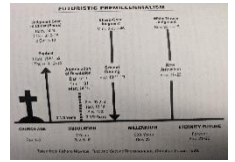


# The Future



- I. The study of biblical prophecy is not optional
  - A. Eschatology does not save but is still necessary
    1. We are counseled to properly interpret the Bible. That would include eschatology
      - a. *eschatology*1: a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind 2: a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind specifically: any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment
      - b. Blessings attend those who understand prophecy correctly
        - a.) Rev 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.
        - b.) Rev 22:7 "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."
    2. 62 books of the Bible contain prophetic information. Only Ruth, Song of Solomon, Philemon and 3 John do not.
  - II. Do not get caught up in labels.
    - A. Often, labels are one group's method of understanding another. Thus, we label things:
    - B. Calvinist, Armenian, Trinitarian, Republican, Democrat.
    - C. Many times, labels are used to communicate simple information about the purpose of certain things/institutions.
    - D. This is so we can understand a particular group, methodology, theology.
    - E. Most labels only deal with a small part of the group, methodology, theology to which the label is attached.
    - F. Essentially, most reformed, biblical Christians (there look at those labels!) simply seek to have a uniform, consistent understanding of Scripture in order to apply it to their lives.
    - G. Recognize that most labels describe only a portion of the person or idea so labeled.
    - H. We here at Kootenai Community Church simply believe the Bible and as we study it, we seek to understand it through an historical, literal, grammatical approach.
  - III. Dispensationalism

- A. Dispensationalism is a method of interpreting history that divides God's work and purposes toward mankind into different periods of time. Usually, there are seven dispensations identified, although some theologians believe there are nine. Others count as few as three or as many as thirty-seven dispensations.
- B. The first dispensation is called the Dispensation of Innocence (Genesis 1:28-30 and 2:15-17)
- C. The second dispensation is called the Dispensation of Conscience, and it lasted about 1,656 years from the time of Adam and Eve's eviction from the garden until the flood (Genesis 3:8–8:22).
- D. The third dispensation is the Dispensation of Human Government, which began in Genesis 8. God had destroyed life on earth with a flood, saving just one family to restart the human race. God made the following promises and commands to Noah and his family:
1. God will not curse the earth again.
  2. Noah and family are to replenish the earth with people.
  3. They shall have dominion over the animal creation.
  4. They are allowed to eat meat.
  5. The law of capital punishment is established.
  6. There never will be another worldwide flood.
  7. The sign of God's promise will be the rainbow.
- E. Noah's descendants did not scatter and fill the earth as God had commanded, thus failing in their responsibility in this dispensation. About 325 years after the flood, the earth's inhabitants began building a tower, a great monument to their solidarity and pride (Genesis 11:7-9). God brought the construction to a halt, creating different languages and enforcing His command to fill the earth. The result was the rise of different nations and cultures. From that point on, human governments have been a reality.
- F. The fourth dispensation, called the Dispensation of Promise, started with the call of Abraham, continued through the lives of the patriarchs, and ended with the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, a period of about 430 years. During this dispensation God developed a great nation that He had chosen as His people (Genesis 12:1–Exodus 19:25).
- G. The basic promise during the Dispensation of Promise was the Abrahamic Covenant. Here are some of the key points of that unconditional covenant:

1. From Abraham would come a great nation that God would bless with natural and spiritual prosperity.
  2. God would make Abraham's name great.
  3. God would bless those that blessed Abraham's descendants and curse those that cursed them.
  4. In Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed. This is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His work of salvation.
  5. The sign of the covenant is circumcision.
  6. This covenant, which was repeated to Isaac and Jacob, is confined to the Hebrew people and the 12 tribes of Israel.
- H. The fifth dispensation is called the Dispensation of Law. It lasted almost 1,500 years, from the Exodus until it was suspended after Jesus Christ's death. This dispensation will continue during the Millennium, with some modifications. During the Dispensation of Law, God dealt specifically with the Jewish nation through the Mosaic Covenant, or the Law, found in Exodus 19–23. The dispensation involved temple worship directed by priests, with further direction spoken through God's mouthpieces, the prophets. Eventually, due to the people's disobedience to the covenant, the tribes of Israel lost the Promised Land and were subjected to bondage.
- I. The sixth dispensation, the one in which we now live, is the Dispensation of Grace. It began with the New Covenant in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20). This "Age of Grace" or "Church Age" occurs between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel 9:24. It starts with the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and ends with the Rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4).
- J. The seventh dispensation is called the Millennial Kingdom of Christ and will last for 1,000 years as Christ Himself rules on earth
- IV. The *sine qua non* of dispensationalism:
- A. A clear distinction between Israel and the Church.
  - B. The consistent use of literal interpretation.
  - C. A concerted emphasis on the glory of God as the underlying purpose for His actions. (Dispensationalism Today [1965], 43, 44).
  - D. The basic definition of dispensationalism includes six ideas (John Feinberg):
    1. the Bible refers to multiple senses of terms like "Jew" and "seed of Abraham".

2. An approach to hermeneutics that emphasizes that the Old Testament be taken on its own terms and not reinterpreted in light of the New Testament.
3. Belief that Old Testament promises will be fulfilled with national Israel.
4. Belief in a distinctive future for ethnic Israel.
5. Belief that the church is a distinctive organism.
6. A philosophy of history that emphasizes not just the teleology and spiritual issues but social, economic, and political issues as well.<sup>1</sup>

E. Eight common features of dispensationalism:

1. The authority of Scripture.
2. Dispensations.
3. Uniqueness of the church.
4. Practical significance of the universal church.
5. Significance of biblical prophecy.
6. Futurist Premillennialism.
7. Imminent return of Christ.
8. A national future for Israel.<sup>2</sup>

F. Distilled Six Essential Beliefs of Dispensationalism:

1. Progressive revelation from the New Testament does not interpret Old Testament passages in a way that cancels the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers as determined by historical-grammatical hermeneutics.
  - a. Foundational.
  - b. Old Testament understanding starts with the Old Testament.
  - c. New Testament progressive revelation may shine a light on Old Testament passages, offer commentary, or add additional applications or reference but they do not override the original intent of the Old Testament writers.
  - d. Promises made to Israel are not nullified by the New Testament.
    - a.) There can be no question that the prophets meant to communicate the promise of a national return of

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Feinberg, "Systems of discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 67-85

<sup>2</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-To-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational thought* (Wheaton, IL: Bridge point, 1993), 13-21

Israel to its land. To the extent that our hermeneutics are regulated by the principle of authorial intent, we are given ample reason to accept this literal rendering of what God, through the prophets, originally promised to his people Israel.<sup>3</sup>

i. Jer 31:31-34

b.) Here for example, the new covenant has a both/and element. Both Israel and the church.

e. Non-dispensationalists believe the promises to Israel are more or less spiritually fulfilled in the church and one should not look for a future inclusion of national Israel into the covenant. God's unconditional covenants with Israel are not abrogated by New Testament illumination of Old Testament promises. If an Old Testament prophecy was made unconditionally to Israel, then it will be fulfilled to Israel. If the New Testament applies it to the church, then it will also still be fulfilled to Israel.

a.) Covenant theologians and dispensationalists disagree on the nature of progressive revelation. Dispensationalists believe that Old Testament promises are not "canceled" by New Testament illumination.

b.) The New Testament does not contradict the meaning of Old Testament texts.

2. Types exist, but national Israel is not a type that is superseded by the church.

a. Adam, for example is a type of Jesus

a.) Rom 5:14

b.) 1Co 15:45

b. The Levitical priesthood of the Mosaic covenant was a type of the better priesthood in the new covenant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

c. Typology is significant in eschatology. Nondispensationalists believe that national Israel was a type of the New Testament church and once the anti-type

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 93

(the “fulfillment” of the type, the church was revealed, Israel’s place as the people of God was transcended and superseded by the church.<sup>4</sup>

- d. National Israel however is not an inferior type that is replaced by the church.
  - e. There is no biblical evidence that Israel is a symbol for the church and further there is no evidence that Palestine is a symbol for the new Jerusalem. If the New Testament cancels an Old Testament type, the New Testament must tell us so.
  - f. There are typological connections between Israel and the church. These connections however do not cancel the future for the type as though it were taken by the anti-type.
  - g. “The typological connection between Israel and the church, is not that of the church superseding national Israel.
3. Israel and the church are distinct; thus, the church cannot be identified as the new or true Israel.
- a. Dispensationalists reject “replacement theology” or “supersessionism”. They do not believe in the church is a replacement or fulfillment of the nation Israel as the people of God.
  - b. The title “Israel” is used 73 times in the New Testament, but it is always used of ethnic Jews.
  - c. The New Testament consistently refers to the nation Israel as “Israel” even after the establishment of the church.
  - d. Rom 10:1 This prayer of Paul is a prayer for national Israel.
    - a.) Romans 9:3-4 was obviously written after the church was instituted.
  - e. Further, the book of Acts continues the distinction between the church and Israel. The term “Israel” is used 20 times and the term “ekklesia” or “church” is used 19 times. The church, lacking any distinctive national traits in contradistinction to Israel, is not a nation as Israel is. The church is not identified with Israel. Their identities though

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<sup>4</sup> See LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 45.

different, both enjoy equally the blessings of the future eschatological salvation.

4. There is both spiritual unity and salvation between Jews and Gentiles and a future role for Israel as a nation.
  - a. A significant argument made against dispensationalism is that it does not properly treat the unity the Jews and Gentiles have in Christ.
    - a.) Eph 2:15-16
    - b.) Non-dispensationalists believe that when Christ fulfilled the law, Israel's exclusivity as a nation and people ended.
  - b. The contention is that Christ's work on the cross in joining Gentiles and Jews into "one man", and "one body" rules out a future role for Israel.
  - c. Dispensationalism teaches that though there is spiritual unity between believing Jews and Gentiles, their God ordained functional distinctions have not been done away with. With reference to salvation, Jews and Gentiles are equal before God. This salvific unity however, does not cancel the ethnic or functional distinctions. Carl Hoch states,
    - a.) "Paul's comments in Ephesians... Exclude any salvific priority for Israel in the ecclesiological structure of the new man. ... However, while there is no longer salvific advantage, there is still an ethnic distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Paul continues to speak of Jews and Gentiles as distinct ethnic groups in his letters (Romans 1:16; 9:24; 1 Corinthians 1:24; 12:13; Galatians 2:14, 15).<sup>5</sup>
    - b.) Similar to this, though men and women share equally in salvation blessings, the Bible still teaches that men and women have different roles.
    - c.) Further, elders and non-elders share equally in the spiritual blessings of salvation but elders have a distinct role in the church based on the plan of God. The same distinction can be made between parents

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<sup>5</sup> Carl D. Hoch Junior., "The New Man of Ephesians 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 118.

and children and in fact within the Trinity itself. All three members of the Godhead are equal and yet they have different functions within their oneness.

- d. Saving unity between Jews and Gentiles as well as a future role for Israel in the millennial kingdom is what has been called a “both/and” situation.
  - e. “The union of Jew and Gentile in the church does not rule out the possibility of functional distinctions between Israel and the other nations in the future—in the same way that there are functional distinctions among believers in the church today amid spiritual equality.”<sup>6</sup>
5. The nation Israel will be saved, restored with a unique identity, and function in the future millennial kingdom upon the earth.
- a. Many non-dispensationalists believe in a literal salvation of Israel based on Romans 11:26. A proper understanding though includes a restoration of Israel. Israel will be restored as a nation, “in her land, with a specific identity and role of service to the nations. In other words, in a literal, earthly kingdom – a millennium – the nation Israel will perform a functional role of service to the nations.”<sup>7</sup>
    - a.) This is affirmed by dispensationalists and denied by many non-dispensationalists.
  - b. To be clear, dispensationalists do not say that Israel will be saved into the church “but rather the nation Israel will be saved and restored with a unique identity and role in an earthly millennium.”<sup>8</sup>
  - c. The Lord Jesus Christ will literally rule over nations at his return:
    - a.) Rev 19:15
  - d. Zechariah 14 names Egypt for example.
  - e. Isaiah chapter 49 teaches that Jesus, the “ultimate Israelite” restores the nation and brings blessings to Gentiles:
    - a.) Isa 49:3-6

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<sup>6</sup> Vlach, Michael. *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths: Revised and Updated* (p. 45). Theological Studies Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Christ's Prophetic Plans*, 33

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*



- f. Jesus’s identity as “true Israel” does not signal the end of the national significance of Israel but rather Jesus is the head who saves and restores national Israel.
6. There are multiple senses of “seed of Abraham”; thus, the church’s identification as “seed of Abraham” does not cancel God’s promises to the believing Jewish “seed of Abraham.”
- a. Scripture teaches that those who believe are “sons of Abraham” and “heirs according to the promise”.
    - a.) Gal 3:7
    - b.) Gal 3:29
  - b. It has been argued that because of this, Gentiles must be “spiritual Jews” since being “son” or a “seed” would automatically make one a Jew.
  - c. Abraham was a believer before he was circumcised, therefore he is the “father” of Gentiles prior to becoming the founder of God’s covenant people.
    - a.) Rom 4:9-10
    - b.) “If Abraham were merely the father of Israel, we would have to conclude that the Gentiles who are now a part of this seed are therefore a part of Israel. But according to the New Testament, Abraham is more than that; he is portrayed as the father of both the people of Israel and of the Gentiles. On the grounds that Abraham was a believer before he was circumcised – that is, before he was recognized as a Hebrew – the apostle Paul declared him to be “the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised... And... Also the father of the circumcised” (Romans 4:9-12; cf. v. 16).<sup>9</sup>
    - c.) Although the seed of Abraham covers both Jews and Gentiles, this does not rule out Israel’s distinct role in the New Testament nor does it justify the formation of a ‘new spiritual Israel’ that takes the place of the Old Testament nation of Israel.
  - d. There are four senses of the “seed of Abraham” in the New Testament.

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<sup>9</sup> Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 50

- a.) Those who are biological descendants of Abraham.
- b.) The Messiah who is the unique individual seed of Abraham.
- c.) The Righteous remnant of Israel.
  - i. Isa 41:8
  - ii. Rom 9:6
- d.) In a spiritual sense, believing Jews and Gentiles.
  - i. Gal 3:29

#### G. Myths about dispensationalism.

1. Not all theological systems have a direct relationship to every area of Christian theology.
  - a. Reformed theology specifically addresses the doctrines of Scripture, God’s sovereignty, and salvation but it does not presuppose any particular view of eschatology. Reformed theologians can be Amillennialist, Postmillennialist, or Premillennialist.
  - b. Dispensationalism doesn’t directly relate to every category theology. It is linked to the doctrines of ecclesiology (church) and eschatology (and times). It is directly linked to hermeneutics and Bible interpretation but it is not inherently related to soteriology – the doctrine of salvation.
  - c. Dispensationalism does not teach multiple methods of salvation.
  - d. John MacArthur states it this way:
    - a.) “So, dispensationalism shapes one’s eschatology and ecclesiology. That is the extent of it. Pure dispensationalism has no ramifications for the doctrines of God, man, sin, or sanctification. More significantly, true dispensationalism makes no relevant contribution to soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation.”<sup>10</sup>
    - b.) He makes the point in one of his books that “theology proper, especially the element of God’s sovereignty, informs dispensationalism, but dispensationalism does not inform theology proper.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith works: The Gospel according to the Apostles* (Dallas Word, 1993), 222.

<sup>11</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 222.

- e. Other nondispensationalists allow that the two features that are most prominent in dispensationalism are related to the church and the prophecy.
- f. Various dispensational authors including progressive dispensationalists have devoted chapters of books refuting the idea that dispensationalism teaches a false view of salvation.

#### H. Five common myths about dispensationalism.

##### 1. Dispensationalism Teaches Multiple Ways of Salvation.

- a. Early critical writers posited that dispensationalism taught two methods of salvation.
- b. A poorly worded statement by Charles Scofield seems to be an early cause of this confusion
- c. It appears from this statement that dispensationalism teaches multiple ways of salvation.
- d. The Scofield reference Bible comment was changed.
- e. Later writers have joined in correcting earlier misconceptions, acknowledging that progression in the dispensations does not change the fundamental principle of salvation by grace.

##### 2. Dispensationalism Is Inherently Arminian.

- a. There are some who teach that dispensationalism is innately linked with Arminianism.
  - a.) Keith A. Matheson teaches that “Dispensationalism has adopted a semi-Pelagian, Arminian doctrine not based on Scripture.”
  - b.) Numerous attempts have been made to paint dispensationalism as inherently anti-Calvinistic.
  - c.) First, it must be remembered that dispensationalism is primarily about ecclesiology, eschatology, and hermeneutics. It is not a treatise about soteriology.
  - d.) There are many Dispensationalists that are Calvinists, even five-point Calvinists. David L. Turner, James Oliver Buswell, S. Lewis Johnson Jr., to name a few.

e.) Some non-dispensational scholars have shown a clear connection between dispensationalism and Calvinism.

3. Dispensationalism is Inherently Antinomian.

- a. Antinomianism- Theologically, antinomianism is the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey.
- b. Many teach that Dispensationalists also teach antinomianism. Some of them claim that Dispensationalists teach that the Christian is not under the Mosaic law and that Christians can be justified without being sanctified.
- c. There is nothing within the theology of dispensationalism that would cause an adherent to separate justification from sanctification.
- d. Dispensationalist Donald G. Barnhouse said “Justification and sanctification are as inseparable as a torso and a head. You can’t have one without the other.”<sup>12</sup>
- e. Although Dispensationalists acknowledge that the Mosaic law has been done away with, it is understood to have been replaced by the Law of Christ. Dispensationalism therefore does not teach that Christians can do whatever they want.
- f. Although some may argue that Dispensationalists are in error concerning the relationship of the Mosaic law and the law of Christ, it is inaccurate to say that dispensationalism teaches antinomianism.

4. Dispensationalism Leads to Non-Lordship Salvation.

- a. Lordship salvation posits that true salvation occurs when a sinner acknowledges he has no power to change and that Christ has done everything that is necessary to change him. He trusts Christ for that salvation and inherent in that trust is the position that the sinner will yield to Christ’s authority in his life.
- b. There were and are some Dispensationalists who made statements that are compatible with the non-lordship view. Lewis Sperry Chafer and Zane Hodges come to mind.

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<sup>12</sup> Donald G. Barnhouse, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 3:10-12

- c. There are as many or far more who teach the lordship view including John MacArthur, Robert Saucy, and Richard Mayhue to name several.
5. Dispensationalism is Primarily about Believing in Seven Dispensations.
- a. Originally popularized by R.C. Sproul in his book “What Is Covenant Theology”, this idea has gained ascendancy. To be fair, many Dispensationalists propound this idea as well, that there are seven specific testing periods in redemptive history.
  - b. This is not the primary theological point regarding dispensationalism.
  - c. All Christians believe in dispensations. It is very unlikely that a Bible believing Christian would not notice the difference between the pre-fall and post-fall world. Neither would they ignore the difference between before and after Christ’s first coming. Nor would they overlook the fact that the present world is certainly different from the coming new heavens and new earth.
  - d. Dispensationalism also is not just about understanding and acknowledging the Greek term *oikonomia*. Although it is a biblical term and is linked to the word dispensation, simply acknowledging it does not make one a Dispensationalist.
  - e. Traditionally, though dispensationalism has been linked with belief in “seven” dispensations, some believe in three, four, eight or even 37. It depends on whether or not different times during a period of history are compressed or expanded. It is not required that one hold to seven dispensations or any other number. The number of dispensations is not the defining tenet of the theology.
  - f. There are many other myths that could be dealt with. Some taught that the Sermon on the Mount only applies to the future millennial kingdom. It does not, it is applicable today. Some believe that dispensationalism teaches a difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. This was probably held by some earlier Dispensationalists but is no longer the norm.

- g. One critic claims an absurd idea that dispensationalism teaches the idea that the literal fulfillment of land promises to Israel and the belief that Israel will undergo tribulation in the future promotes racism and ethnic cleansing. This is silly and irrational.
  - h. One man teaches that dispensational beliefs run concurrent with a lack of concern for national and global issues. This is not true at all. The idea was that Dispensationalists spend all their time looking to the sky waiting for the rapture and ignore the terrible things are happening in our world. Nothing could be further from the truth.
6. Michael Vlach gives this definition of dispensationalism which seems very concise and proper:
- a. “My understanding is that a dispensation is a noticeable era when God administers and deals with His creation in a unique way. Criteria for a dispensation can involve such matters as the giving of a covenant, a covenant head such as Noah and Abraham, more revelation being offered, or certain blessings and consequences being presented. It could be an era such as the Tribulation Period when God unleashes His wrath upon an unbelieving world in preparation for His kingdom.”<sup>13</sup>
7. Continuity and Discontinuity in Dispensationalism.
- a. Continuity “refers to a connection or carryover of an Old Testament idea or concept into the New Testament.”<sup>14</sup>
    - a.) Salvation by grace alone.
  - b. Discontinuity “refers to a change or disconnect between the Old Testament and New Testament.”<sup>15</sup>
    - a.) No animal sacrifice in the New Testament.
  - c. Dispensationalism has been labeled a “discontinuity” system because it teaches a significant distinction between Israel and the church.
  - d. Michael Vlach lists eight areas where continuity between the Testaments is affirmed:

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<sup>13</sup> Vlach, Michael. *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths: Revised and Updated* (p. 70). Theological Studies Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* p75

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

- a.) Storyline Continuity.
  - i. Dispensationalists believe there is strong continuity between the storyline of the Old Testament and the storyline presented in the New Testament.
- b.) 2. The Messiah's kingdom is consistent with the kingdom promised in the Old Testament.
  - i. The predictions of the Old Testament prophets and in the Psalms of the future earthly kingdom of the Messiah come to fulfillment as a result of Jesus's second coming.
- c.) Israel.
  - i. Israel of the Old Testament consists of the ethnic descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that comprise the nation of Israel.
- d.) Israel's land and Jerusalem.
  - i. Israel's land and Jerusalem continue to remain significant in New Testament times
- e.) Day of the Lord.
  - i. The coming Day of the Lord that impacts both the land of Israel and the entire world is taught in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament (Isa. 13; 1 Thess. 5; 2 Thess. 2).
- f.) Messianic salvation extending to believing Gentiles.
  - i. The Old Testament predicted that Gentiles would become the people of God because of the Messiah (Amos 9:11–12) and that has happened in New Testament times (Acts 15:14–18).
- g.) Salvation by grace alone through faith alone.
  - i. Dispensationalism affirms that salvation in all ages is by grace alone through faith alone (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4).
- h.) The New Testament quotes and alludes to the Old Testament in ways consistent with the original literal meaning of the Old Testament writers.





in some ways from the present age we live in as Jesus rules from and over the earth (Zech. 14:9).

d.) People of God.

- i. The concept of the people of God has varied throughout some dispensations. To be clear—all God’s people from beginning to end are saved the same way (i.e., continuity), but the people of God concept has varied. From Adam until Moses there was no nation of Israel so the people of God were not related to any one nation. According to Paul this was also an era in which people were sinners even though they did not have special specific verbal revelation that Adam and Moses had (see Rom. 5:13–14). With Israel becoming a nation, the people of God concept was strongly linked with Israel and the message of salvation coming from Israel.

e.) Role of the Holy Spirit.

- i. Most dispensationalists believe the Holy Spirit’s role of permanently indwelling saints began as a result of Jesus’ ascension and pouring out of the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 2.

V. The Key Differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.<sup>16</sup>

- A. First and foremost, it is important to note that both Dispensationalists and Covenantalists believe that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ through faith alone. There is no disagreement on the core fundamentals of Christianity. Assuming that one adheres to these core principles, both Dispensationalists and Covenantalists are born again Bible believing Christians. They are brothers and sisters in Christ.
- B. Second, the issue of dispensations is not a fundamental difference. Both Dispensationalists and Covenantalists agree that God has worked in different times and in different ways throughout history although salvation has always been by grace through faith.

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<sup>16</sup> Vlach, Michael. Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths: Revised and Updated Theological Studies Press. Kindle Edition.  
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1. Differences will be noted in the criteria of a dispensation or on how many there are but not on the fact that there are different historical time periods in Christian history.
- C. Similarly, the covenants of covenant theology are not what is most significant.
1. Covenantalists believe essentially in three covenants:
    - a. Covenant of Redemption.
    - b. Covenant of Works.
    - c. Covenant of Grace.
  2. There are differences within the covenant theology camp as to what the covenants should be called but this is a general outline of the main points of covenant theology.
- D. The two matters that lie at the heart of the differences between dispensationalism and Covenantalism are hermeneutics and storyline.
- E. Hermeneutics.
1. Dispensationalism holds to a consistent historical-grammatical or literal hermeneutic applied to all areas of Scripture including eschatology and Old Testament passages related to national Israel.
  2. Dispensationalism believes that all the details of the Old Testament prophecies, promises, and covenants must be fulfilled in the way the original inspired Bible authors intended. There are no nonliteral or spiritual fulfillment of physical and national promises in the Bible. Nor does the New Testament reinterpret, transcend, transform, or spiritualize promises and prophecies in the Old Testament.
  3. Although areas like the Mosaic law are shadows of greater new covenant realities (see Hebrews 10:1), Dispensationalists do not believe that everything in the Old Testament is a shadow.
  4. Dispensationalists holds to “passage priority” in which the primary meaning of a passage is found in the passage at hand and not in other passages. Dispensationalists do not believe in the priority of one Testament over the other (although the New is more complete), they just ask that the integrity of each passage in each testament be honored without overriding its meaning with other passages.
  5. Covenantalists also affirm a historical-grammatical hermeneutic to many areas of Scripture, but they believe that typological and

even spiritual hermeneutics need to be applied to some areas of Scripture – particularly passages involving physical and national promises to national Israel in the Old Testament. These are often viewed as shadows that are transcended by the greater New Testament realities (i.e. Jesus and the church).

6. The covenantal hermeneutic is closely linked to the concept of “New Testament priority” in which the New Testament is viewed as a lens for interpreting and even reinterpreting the Old Testament.

a. One covenantalist puts it this way:

a.) “If the New Testament writers spiritualize Old Testament prophecies by applying them in a nonliteral sense, then the Old Testament passage must be seen in light of that New Testament interpretation, not vice versa.”<sup>17</sup>

7. Supposedly, once the concepts of “Israel” “temple” find fulfillment in Jesus, one need not expect the literal fulfillment of these matters in the future.

8. To summarize, many of the differences between the two theologies concern how literal one should be with physical and national promises and covenants in the Old Testament. Dispensationalists view these as realities that need to be fulfilled if they have not been already. Covenantalists often view these as shadows and types that are fulfilled in Jesus with no literal fulfillment of these matters being necessary.<sup>18</sup>

#### F. Storyline.

1. The other major difference between dispensationalism and covenant theology deals with the Bible’s storyline. The nature of the Old Testament promises and covenants, the identity and role of Israel and God’s purposes, the identity and role of the church, what has been fulfilled with Jesus his first coming and what remains to be fulfilled in His second coming.

2. The two main storyline differences regard:

a. The nation Israel’s role in God’s purposes.

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<sup>17</sup> Vlach, Michael. *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths: Revised and Updated* (p. 88). Theological Studies Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>18</sup> Vlach, Michael. *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths: Revised and Updated* (pp. 86-88). Theological Studies Press. Kindle Edition.

- b. Whether there will be a mediatorial kingdom phase to God's kingdom program on the earth after this present age but before the eternal state.
3. Covenantalists generally believe Jesus as the true Israel and they believe that the Old Testament promises to national Israel in the Old Testament are shadows that find fulfillment in Him.
4. They generally further believe that when believers become united in Christ, they join "Israel" as well. Thus, the concept of Israel expands to include Gentiles. This culminates in the church in Jesus being the new/true Israel.
  - a. At this point, there would be no need for restoration of national Israel since Jesus is "true Israel" and the church in Jesus is now Israel.
  - b. They further recognize that "not yet" aspect to Jesus's reign. They rely heavily on first coming fulfillment of Old Testament promises and covenants.
  - c. For most covenantalists, the Davidic/millennial reign and the reign of the saints is occurring from heaven now with us currently being in Jesus' messianic kingdom.
  - d. Further, covenant promises from the Old Testament are being currently fulfilled so there is no need of a future earthly reign of Jesus since this age is the era of fulfillment and raining.
5. Dispensationalists believe in and celebrate the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ and His role as the true Israelite but this does not remove the significance of the nation of Israel. Isaiah 49:3-6 teaches that the "true Israelite" – Jesus the Messiah involves a role of service for the nation. God's ancient plan for the nation Israel to have a mission of service and leadership to the nations is outlined in Genesis 12:2-3; Deuteronomy 4:5-6.
  - a. Nations will exist in the coming messianic/millennial kingdom (Isaiah 19:24-25; Revelation 19:15), and thus Israel will have a role to the nations during this period of time under the headship of Jesus the Messiah.
  - b. National Israel is still significant, the church does not supersede or replace national Israel in God's plans.

- c. The church is the instrument for the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom in this age but Israel will still have a role to the nations when Jesus returns to reign over the nations (Revelation 19:15).
  - d. The church in this age will also participate in Jesus's rule over the nations (Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21).
6. Different from covenantalists, Dispensationalists do not believe the concept of "Israel" expands to include Gentiles.
- a. The concept of the "people of God" expands to include believing Gentiles alongside believing Israelites. God's plan does not include that believers become Israel, there will be ethnic diversity in the people of God since Israelites and Gentiles do not lose their ethnic identities.
  - b. Even in the eternal state the people of God are referred to as "the nations" (Revelation 21:24, 26).
7. A key and important component of the Bible storyline according to dispensationalism is the coming earthly kingdom in which the last Adam and Messiah will rule the earth successfully for the glory of God. A successful kingdom rule over the earth must occur. God gave that task to Adam and to mankind to rule the earth on his behalf in Genesis 1:26-28. Currently that mandate remains unfulfilled. This is affirmed in Hebrews 2:5-8. The coming earthly kingdom of Jesus will include a proper reign of the last Adam (Jesus) where the first Adam failed. This reign involves nations and Israel will be used by the Lord Jesus Christ as an instrument for his kingdom rule during this time.
- a. A coming earthly kingdom reign of the Lord Jesus over the nations with Israel as an instrument of his ruling is essential to the dispensational understanding of the Bible storyline.

## VI. Summary

- A. The primary meaning of any Bible passage is found in that passage. The New Testament does not reinterpret or transcend Old Testament passages in a way that overrides or cancels the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers.
- B. Types exist but national Israel is not an inferior type that is superseded by the church.

- C. Israel and the church are distinct; thus, the church cannot rightly be identified as the new/true Israel.
- D. Spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles is compatible with a future functional role for Israel as a nation.
- E. The nation Israel will be both saved and restored with a unique functional role in a future millennial kingdom upon the earth.
- F. There are multiple senses of “seed of Abraham,” thus the church’s identification as “seed of Abraham” does not cancel God’s promises to the believing Jewish “seed of Abraham.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Vlach, Michael. *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths: Revised and Updated* (p. 103). Theological Studies Press. Kindle Edition.