have refused to accept.¹⁴⁷ By faith salvation based upon an imputed righteousness was abandoned at Mount Sinai and was not resumed until after Mount Calvary, according to Dr. Chafer. If one considers the period from the Abrahamic covenant to the end time church rapture, the Mosaic covenant was a legalistic parenthesis in a by faith administration of grace that began in the dispensation of promise and resumed in the dispensation of grace. If one considers the period from the Mosaic covenant to the end of the millennium, then the church age is a parenthesis of grace in a meritorious administration of law. It is only fair to mention that many recent dispensationalists have in various degrees modified this excessively rigid dichotomy between law and grace in their explanations of redemptive history and have begun to drift toward the teachings on law and grace more traditionally held by reformed theologians.

The next major development in a dispensational view of the Bible is the Gospels and the early chapters of Acts. According to dispensationalism, Christ was offering the Jewish nation a Judaistic political kingdom. Since the Jews rejected Christ's offer, Christ postponed the Jewish kingdom and instead inaugurated the parenthetical and previously unrevealed church age. Because of this analysis of the ministry of Christ, dispensationalists see the Gospels as a complex combination of truth relating directly to three different dispensations: law, grace and kingdom. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is legal and Jewish kingdom truth that is not directly meant for the church age. Scofield labeled the Lord's prayer petition "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"¹⁴⁸ as "legal ground."¹⁴⁹ The parables of Matthew 13, which obviously refer to the church age, are interpreted as an initial explanation of some of the unexpected mysteries of the coming age due to the postponement of the Jewish millennium and the unrevealed introduction of the church age. Matthew 16:18 is where Christ first openly revealed the coming parenthetical church age, and Matthew 18:17 is where Christ gave church truth on discipline. The Olivet discourse¹⁵⁰ is again Jewish truth that is interpreted as a detailed prophecy of the seven year Jewish tribulation period after the church rapture. The upper room discourse¹⁵¹ that occurred a few days later is church truth. The apostles in Acts 1:6 again represent the Jewish remnant, but in Acts 2 they again represent the church and are involved with church truth as they preach on Pentecost. In Acts 3:12-26, the apostles reoffer the Judaistic kingdom to the Jewish nation for the last time until the yet future tribulation period. If the Jews had accepted this reoffer, the rapture would have occurred then, and the Jewish kingdom would have come after a very short church age.

Dispensationalists view the rest of the book of Acts as church truth. The only problem with this is the frequent references to the kingdom both in Acts and in the epistles written during that period.

Dispensationalists explain that the kingdom there referred to is not the theocratic Messianic kingdom of Old Testament prophecy but instead is either God's nontheocratic sovereign rule of providence or is "the kingdom in mystery form" of Matthew 13, which dispensationalists interpret as a name applicable to the non-kingdom church age. This explanation does not satisfy the ultra-dispensationalists who view Acts and the epistles of that period as Jewish truth and not as truth for the later Gentile Pauline Body and Bride of Christ church.

In the epistles, even the "orthodox" dispensationalists find some scattered traces of Jewish truth. For example, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 speaks of the flaming return of Christ in judgment upon the persecutors of God's people. In dispensational thinking, there is no flaming judgment associated with the church return of Christ, which is a secret rapture. Flaming judgment is associated only with the Jewish second advent. So the recipients of 2 Thessalonians 1 were there being taught Jewish truth even though Paul used his message as an encouragement to church age Christians. The Christians at Thessalonica must have there been acting as representatives of Jewish tribulation saints.

Notice also Titus 2:13. There Paul combined the church return of Christ (the blessed hope) with the Jewish return of Christ (the glorious appearing) in one statement as if they were one event! To be a good dispensationalist, one must read Scripture with one's presupposed dichotomies ever in mind so that one can catch such distinctions. Dividing Scripture categorically and relegating the message to the proper age and people are key to good dispensational interpretation.

Finally there is the book of Revelation where the early chapters (1-3) are church truth and the rest of the book is Jewish truth concerning the Jewish tribulation and millennium until the mention of the Bride of Christ, which is the church, at the end.

Dividing Biblical history into a progression of dispensations is not unique to dispensationalists. All theologians do that. What is characteristic of the consistent dispensationalist is that he suffers from an acute case of "hardening of the categories." Having in practice rejected the typological and organic union of the two testaments that is found in Christ and His saving work, the consistent dispensationalist has instead adopted a two program, two people view of Biblical history in which the church age is a logically unnecessary parenthesis in the divine program and, from the perspective of the Old Testament prophets, a divine afterthought and adjustment. My own opinion, to use a pun, is that consistently interpreting Scripture through the rigid grid of dispensational assumptions has the potential for turning Biblical bread into theological shredded wheat. Fortunately, many dispensationalists today are mild dispensationalists who are not all that rigid when it comes to dispensational interpretation and theology and who have had little actual exposure to the classical and definitive dispensational works by men such as Darby, Chafer and Scofield where these dispensational dichotomies are rigidly pressed.

Christian Zionism

Dispensationalism as a system tends to promote among Christians Zionism, the conviction that physical Jews today have a Biblical right to possess the land of Palestine. The point of discussion in this chapter is not Zionism as a political issue but Zionism as a Biblically based theological issue. The typical committed dispensationalist does tend to have a passionate commitment to theological Zionism. I remember that when I was a dispensationalist, my tendency was to be somewhat overawed by the epic Zionistic event of 1948: the modern establishment of the Jewish state of Israel. I once viewed that event as one of the most dramatic prophetic happenings in history and as one of the clearest signs of the soon return of Christ. The really consistent dispensationalist does not regard 1948 as a direct fulfillment of prophecy, since no Jewish

prophecy can directly refer to the parenthetical church age in dispensational theology. Instead, 1948 is regarded as a dramatic preparation for the Jewish fulfillment of prophecy that will begin to occur after the rapture of the church. For the dispensationalist, the fact that the end time stage is supposedly being set in this generation is a very strong indication that the end time drama is very imminent today. I doubt many dispensational writers have gone as far as Hal Lindsey who suggested that the end could come within about 40 years (i.e. a generation) from 1948 based on the fig tree parable of Matthew 24:32-34.¹⁵²

Dispensational Zionism is largely founded on the dispensational interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant. A crucial element in this interpretation is the determination of who are the "seed of Abraham." Using their "literal" hermeneutic, dispensationalists interpret this term as used in the Abrahamic covenant as referring to the physical Jews. A difficulty with this interpretation is that in Galatians 3, verses 7 and 29, the Christian, regardless of his race, is said to be the seed of Abraham and the heir of the promises made to Abraham. Another difficulty is that these promises made to Abraham are the land promise. In Galatians 3:16, Paul says, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made," and then quotes the phrase "and to thy Seed" from the book of Genesis. Every time in the book of Genesis the phrase "to your seed" is used in the context of a divine promise to give something to somebody, the reference is to the land promise.¹⁵³ From this it would seem that the true seed of Abraham who are to inherit land are those who have Abraham's faith. This was the case in principle even in the Old Testament economy where according to God's administrative commands, physical Jews who openly demonstrated high handed contempt for God's covenants and laws were to be excommunicated from Israel, and believing Gentiles were to be grafted in as proselytes. Even in Genesis 17, others beside Abraham's physical seed were included in the covenant, and in Genesis 21, a physical seed was excluded from the covenant community for moral reasons.¹⁵⁴

The dispensationalist, however, argues that the Christian believer as a seed of Abraham is related to only one statement in the Abrahamic covenant, the statement that in Abraham all the nations would be blessed.¹⁵⁵ There are two problems with this argument. First, as we have already shown, Paul in Galatians 3:16 and 29 relates the language of the land promise to the Christian. So the dispensationalist has no basis for limiting the Christian application of the Abrahamic covenant to the universal statement that all the nations will be blessed in Abraham. Second, the dispensational parenthesis theory, if held with strict consistency, would not allow a direct application even of the universal element in the Abrahamic covenant to church age Christians. The parenthesis theory would seem to require a direct application of the universal element in the Jewish Abrahamic covenant to millennial Gentile nations and relate this to the church age only indirectly. This is the way many dispensationalists deal with other Old Testament passages that obviously refer to the church age, passages such as Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy and Joel's prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit. There are many prophecies that expand on the universal statement of the Abrahamic covenant.¹⁵⁶ Under the heading "The Gentiles in the Millennium," Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost states: "The universal aspects of the Abrahamic covenant, which promised universal blessing, will be realized in that age."¹⁵⁷

The dispensationalist also argues that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional in the sense that it is to be fulfilled regardless of the moral condition of the Jewish people. In the dispensational interpretation of the covenants, the "unconditional" Abrahamic covenant is strongly contrasted with the "conditional" Mosaic covenant. Reformed interpreters, in contrast, regard the Mosaic covenant as a national expansion of the Abrahamic covenant. We will not go into a detailed refutation of the dispensational doctrine of unconditional and conditional covenants¹⁵⁸ other than to point out that this teaching reflects a shallow understanding of the Scriptural relationships between law and grace and between human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Dispensationalists teach that the unconditional Abrahamic covenant was expanded into three other unconditional Jewish covenants: the Palestinian covenant, the Davidic covenant and the new covenant. The expanded covenant dealing with the land promise portion of the Abrahamic covenant is the Palestinian covenant, which dispensationalists identify with Deuteronomy 30:1-10. It does seem strange that anyone would teach that a section of Deuteronomy contains a separate covenant that is not a part of the Mosaic covenant and that differs from the Mosaic covenant in its basic nature. The Palestinian covenant is supposed

to be unconditional in the dispensational sense of the word. Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses 1-3 and 10, however, contains statements that sound like moral conditions. I suspect that what happened was that the dispensational interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant's land promise necessitated this artificial interpretation of Deuteronomy 30.

Dispensationalists argue that the Abrahamic covenant is Jewish, unconditional and unfulfilled. They prove the covenant to be unfulfilled by examining the chronological and geographic boundaries of the covenant promise. The Abrahamic covenant is a forever promise,¹⁵⁹ and the Jews possessed Palestine for only a limited time in the Old Testament. In regard to the geographic boundaries of the covenant, the promised land was to include the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River.¹⁶⁰ Dispensationalists argue that the Jews never at any time possessed all the land within these boundaries. In 1 Kings 4:21, we learn that Solomon ruled over all the land from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River, but the dispensationalists argue that the "border of Egypt" is not the "river of Egypt" and that Solomon merely ruled over much of this territory by collecting tribute, not by actually possessing it. So, if the dispensationalists are right, the land promise of the Abrahamic covenant is Jewish, unconditional and unfulfilled, and therefore there must be a yet future Jewish possession of the land of Palestine.

Exactly when and how is the Abrahamic covenant's land promise to be fulfilled? In searching out the details of this question, one encounters some interesting divergencies in dispensational answers. In the earlier dispensational writers like Chafer, the Abrahamic covenant had a truly eternal Jewish fulfillment. In that system, the resurrected Old Testament saints together with the resurrected millennial saints were to inherit eternally a Judaistic new earth after the Judaistic millennium while the church saints were to inherit a Christian new heavens for eternity. In this older dispensational system, there was an eternal dichotomy of destinies between Israel, the earthly seed of Abraham, and the church, the heavenly seed of Abraham.

More recent dispensationalists, such as Walvoord, Pentecost and Ryrie, disagree with these details of Chafer's view. They teach that the eternal Jewish nature of the land promise is to be completely fulfilled in the 1000 year Judaistic millennial period. After all, if the land promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in eternity on the new earth, then there is no real mandate for a Jewish millennium in the Abrahamic covenant. They also teach that the promised land is to be inhabited during the millennium only by unresurrected living Jews and Gentiles and not, as in Chafer's system, by the resurrected Old Testament saints as well. During the millennium, the resurrected Old Testament saints together with the resurrected church saints are to be in the new Jerusalem, which will be a millennial satellite city hovering over Palestine. At the end of the millennium, the new Jerusalem will descend to earth, and the saints of all ages will inhabit together the new earth. The Old Testament saints will never be members of the Body and Bride of Christ but they will at least share a common eternal destiny with the church. In this system, the strictly Jewish inheritance of the land promise is limited to the millennial years and to unresurrected millennial saints. The land promise specifically promised the forever land inheritance to Abraham as well as to his seed, but Abraham together with the other Old Testament saints will be in the heavenly city during the time of the land inheritance. I wonder if the dispensational speculation about possible travel between the satellite city and planet earth during the millennium did not result from their wrestling with this particular weak link in their system.

Here we have the dispensational understanding of the Abrahamic covenant's land promise. Was Scripture truly allowed to interpret Scripture? Was there a sensitivity to progressive revelation? Is there any evidence that the dispensational interpreters recognize their fallibility and have a willingness to adjust if necessary their understanding of the Abrahamic covenant if it does not harmonize well with further infallible revelation on the subject? Or do we see evidence of a willingness to artificially bend further revelation in order to vindicate a particular understanding of the Abrahamic covenant's land promise?

My own understanding of the Abrahamic covenant's land promise is different from the dispensationalist's. I believe the Jewish inhabitation of Palestine in the Old Testament was a temporary typological symbol and

pledge of the ultimate eternal inheritance of the saints. I also believe that the land promise applies to the Christian today in the spiritual rest and heavenly position that is his in Christ Jesus. The following is an eight point explanation of my understanding of the fulfillment of the land promise.

First, there are Old Testament passages which indicate that the land promise had a real fulfillment in the Old Testament.¹⁶¹ This data must be incorporated into one's total understanding of the land promise. I would suggest that the land promise found a fulfillment as a type in the Old Testament and also anticipated a future fulfillment in terms of its antitype.

Second, the ultimate fulfillment of the land promise is an eternal fulfillment.¹⁶² The Hebrew word translated forever is at times contextually limited and does not always refer to a literal eternity,¹⁶³ but God's covenants do have a truly eternal, forever reference. When the forever nature of God's covenant is compared to the life span of the sun, one can be certain that the divinely inspired writer had more in mind than a mere one thousand years.¹⁶⁴

Third, the ultimate fulfillment of the land promise involves the whole world and not just Palestine. Notice what Paul said in Romans 4:13:

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world (Greek: *kosmos*) was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." We have already shown the terminology about a promise given by God to Abraham and his seed can only refer to the land promise. Paul identified the land promise given to Abraham and his seed not merely with Canaan but with the whole world.

Fourth, the ultimate inheritors of the land promise will be the elect of all the ages. As we have already seen, there are New Testament passages which relate the language of the land promise to Christians as the spiritual seed of Abraham.¹⁶⁵ In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ identified the heirs of the land promise as the spiritually meek,¹⁶⁶ which is an appropriate description of God's people in general. In the book of Hebrews, the land promise is associated with citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁶⁷ The saints of all ages are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem,¹⁶⁸ which is further evidence that the saints of all ages will inherit the land promise.

Fifth, this association of the land promise with citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem means that during the inter-advent age, the land promise finds fulfillment in "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven."¹⁶⁹ From the moment of conversion, the Christian is a comer unto Mount Zion and a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem,¹⁷⁰ has spiritual rest in Christ Jesus,¹⁷¹ and is seated with Christ in the heavenlies.¹⁷² We, today, in Christ Jesus have a foretaste of the heavenly rest that was pictured by Joshua's conquest of the promised land.¹⁷³

Sixth, the land promise today is related to the covenant blessing of the fifth commandment. Under the old covenant, those who honored their father and mother were promised, in general, that it would go well with them in the land which God gave them.¹⁷⁴ Now that the covenant people are from every nation, tribe and tongue, this promise of covenant blessing has been dispensationally adjusted by Paul to read: "that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth."¹⁷⁵ Paul has removed the Palestinian specific geographic limitation in this covenant promise that related covenant blessing in terms of the land promise.

Seventh, the Christian today is in a position analogous to Israel under Joshua when they conquered the promised land. The difference is that our weapons are not physical¹⁷⁶ and our task is to conquer the whole world. We know that the Abrahamic land promise ultimately refers to the whole world.¹⁷⁷ Adam was originally given dominion over the whole world.¹⁷⁸ This inheritance was lost in the fall and Satan became the prince of this world,¹⁷⁹ but God promised that a Seed Redeemer would ultimately defeat Satan¹⁸⁰ and that this new Adam would regain world dominion.¹⁸¹ This Seed Redeemer would be a Seed of Abraham through

whom Abraham would be a blessing to all nations.¹⁸² This Seed Redeemer would be a son of David who would have the nations for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession.¹⁸³ This Seed Redeemer would be a Son of Man who would be given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him.¹⁸⁴ Through His resurrection-ascension, Christ has received all authority in heaven and on earth.¹⁸⁵ Christ from His heavenly throne is today fulfilling Psalm 2¹⁸⁶ and Psalm 8¹⁸⁷. The northern boundary of the land promise given to Abraham was the Euphrates River,¹⁸⁸ but the dominion of the Messiah is extended "from the River to the ends of the earth."¹⁸⁹ Even as God gave Palestine to Israel under Joshua and told them to conquer it, so God has given the nations to new covenant Israel under Jesus and has told us to disciple them

And eighth, when Christ returns, the heavenly Jerusalem will descend to the new earth,¹⁹⁰ which then becomes the eternal locus of the land promise fulfillment. In Hebrews 4:8-9, we learn that the rest under Joshua after the conquest of the promised land was a type of the heavenly Sabbath rest of the eternal inheritance. The ultimate fulfillment of the land promise will be the eternal inheritance of the new earth by the saints of all ages. Only in this eternal context can Abraham and all his true seed inherit the land forever.

Before closing this chapter on the Abrahamic land promise, I want to comment on the Old Testament prophecies about dispersed Jews' returning to the land. Dispensationalists tend to refer these prophecies to an end time regathering of the Jews to Palestine. It seems much more logical that these prophecies primarily referred to the Babylonian exile and the return of the Jewish captives under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. In opposition to this, the dispensationalist can point out that these prophesied regatherings were a second return to the land and a regathering from a world-wide dispersion,¹⁹¹ not from a localized Babylonian exile. This objection ignores the Biblical fact that the exiled Jews were scattered all over the civilized world of that day.¹⁹² And return from Babylonian exile was the second return to the land since the first was the exodus under Moses.

Admittedly, there are elements in the restoration prophecies that go beyond what was experienced under the old covenant. This is because the fulfillment of prophecies of blessing can be limited¹⁹³ or postponed¹⁹⁴ or cancelled¹⁹⁵ due to covenant disobedience and because these prophecies have continuing and progressively greater fulfillments in the church age and in eternity. A prophecy can be given in terms of the old covenant economy and fulfilled in terms of the new covenant economy and eternity. The restoration prophecies refer progressively to the gathering of an Old Testament remnant from Babylonian exile to a reestablished Jerusalem, to the Messianic gathering of Jews from all nations into the Heavenly Jerusalem on Pentecost, to the great commission gathering of the Gentiles into the Israel of God,¹⁹⁶ and ultimately to the final gathering of the elect to their eternal inheritance in the ultimate Canaan, the new earth of Revelation 21.¹⁹⁷ The nature of the gathering progresses as the kingdom progresses from one of localized typological shadows to one of universal spiritual antitypes to one of eternal realities.

Thy Kingdom Come

The Presbyterian Church in America Book of Church Order begins with the statement, "Jesus Christ . . . sits upon the throne of David." Most people raised with the teachings of the reformed faith would take this fundamental truth for granted. Who, after all, would question this essential teaching? Well, a well informed dispensationalist would not only question this but would take strong exception to it. The Davidic throne is another Biblical subject concerning which dispensationalists and reformed theology have radically different teachings.

The Davidic kingdom in Scripture is founded on the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12-16. This covenant promise obviously involved Solomon, David's immediate seed and heir to the throne, since it spoke of the seed's building God's temple and of the possibility of the seed's sinning. The promise, however, also involved

a greater antitypical fulfillment since it spoke of an eternal kingdom. The prophets later associated the eternal Davidic kingdom with the Messiah, who was to inherit the throne of David and to rule eternally over the kingdom in righteousness and justice. This Messianic kingdom was to become a universal kingdom over all the kingdoms of the world.

Reformed interpretation associates the Messianic establishment of the Davidic kingdom with the first advent of Christ and especially with His ascension into heaven. Both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed during their earthly ministries that the kingdom was at that time actually near at hand, not merely potentially near. Jesus told his disciples to seek the kingdom because "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."¹⁹⁸ Jesus gave specific instructions on how to enter the kingdom¹⁹⁹ and stated that "every man presseth into it."²⁰⁰ The presence of the kingdom was especially manifested in the casting out of demons.²⁰¹ Jesus explained the nature of the kingdom in parables,²⁰² and, referring to His own presence, told the Pharisees that the kingdom was in their midst.²⁰³

Jesus especially brought in the Messianic kingdom through His resurrection and ascension to His throne at the right hand of God. It was at this point that Jesus received His full regal authority as Messiah.²⁰⁴ Peter related the resurrection of Christ to the Davidic covenant promise concerning a throne and stated that at His ascension Jesus was made the Christ.²⁰⁵ The titles *Christ* and *Messiah* both mean the anointed one, which is the Old Testament title for God's chosen king over Israel.²⁰⁶ At His ascension, Jesus was said to have fulfilled Messianic psalms that refer to the Messianic rule.²⁰⁷

The fact that the Messianic kingdom was initially established at the first advent is further verified in the book of Acts. For example, at Samaria, "Philip preached the things concerning the kingdom of God."²⁰⁸ Paul and Barnabas encouraged newly formed churches with the message: "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."²⁰⁹ The unbelieving Jews at Thessalonica charged that Paul and Silas were acting "contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus."²¹⁰ Throughout his Roman imprisonment, Paul "preached the kingdom of God."²¹¹

With all this New Testament evidence that Christ established the Messianic rule at His first advent, why do dispensationalists insist that the Messianic rule has not yet begun? The basic reason is dispensational literalism. Dispensationalists argue that the Davidic throne must be an earthly throne situated on literal Mount Zion in literal Palestine. They argue that Christ postponed His rule on the literal throne of David until after the parenthetical and previously unrevealed church age and that Christ's present rule from the throne at the right hand of the Father is not the rule the Old Testament prophets were prophesying.

After all this to do about the **literal** throne, it is interesting to study the definition of the Davidic throne given by dispensationalist scholar Dr. John F. Walvoord:

"By the term 'throne' it is clear that no reference is made to a material throne, but rather to the dignity and power which was sovereign and supreme in David as king. The right to rule always belonged to David's seed."²¹² This definition is anything but literal. In order to understand the significance of this definition, one needs to keep in mind the dispensational theory that the Davidic covenant was unconditional in the sense of being void of all human responsibility. If the Davidic covenant was unconditional in that sense and if the Davidic covenant eternally established the Davidic throne, then how do dispensationalists deal with the Babylonian exile? Was not the throne actually cast to the ground by God at that time?²¹³ Now we can see the reason for Dr. Walvoord's definition of the throne. If the throne only refers to "the right to rule," then the seed of David retained the throne even while in Babylonian exile.²¹⁴ This brings us to an interesting question: Does Christ not now possess "the dignity and power which was sovereign and supreme in David as king" and "the right to rule"? If one accepts Dr. Walvoord's definition of the Davidic throne, then how can one possibly also hold that Christ does not now possess it? It seems that when dispensationalists want to argue that Christ is not now on the throne of David, they stress a very literal definition, but when they wish

to argue that the Davidic throne was not lost during the Babylonian exile, they stress a very figurative definition of the throne.

In arguing that Christ does not now possess the throne of David, dispensationalists have traditionally insisted that the true throne of David must be an earthly throne. They have insisted that a heavenly throne²¹⁵ and a heavenly Mount Zion²¹⁶ are not sufficient for the fulfillment of prophecy. Some more recent dispensationalists, however, now teach that Christ will be reigning during the millennium not from an earthly throne but from the **heavenly** Jerusalem. I quote: "It is from this heavenly city that David's greater Son exerts His Messianic rule, . . ." ²¹⁷ This is really a remarkable about face.

Dispensationalists also argue that the Messianic throne of David must be a political and territorial reign. They argue that this was the popular Jewish understanding of the subject at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry and that the New Testament nowhere redefines the concept. I disagree with this last statement. I believe that the quotations concerning the kingdom that we have already examined are more than adequate evidence that Jesus did not accept this political view of the kingdom.²¹⁸ Admittedly the disciples were infected with this popular Jewish view in various degrees up to their receiving the illuminating outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

When we come to the dispensational interpretation of the book of Acts, we find that suddenly the word *kingdom* cannot refer to the Messianic rule but must refer to the general rule of divine providence or to the "kingdom in mystery form." The reason for this shift in definition is obvious: the Davidic kingdom cannot be related to the church age in dispensational interpretation. Here I ask the dispensationalist his own question: Where was the word *kingdom* redefined? Why does it have to refer to the Davidic kingdom in the Gospels but cannot in Acts and in the epistles? To use a criticism which Dr. Charles C. Ryrie used against an amillennialist, the reason that the dispensationalist does not see the Messianic kingdom when the word is used in the book of Acts is because "he feels, of course, that he has found justifiable reasons for spiritualizing the concept of the kingdom."²¹⁹

Actually the word *kingdom* in both Hebrew and Greek refers primarily to the abstract authority to rule, not to a concrete realm, which is a secondary connotation of the word. This proper understanding of the word helps explain many passages. For example, in Matthew 6:33, Christ said: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things (food, shelter and clothing) shall be added unto you." What is a Christian to seek in order to obey this command? A theocratic kingdom in a future Jewish age? Or God's rule and authority in all of life? Also, notice the second petition in the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come."²²⁰ With this proper understanding of the word *kingdom*, this second petition is almost synonymous with the third petition: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Christ at his first advent established and began to exercise this authority to rule and to reign, which is the primary meaning of kingdom. It will not be until the time of the new heavens and the new earth that Christ's kingdom will be fully and perfectly realized in the secondary and concrete elements of a realm and subjects. In the present, Christ has His kingdom authority and He is obtaining His realm and His subjects as the nations are discipled.²²¹

When one accepts the reformed understanding of the Davidic kingdom, it really is meaningful to the Christian today. It relates to the here and now, not to a future Jewish age. The dispensational view of the kingdom neglects the full significance of the present reign of Christ and can lead to a pietistic, other-worldly sort of Christianity that is culturally impotent.

Old Testament Salvation

The area of theology where dispensationalists have been criticized most severely over the years and where recent dispensational theologians have made the greatest adjustments in the dispensational system is the doctrine of Old Testament salvation. By studying in detail the teaching on this subject by earlier dispensationalists such as C.I. Scofield and Lewis Sperry Chafer and the teaching on this subject by current dispensationalists such as Charles Caldwell Ryrie and John F. Walvoord, one can come to understand both the basic essence of dispensationalism and its recent evolution. Because of this definite theological evolution, I like to refer to earlier dispensationalists such as Dr. Chafer as classical dispensationalists and to current dispensationalists such as Dr. Ryrie as neo-dispensationalists.

The most basic weakness in the dispensational teaching on Old Testament salvation is related to the concept of union with Christ. On this subject, dispensationalist Dr. John F. Walvoord has made the following revealing statement:

"In this present age, . . . a peculiar work is revealed which did not exist in the Old Testament and apparently will not be realized after the present age. This is the work of God the Holy Spirit which places a believer in Christ and relates him to all fellow believers in the figure of a human body."²²² Dispensationalists recognize that if Old Testament saints are in Christ as Paul used that term, then Old Testament saints are in the church universal,²²³ and that destroys the dispensational dichotomy between Israel and the church. A salvifically unified people of God through the ages is a concept that is antithetical to the foundational presuppositions of dispensationalism.

The dispensational teaching on Old Testament salvation that has been most criticized is their teaching on the relationship of Old Testament salvation to grace, faith and works. This is an area where dispensationalism has evolved in recent years. It will be necessary to treat separately the classical dispensational teaching and the neo-dispensational teaching on this subject.

The classical teaching on Old Testament salvation is extensively explained in the fourth volume of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology*, which is my primary source for my understanding on this subject. The first element in Dr. Chafer's explanation of Old Testament salvation is physical birth into Old Testament Israel. The Old Testament salvation of God's earthly people (Israel) was founded on physical birth in contrast to the New Testament salvation of God's heavenly people (the church) which is founded on spiritual birth or regeneration. Dr. Chafer saw no spiritual regeneration in Old Testament salvation. This physical birth as a Jew put one into the nation Israel, which as a nation was heir to the gracious and unconditional Abrahamic covenant. The individual Jew, however, was as an individual subject to the meritorious and conditional Mosaic covenant. As an individual, he had to keep the Mosaic law in the power of the flesh with no divine enablement. He obtained forgiveness for his transgressions of the Mosaic law through offering animal sacrifices. By fulfilling these legal and ceremonial conditions, the Old Testament Jew remained a true member of God's earthly covenant people, which as a nation was heir to the unconditional national covenant blessing based on the Abrahamic covenant.

Basic to this system is the teaching that Israel as a nation was under the unconditional Abrahamic covenant while the individual Jews within the nation were under the conditional Mosaic covenant. The national inheritance of the earthly people will be inherited in the dispensational millennium and in eternity. During the dispensational millennium, the earthly people will inherit the earth and the heavenly people will reside in heaven. During eternity, Israel will inherit a Judaistic new earth and the Christians will inherit the non-Judaistic new heavens.

In 1944, the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly found the theology of Dr. Chafer, who was then an ordained minister in the PCUS, to be "out of accord with the system of doctrine set forth in the Confession of Faith" because he taught "divergent plans of salvation for various groups in various ages." Dr. Chafer denied this charge in an article "Inventing Heretics Through Misunderstanding." Dr. Chafer explained that he taught only one plan of salvation for all ages because he taught that salvation was always grounded upon God's grace which was made available through the death of Christ. In his writings, Dr. Chafer argued that his concept of Old Testament salvation was a by-grace system of salvation because 1) it was founded on physical birth into Judaism, which was by grace; 2) it involved forgiveness of sins through animal sacrifices, which was by grace; and 3) "Since human faithfulness in whatever degree could never be the exact compensation or exchange for the values of eternal life or for unending blessings in the kingdom, there is a very large measure of divine grace to be seen in the salvation of the elect earthly people."²²⁴ In his article on inventing heretics, Dr. Chafer asserted that people who "receive their doctrine from the Sacred Text rather than from man-made creeds" would agree with him that salvation involves "different human requirements in various ages" and that salvation can be by grace even when received "upon any varied human terms."²²⁵ While here arguing that he taught a unified salvation through the ages in that it was always grounded upon grace, Dr. Chafer also seemed to be acknowledging that he held to very divergent human requirements for salvation in various ages.

Neo-dispensationalists, apparently having learned from Dr. Chafer's critics, have adjusted the dispensational teaching on the human requirements in Old Testament salvation. They now clearly teach that salvation in all ages is through faith in God's promises. In contrast to reformed theology, the neo-dispensationalists insist that Old Testament salvation was through faith in the Old Testament promises but not through faith in Christ in any sense. Since they teach that Old Testament salvation did not involve the Pauline concept of union with Christ, it only seems appropriate for them to exclude faith in the coming Christ as well. The reformed theology position is that the Old Testament promises and typological institutions found their true fulfillment in Christ and thus faith in these Old Testament promises involved faith in the coming Christ even though the Old Testament saint may have understood this very dimly. For example, Abraham believed that God would give him a Seed and would one day bless all nations through him. Abraham no doubt associated this promise with the previously given Seed Redeemer promise of Genesis 3:15. The New Testament reveals that this promised Seed of Abraham was Jesus of Nazareth.²²⁶ So when Abraham believed this promise, he saw Christ's day, though dimly and as through a mirror darkly, and was glad.²²⁷

There is another significant difference between the position of the earlier and the current dispensationalists. Unlike the classical dispensationalists, the neo-dispensationalists do not teach an eternal dichotomy of destinies between Israel and the church. Neo-dispensationalists teach that during their millennium, living Jews will be on earth while resurrected Old Testament saints and resurrected church saints will together inhabit the new Jerusalem. Some recent dispensationalists such as Dr. John F. Walvoord speculate that the new Jerusalem during the millennium will be a satellite city hovering over Palestine. In eternity, the saints of all the ages will together inhabit the new earth, though the distinction between Israel and the church will remain. Old Testament and millennial saints will still not be members of the Body and Bride of Christ.

Allow me to close this chapter by discussing the issue of conditional and unconditional covenants. It is a little difficult to analyze this dispensational dichotomy since it is hard to understand. Even they seem to have problems with the idea of a covenant with absolutely no moral stipulations. One dispensational writer states that what is promised in an unconditional covenant is given apart from the response of the recipient (no "if" is attached whatsoever) but that the blessings of an unconditional covenant can be conditioned on the recipient's response without this changing the unconditional character of the covenant!²²⁸ It is also difficult to imagine how a divine covenant could have been strictly conditional without salvation's being legalistic and meritorious under that covenant's administration.

Instead of seeing a strong dichotomy between the unconditional, gracious and national Abrahamic covenant and the conditional, meritorious and individualistic Mosaic covenant, I see the Mosaic covenant as a national expansion of the promises, moral stipulations and ceremonial law found in the Abrahamic covenant. Both covenants were by-grace covenants and both involved moral stipulations with blessings promised for obedience and neither, when properly interpreted, were legalistic or meritorious.

I believe that from the perspective of divine sovereignty and God's secret decrees, all of God's covenants are unconditional; that is to say, all of grace, totally undeserved, completely gratuitous. I also believe that from the perspective of human responsibility and God's revealed will and the historical administration of God's covenants, God's covenants all require a response of genuine faith. Genuine faith progressively bears the fruit of holiness and good works.²²⁹ Every professed Christian has the God given responsibility to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.²³⁰ Salvation, apart from exceptional cases such as the death of infants, is always through faith in Christ.²³¹ Here is human responsibility and moral stipulation and blessing conditioned on response. This does not, however, require salvation to be meritorious or legalistic. Some try to obtain a through faith salvation that is by grace by trivializing faith into nothing in the context of a "Savior only", carnal Christian salvation. That, in my opinion, is not the answer. I believe the reason salvation can be through faith and yet totally free and by grace is because God graciously gives His chosen people the spiritual ability to meet His own requirement of Gospel obedience. God works in His people's lives to enable them to will and to work according to His good pleasure.²³² Without faith, it is impossible to please God,²³³ and the natural, non-regenerate man is totally unable to please God²³⁴; however, the person whom God unconditionally chooses to bless, He regenerates and sanctifies and enables to believe with a dynamic faith that will lead to holy living. God then rewards this obedient holiness with blessings and rewards. The faith that works is not a meritorious condition for blessing but is the instrument through which God brings blessing upon the saint in accordance with the divine principle, "to be carnally minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."²³⁵ God's covenant blessings are but rewards upon the effects of God's own grace. Thus when God unconditionally chose Abraham to receive blessings, God regenerated him and enabled him to believe and to obey so that God could bless him in accordance with holiness. God chose to actively, personally know Abraham in order that Abraham might raise His family in the way of righteousness and thus receive covenant blessings.²³⁶ Thus God rewarded Abraham for his obedience²³⁷ and yet Abraham's salvation was unconditional and all of grace. This is the Calvinistic theology of rewards. This is the only satisfactory explanation I have found as to how God's covenants can condition blessings upon moral stipulations and still be totally unconditional and all of grace.

Summary of Objectionable Teaching

Allow me to close by listing what I consider to be the really objectionable teachings associated with dispensationalism. There are other dispensational teachings with which I disagree but I do not view them as foundational and basic. The following are the dispensational teachings that I personally regard as especially objectionable:

1. The belief that Old Testament salvation was not through faith in the coming Christ. The reformed position is not, as it has been misrepresented on occasion, that the Old Testament saints understood as much about Christ and the Gospel as we do today. The reformed position is that the object of saving faith in the Old Testament was the same as the object of saving faith in the New Testament, although admittedly the Old Testament saint had much less knowledge of Christ. He saw dimly through the Messianic prophecies and types. The object of faith has not changed through the dispensations; the degree of knowledge of the object has.
2. The belief that the Old Testament saint had a salvation that did not include union with Christ and that the Old Testament saints in eternity will not be members of the Body and Bride of Christ. Reformed theology does recognize that the New Testament era is an era of greater grace and spiritual fullness to

the point that Scripture can contrast the New and Old Testament ages as light compared to darkness. This is not to say that the Old Testament was so lacking in grace that Old Testament salvation did not involve covenant union with Christ and the covenant headship of Christ.

3. The belief that there is a strong dichotomy of nature between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant in that one is unconditional and the other conditional. Related to this would be the dispensational teaching that the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer are legal ground and thus not directly applicable to the Christian. Reformed theology views the Mosaic covenant as basically a nationally expanded version of the Abrahamic covenant, and its moral law elements are regarded as still valid. Since moral law is merely the expression of God's holiness as it relates to created reality, God's moral law can no more be invalidated than can God's holiness.²³⁸ There can be, and are, adjustments in the realm of case law and ceremonial law since case law is a time-bound, situation-specific application of moral law and ceremonial law is positive law.
4. The belief that the New Testament era is a parenthesis in the prophetic program for Israel to the point that no Old Testament prophecy can directly refer to the church age.
5. The conviction that the Abrahamic covenant and the Davidic covenant and the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 are primarily Jewish covenants that can relate to the Christian only in a secondary and indirect sense at most.
6. The belief that Christ's present reign at the right hand of the Father has no direct relationship to the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and the Messianic kingdom prophecies.
7. The belief that there is no organic relationship of continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. Reformed interpreters believe that the Christian church, and not the theological heirs of Phariseism, are the true present heirs of the Old Testament covenants and kingdom promises.

The purpose of this list is not to stereotype all dispensationalists. These are objectionable beliefs from the perspective of reformed theology, and these are beliefs that have been taught by leading dispensational theologians as basic elements in that system. If there are Christians today who think of themselves as dispensationalists and who disagree with some of the above listed beliefs, then I am thankful that they do disagree with at least some of these. What a person actually believes is more important than how he classifies himself theologically.

End Notes

- ¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), page 17, compare page 33.
- ² Alan Patrick Boyd, "A Dispensational Premillennial Analysis of the Eschatology of the Post-Apostolic Fathers (until the Death of Justin Martyr)" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977), page 89.
- ³ *Ibid.*, unnumbered preface
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pages 90-91
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, page 92, footnote 1.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, page 89.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, page 91, footnote 2.
- ⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), page 102.
- ⁹ Matthew 20:21; Acts 1:6
- ¹⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come, A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), page 517.
- ¹¹ Daniel 9:20-27
- ¹² Acts 2:16

13 Acts 15:15-18
 14 Ephesians 2:4-7
 15 Galatians 4:3-4
 16 Exodus 12:45 LXX
 17 Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20; Revelation 3:12
 18 Hebrews 12:22-23
 19 cf. Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:6.
 20 cf. Exodus 16:31; 2 Samuel 1:12; Jeremiah 31:31; Matthew 10:6; 15:24; Acts 2:36.
 21 Revelation 21:12,14
 22 Rev. 21:2,9-10
 23 Ephesians 5:22-33
 24 cf. Hebrews 11:39-40
 25 1 Peter 2:9
 26 Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), page 71.
 27 Ezekiel 34:7-31
 28 Zechariah 11:7,11
 29 John 10:14,27
 30 John 10:26
 31 John 10:16
 32 compare John 10:1compare John 10:1
 33 Ephesians 2:14
 34 John 10:11
 35 John 10:28
 36 1 Peter 1:1; James 1:1
 37 James 1:1; Rev. 7:4; Luke 22:30James 1:1; Rev. 7:4; Luke 22:30
 38 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rev. 1:6; Titus 2:14; cf. Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6
 39 Romans 2:28-29
 40 Philippians 3:3; cf. Colossians 2:11, Romans 2:29
 41 Hebrews 11:22
 42 Galatians 4:26
 43 Galatians 4:28
 44 Galatians 3:29
 45 James 2:2
 46 Joel 2:23,27
 47 Acts 1:5; 10:44-48; 11:15-1
 48 1 Corinthians 12:13
 49 Isaiah 13:10Isaiah 13:10
 50 Ezekiel 32:7-8
 51 Isaiah 34:4-5
 52 Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:11,25
 53 Amos 9:10
 54 cf. Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17
 55 Acts 15:7-9; Acts 10
 56 *paqad*: Genesis 21:1; 50:24-25; Exodus 13:19; Ruth 1:6; Jeremiah 15:15; 29:10; 32:5; Psalm 65:9; *shub*: Genesis 18:10,14; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7; 2 Chronicles 30:6; Isaiah 63:17; Psalm 80:14; 90:13; Jeremiah 12:15; Psalm 6:4.
 57 cf. Isaiah 34:1-5
 58 Acts 15:17

59 Acts 15:14
60 cf. Hebrews 11:39-40
61 Jeremiah 31:31
62 Jeremiah 31:33
63 Luke 22:20
64 J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come, A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), page 124.
65 Romans 11:26-27
66 1 Corinthians 12:13
67 Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:15-16
68 John 7:39
69 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:5,10
70 Romans 8:1
71 Romans 6:1-4
72 1 Corinthians 15:22
73 Ephesians 2:12-13
74 Ephesians 3:6
75 Romans 15:7-13
76 Matthew 16:18
77 Hebrews 3:5-8
78 Isaiah 54:1-3
79 cf. Ephesians 3:5, especially the word *now*; Ephesians 4:11.
80 Ephesians 2:15
81 Ephesians 5:25
82 Acts 7:38
83 1 Corinthians 10:32
84 Exodus 12:38
85 Esther 8:17
86 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII,ix,1.
87 Matthew 3:9
88 John 8:37,39
89 Romans 2:28-29; 9:6
90 Luke 19:9
91 Luke 12:32; cf. Romans 11:5
92 Acts 2:39; 3:25
93 Romans 11:20
94 Acts 15
95 Romans 11:17
96 Matthew 8:11
97 Ephesians 2:11-22
98 Revelation 2:9; 3:9
99 Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:11
100 Galatians 6:16
101 Galatians 4:21-31
102 Romans
103 Romans 11:28
104 Romans 9:1-5; 11:28-29
105 Romans 11:29
106 Romans 11:1-7

- 107 Romans
- 108 Romans 11:23
- 109 Galatians 4:1-7
- 110 Isaiah 11:14; Daniel 11:41
- 111 Micah 5:5; Isaiah 19:23-25
- 112 Isaiah 11:14; 63:1-6; Joel 3:19; Amos 9:11-12; Daniel 11:41
- 113 Zechariah 14:16-19; Isaiah 19:23-25 Zechariah 14:16-19; Isaiah 19:23-25
- 114 Isaiah 11:14; Daniel 11:41
- 115 Zechariah 12:11-14; Isaiah 66:21; Malachi 3:3; Ezekiel 44:15; 48:11.
- 116 Ezekiel 45:15,17,20; Hebrew: *kaphar*, atone
- 117 Hebrews 10:4
- 118 Hebrews 10:10-18
- 119 Ezekiel 39:9
- 120 Revelation 21:9-10
- 121 Revelation 21:12,14
- 122 Psalm 2:6
- 123 Revelation 2:5; 2:26-27; compare Psalm 2:9
- 124 Hebrews 12:22
- 125 C.I. Scofield, editor, *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), page 888.
- 126 Numbers 12:6-8
- 127 Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pages 94-95.
- 128 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:40-41.
- 129 Malachi 4:5-6
- 130 John 1:21
- 131 Matthew 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:13
- 132 Galatians 3:16,29
- 133 Numbers 12:6-8
- 134 Deuteronomy 34:10 Deuteronomy 34:10
- 135 Hebrews 3:3
- 136 Deuteronomy 18:15,18; Acts 3:22
- 137 Hebrews 1:1-3
- 138 John 6:46
- 139 John 1:18
- 140 John 3:11-13
- 141 John 14:26; 16:13-14
- 142 compare 1 Peter 1:10-12 compare 1 Peter 1:10-12
- 143 Luke 10:24
- 144 C.I. Scofield, editor, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, page 5, note 4.
- 145 Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, page 187.
- 146 Matthew 5:17-19
- 147 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:163-164, 215-216, 211-212, 247.
- 148 Matthew 6:12
- 149 C.I. Scofield, editor, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, page 1089-1090 note 1 on Luke 11:1; see also page 1002, note 1 on Matt. 6:12. Compare Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:221-222.
- 150 Matthew 24
- 151 John 14-16

- ¹⁵² Hal Lindsey with C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), page 54.
- ¹⁵³ Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3,4; 28:4,13; 35:12; 48:4.
- ¹⁵⁴ verses 9-12; cf. Galatians 4:2
- ¹⁵⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), page 145-146; cf. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), pages 149-150.
- ¹⁵⁶ cf. Psalm 22:27-30; 68:29-31; 72:8-11,17; Isaiah 2:2-5; 11:9-10; 19:24-25; 42:1-4; 45:14; 49:6-7,22-23; 52:10; 54:1-3; 60:3f.; 65:1; 66:19; Jeremiah 16:19; Amos 9:11-12; Zechariah 2:3-13; 8:20-23; Malachi 1:11.
- ¹⁵⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, page 507; compare Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, page 134.
- ¹⁵⁸ cf. Jeremiah 18:5-12
- ¹⁵⁹ Genesis 13:15; 17:8
- ¹⁶⁰ Genesis 15:18
- ¹⁶¹ Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14-16; 1 Kings 8:56; Nehemiah 9:7-8.
- ¹⁶² Genesis 13:15; 17:8
- ¹⁶³ compare Deuteronomy 15:17
- ¹⁶⁴ Psalm 89:34-37; compare Jeremiah 31:35-36; 33:20-21; Isaiah 54:10
- ¹⁶⁵ Galatians 3; Romans 4:13
- ¹⁶⁶ Matthew 5:5; compare Psalm 37:11
- ¹⁶⁷ Hebrews 11:8-10,16
- ¹⁶⁸ Hebrews 12:22-23; 13:14; Galatians 4:26
- ¹⁶⁹ 1 Peter 1:4
- ¹⁷⁰ Hebrews 12:22
- ¹⁷¹ Matthew 11:28
- ¹⁷² Ephesians 2:6
- ¹⁷³ Hebrews 4:8-9
- ¹⁷⁴ Deuteronomy 5:16
- ¹⁷⁵ Ephesians 6:3
- ¹⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 10:4
- ¹⁷⁷ Romans 4:13
- ¹⁷⁸ Genesis 1:26-28
- ¹⁷⁹ John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. Ephesians 2:2
- ¹⁸⁰ Genesis 3:15
- ¹⁸¹ Psalm 8:6
- ¹⁸² Genesis 12:3
- ¹⁸³ Psalm 2:8
- ¹⁸⁴ Daniel 7:14
- ¹⁸⁵ Matthew 28:18
- ¹⁸⁶ Revelation 2:26-27; 12:5
- ¹⁸⁷ Hebrews 2:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:25-27
- ¹⁸⁸ Genesis 15:18
- ¹⁸⁹ Zechariah 9:10
- ¹⁹⁰ Revelation 21:1-2
- ¹⁹¹ Isaiah 11:11; 49:12
- ¹⁹² Esther 3:8
- ¹⁹³ Joshua 1:4; 7:11-12
- ¹⁹⁴ Numbers 14:30-31

- ¹⁹⁵ Jeremiah 18:9-10
¹⁹⁶ Isaiah 49:5-6; Acts 13:47-48; 15:13-18
¹⁹⁷ Matthew 13:30
¹⁹⁸ Luke 12:32
¹⁹⁹ John 3:3,5; Matthew 5:20; 7:21
²⁰⁰ Luke 16:16
²⁰¹ Matthew 12:28-30
²⁰² Matthew 13:11
²⁰³ Luke 17:20-21
²⁰⁴ Matthew 28:18
²⁰⁵ Acts 2:29-36
²⁰⁶ 1 Samuel 24:6; 2 Samuel 23:1; Psalm 2:2
²⁰⁷ Acts 2:34; 4:25-26; Revelation 2:26-27; 12:1-5
²⁰⁸ Acts 8:12
²⁰⁹ Acts 14:22
²¹⁰ Acts 17:6-7
²¹¹ Acts 28:23,31
²¹² John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), page 196.
²¹³ Psalm 89:39,44
²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 201.
²¹⁵ Revelation 12:5
²¹⁶ Hebrews 12:22
²¹⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, page 546.
²¹⁸ John 6:15; 18:36
²¹⁹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, page 172.
²²⁰ Matthew 6:10
²²¹ Matthew 28:18-20
²²² John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit at Work Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), page 21.
²²³ 1 Corinthians 12:13
²²⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1936), page 91.
²²⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Inventing Heretics Through Misunderstanding," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, volume 102, number 405 (Jan. - March, 1945).
²²⁶ Galatians 3
²²⁷ John 8:56; cf. Galatians 3:8
²²⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, page 68.
²²⁹ James 2:17; Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 12:14
²³⁰ Philippians 2:12
²³¹ Ephesians 2:8
²³² Philippians 2:13
²³³ Hebrews 11:6 Hebrews 11:6
²³⁴ Romans 8:8
²³⁵ Romans 8:6
²³⁶ Genesis 18:19
²³⁷ Genesis 22:15-18; 26:2-5
²³⁸ cf. Matthew 5:17-20