

# 1 What is Dispensationalism?

Search the internet for the term “Dispensationalism” and you will find such hatred and vitriol expressed that you will wonder whether Dispensationalism didn’t ascend out of the very pit of hell! What has caused such a strong reaction? Is Dispensationalism a heresy? Or is it solidly grounded in the teachings of the Bible? This book will seek to explain what Dispensationalism is, the Biblical basis of Dispensationalism, and how a dispensational approach to Scripture helps to understand God’s working in such realms as the Church, Israel, human government, the ministry of Christ, and future events.

## What it’s not

### 1. *A View of Bible Prophecy*

Much of the opposition to Dispensationalism comes from a misunderstanding about what it really is. Probably the most common misconception is that Dispensationalism is a certain way of thinking about prophecy. Books like Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) and Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* (1995, later a movie series) did much to popularize a dispensational view of prophecy, but they also left many people with the impression that Dispensationalism was merely a prophetic scheme of end time events. It is not. To be sure, there is a way of thinking about prophecy that results from Dispensationalism, and is unique to Dispensationalism, but Dispensationalism is not essentially a prophetic system.

### 2. *Christian Escapism*

Another misconception about Dispensationalism is that it is a sort of Christian escapism. This is closely related to the first misconception, but this one has to do with the fact that most, if not all, dispensationalists teach a pretribulation rapture – a topic we’ll cover in more detail later in this book. The pretribulation rapture position teaches that the church will be entirely removed from the earth before the great and terrible Day of the Lord (or “Tribulation”) commences. Opponents of Dispensationalism think that this is simply wishful thinking, pie in the sky, escapist nonsense. Sometimes you will even hear such opponents refer to Dispensationalism derisively as “that *Left Behind* teaching.” Of course, as with the first misconception, this one also fails to understand that Dispensationalism is essentially something other than a prophetic scheme of the end times. It is true that if one views the Bible dispensationally he cannot fail to come to the conclusion that the rapture will occur before the Tribulation Period begins. But Dispensationalism is essentially something other than a prophetic scheme of the end times.

### 3. *Dividing Time into Dispensations*

One final misconception about Dispensationalism is that it is a system of dividing up time according to seven (or some other number) time periods known as “dispensations.” This misconception comes from the popularity of charts used by many dispensational teachers that show the different periods – eras or ages – into which time may be divided according to the Bible. But it is important to realize that non-dispensationalists (such as those who hold to Covenant Theology – a subject we’ll view in more detail later in this book) *also believe* that the Bible presents a sequence of varying dispensations throughout time. So, while the existence of varying dispensations is important to Dispensationalism, it is not unique to Dispensationalism.

## What it is

So, if Dispensationalism is not essentially any of those things mentioned above, then what is it? First, and foremost, Dispensationalism is the result of a consistent literal interpretation of the Bible. By “literal interpretation” we mean a normal, straightforward way of reading the Bible. Now, there are non-dispensationalists that will object to characterizing Dispensationalism this way. That’s because they would claim that they interpret the Bible literally too. The reason behind this involves a little bit of history that we will develop more fully later on. But for now, consider this historical sequence: (1) At the

time when Christ and the apostles lived on the earth, literal interpretation was the accepted way of understanding the Bible. (2) In the third to fourth century Greek philosophy began to influence much of Christian theology resulting in a non-literal, or “allegorical,” approach to understanding the Bible. This non-literal method of interpreting the Bible became the norm for the Catholic Church throughout the middle ages. (3) When the reformation came to Europe in the sixteenth century under the teaching of men like Martin Luther and John Calvin, there was a return to literal interpretation among the Protestants and a rejection of allegorical interpretation. For this reason, today almost all Protestants – both dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists – believe that the Bible should be interpreted literally. There *is* a difference, however, between how dispensationalists approach Bible interpretation versus how non-dispensationalists approach Bible interpretation. If you re-read the second sentence in this paragraph, you will notice the phrase, “consistent literal interpretation.” And it’s the word “consistent” that marks the difference between a dispensational approach to Bible interpretation and a non-dispensational approach. Non-dispensationalists will interpret *most* of the Bible literally, but when it comes to certain portions of Scripture, they will resort to a non-literal interpretation so as to avoid the conclusions that dispensationalists arrive at. This is why we begin our description of what Dispensationalism is by noting that it results from a *consistently* literal interpretation of the Bible. Dispensationalism is committed to this literal, straightforward way of interpreting every passage of Scripture.

Closely linked to the matter of literal interpretation is what has come to be known as the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism. Some years ago, Dr. Charles Ryrie, who was dean of doctoral studies and professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, was asked what he thought was the essence of Dispensationalism. He replied that there were three features that really characterized Dispensationalism. These three features have come to be known as the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism. The phrase *sine qua non* (pronounced, “seen’-aye kwa known”) is Latin, and means literally, “that without which not.” It is a phrase used to describe the absolutely essential components of a system, in other words, the things without which the system cannot exist. The three-fold *sine qua non* identified by Dr. Ryrie is as follows: (1) A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct. (2) The distinction between Israel and the church is born out of a system of hermeneutics that is usually called literal interpretation. (3) The underlying purpose of God in the world is the glory of God.<sup>1</sup> You’ll notice that the second point is virtually the same as what we have said above about literal interpretation.

### *I. Distinction between Israel and the Church*

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32). If we hold consistently to a literal interpretation of the Bible, we find that Israel and the Church form two distinct and separate entities. The term “Israel” occurs over 2,500 times in the Old Testament and never refers to the Church. The term “Church” occurs 110 times in the New Testament and never refers to Israel. However, non-dispensationalists tend to merge these two into one group of the elect people of God. Many non-dispensationalists believe that Israel in the Old Testament was really part of the Church, and the Church in the New Testament is what they describe as “the true Israel.” At this point, you might wonder, “Does it really matter whether someone distinguishes between Israel and the Church or not?” Yes, it does matter. It matters first of all, simply because the Bible teaches such a distinction, and it’s not up to you or me to judge what is important in the Bible and what isn’t important. The fact is, that *all* of the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and it is important and profitable for us (2 Tim. 3:16-17). But there are other reasons why maintaining this distinction is important.

A second reason that maintaining a distinction between Israel and the Church is important is that God made promises to Israel that do not belong to the Church, and He made promises to the Church that do not belong to Israel. If we fail to make the proper distinction between these two groups, we may be expecting God to do something for us that He never promised. Belief that the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament have been transferred to the Church in the New Testament is known as “Supersessionism” or “Replacement Theology.” Most non-dispensationalists are supersessionists to one degree or another. The biggest problem with supersessionism is that in order to make it work, many of the promises made to Israel need to be interpreted in a non-literal fashion, so that the land of Canaan becomes heaven, the Jordan River becomes death, bountiful crops become spiritual blessings, etc. This introduces confusion into the way we understand the Bible. If it can’t be understood literally, then its interpretation is subject to the whim and fancy of each individual interpreter. Another problem with supersessionism is that it portrays God as being unfaithful. If God made promises to Israel, but then decided to fulfill those promises with someone else, then it implies that God deceived Israel in the Old Testament. Also, if God cannot be trusted to fulfill His promises to Israel, how can I as a Christian trust Him to fulfill His promises to me? But if I believe that God will faithfully fulfill His promises to Israel, then as a Christian I can also have the confidence that He will fulfill His promises to me.

A third reason for maintaining a distinction between Israel and the Church is that, historically, failure to do so has led to anti-Semitism by many who called themselves “Christians.” Anti-Semitism is racial discrimination against the Jews. This is related to

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<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Revised and Expanded, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 39-40.

the problem of Supersessionism as described above. When the Apostle Paul encountered anti-Semitic attitudes among the Gentile Christians in Rome, he wrote “*because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:*” (Romans 11:19–20). A highminded, haughty attitude among professing Christians historically has led them to label the Jews as “Christ killers,” which led them to pogroms and crusades in which many thousands of Jews were mercilessly slaughtered. Hatred of the Jew is not only unscriptural, it is irrational. In the history of mankind, Jewish people have done more to benefit and help humanity than any other race. Jesus Christ and the apostles were all Jewish. The early Church consisted entirely of Jewish people who had trusted in Jesus as their Messiah. The Anti-Christ and Satan will both pursue a program of anti-Semitic persecution of the Jews in the future Tribulation Period (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 12:13).

Finally, recognizing a proper Biblical distinction between Israel and the Church helps one to understand the prophecies that tell of Christ’s future kingdom on the earth. The Bible proclaims that Christ is returning, and that when He returns, He will rule on the earth for a thousand years in a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and prosperity (Revelation 20:1-6). This view of the kingdom is found not only in Revelation 20, but in a multitude of Old Testament prophecies about the kingdom of the Messiah. Failure to recognize a distinction between Israel and the Church usually leads one to deny the reality of a future, literal kingdom of Messiah on the earth – a position known as “Amillennialism.”

## 2. *A Consistently Literal Interpretation of the Bible*

This theme was dealt with above, and we will examine the principles of Bible interpretation more fully in a later lesson. However, here, let’s look briefly at *why* some Christians might opt for a non-literal interpretation for some portions of Scripture. Jesus and the apostles held to a literal (that is, normal, straightforward) interpretation of the Old Testament. For instance, Jesus understood the Biblical account of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish as being literally true (Matthew 12:40); He also believed that Adam and Eve were historical people who actually lived in the Garden of Eden and were the first human beings created directly by God (Matthew 19:4-5); and the author of Hebrews assumed the literal truth of the account of Abraham offering his son Isaac on Mount Moriah (Hebrews 11:17-19). Other examples could be multiplied many times over, but suffice it to say here that the normally accepted method of interpreting the Bible by the Jews of the first century AD was the literal method of interpretation. This resulted in the early church of the first two centuries being almost exclusively premillennial.

One notable exception to this normal practice was a scholarly Jew named Philo who lived in Alexandria, Egypt (25 BC – AD 50). Philo felt that some of the Old Testament stories were embarrassing and didn’t adequately honor God, so he borrowed a novel idea from the Greeks. The Greeks had a similar “problem” with their sacred writings. The Greek gods were capricious, vacillating, lustful, power hungry, and immoral. So the Greek philosophers devised a method of non-literal interpretation whereby they could find hidden behind the literal meaning of the text, a deeper, spiritual meaning that was more honorable to their national religion. This method of interpretation is known either as “allegorical interpretation” or “spiritual interpretation.” Philo felt that he could adapt this same method of interpretation to the text of the Old Testament, and he became quite a popular Bible teacher among the Jews of Alexandria. Later, a Christian scholar in Alexandria, named Origen (AD 184-254), began using Philo’s allegorical method of interpretation on both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Until Origen, for over 100 years, Christians had practiced the normal Jewish way of interpreting the Bible literally. Origen’s method gained some popularity, but mostly only locally in Alexandria, until the fourth century. In the fourth century an important and influential Christian theologian named Augustine (354-430) sought for a way to understand the Book of Revelation without requiring an earthly thousand year kingdom on the earth (Amillennialism). He found that way in Origen’s allegorical interpretation. Because the Emperor Hadrian had expelled all the Jews from the Holy Land in the second century, those churches that had formerly been influenced by their Hebrew Christian pastors and their attachment to literal interpretation, were now pastored by Gentiles with a more Greek way of thinking. This allowed Augustine’s influence to spread far and wide. From the time of Augustine until the Protestant Reformation – over 1,000 years – allegorical interpretation became the new normal way for interpreting the Bible.

Reformers such as Wycliffe, Luther, and Calvin, were of the conviction that the only acceptable way to understand the Bible was to take it literally at face value. They all rejected the allegorical method that had become the norm through the middle ages. In the sixteenth century, this led the reformers to rediscover the blessed truth of justification by faith. In the nineteenth century, the same devotion to a literal interpretation led John Nelson Darby to begin systematizing Dispensationalism. It was due to a literal interpretation that Darby began to notice both a distinction between Israel and the Church, and a distinction between the rapture and the second coming. These observations led to further conclusions that eventually resulted in what we now know today as Dispensationalism. But many in the reformed tradition, despite their honoring of literal interpretation, continued to hold on to the supersessionist and amillennial ideas of the original reformers, and this resulted in an inconsistent application of literal interpretation. These reformed theologians were literal in their interpretation of most of the Bible, but when it came to matters of the Second Coming of Christ and the kingdom they continued to practice an allegorical method of interpretation.

### 3. *The Glory of God as the Underlying purpose of God in the World*

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). One final distinguishing characteristic of Dispensationalism is that it views the glory of God as being the basic unifying purpose of God in all that He does. This may seem like an obvious point. And it is a point that non-dispensationalists generally give assent to, at least in word. For example, the major non-dispensationalist catechism, the *Westminster Catechism*, states that the chief end of man is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” So you might well ask, “Why, then, is this considered a characteristic of Dispensationalism?” It is important here to differentiate between what the Christian’s primary calling is and what God’s primary purpose in working in the world is. To be sure, there is nothing more precious and important to a sinner saved by grace than the Gospel! When viewed from the perspective of man, salvation is the most important theme there could possibly be. But things may look a little different from God’s perspective. There can be no doubt that the work of redemption is a main focal point of God in the way He relates to His creation. But salvation is not the *only* purpose that God has in the world. There are other purposes of God that really do not pertain to His work of redeeming the lost. For example, God has a purpose for the family, a purpose for human government, a purpose for the physical creation, and a purpose for the angels. None of these really has anything to do directly with the work of redemption. And here is where Dispensationalism has a more comprehensive view of God’s purposes in the world than non-dispensational systems.

Virtually all non-dispensational approaches make salvation the focal point of their theological systems. In Protestantism, the primary alternative viewpoint to Dispensationalism is Covenant Theology, also known as Reformed Theology. Covenant Theology is controlled primarily by what they refer to as the Covenant of Grace. There are dispensations in Covenant Theology, but the dispensations are viewed as various ways of administering the Covenant of Grace. Basically, all of God’s dealings with His creation is summed up in terms of what God is doing to bring about the salvation of the elect. Reformed Theology is seeing a resurgence in popularity among many Christians today, and this is reflected, among other things, in the preponderance of “Gospel-Centered” themes. A recent search of popular Christian books revealed the following titles:

- The Gospel-Centered Life
- Gospel-Centered Teaching
- Gospel-Centered Discipleship
- Gospel Centered Leadership
- The Gospel-Centered Woman
- The Gospel-Centered Mom
- Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics
- The Gospel-Centered Community Participant’s Guide
- Living the Cross Centered Life
- Gospel-Centered Family

This is not to say that there’s anything wrong about our being focused on the Gospel as Christians, but it does reflect the salvation centered focus of Reformed Theology and its influence on today’s Christian world. Dispensationalism does not deny the importance of the Gospel. If anything, dispensationalists have generally been known for being very evangelistic. But in Dispensationalism, the work of redemption is understood as being part of a broader theme of glorifying God. Dispensationalism provides a proper Biblical foundation for understanding not only God’s purposes in salvation, but also for other means of bringing Him glory, such as His purposes for the family, human government, the physical creation, and angels.

### Conclusion

There is much confusion today about just what Dispensationalism is. Though it implies a certain view of the end times, and though it does provide an accurate way of viewing the progress of history, in essence it is a way of understanding the Bible literally that acknowledges a distinction between Israel and the Church, and views the glory of God as a central, unifying theme.

## 2 Where did it come from?

Often one hears the criticism made of Dispensationalism that it is only a recent development in the history of Christianity, and that more ancient forms of Christianity must certainly be more in line with what the apostles taught. On the surface of it, this argument from history certainly seems to have a ring of truth to it. But there are problems with this criticism. Should history really serve as a test for a doctrine? What is our ultimate test of truth or falsehood? In order to deal with some of these questions, let's consider the matter of the origins of Dispensationalism. Where did this system come from? When did it arise? Who was responsible for it? Most importantly, is it Biblical?

### Is something wrong merely because it is recent?

First, let's consider the question of whether history should serve as a test of doctrine? The ultimate test of truth must be conformity or non-conformity to the Bible. The psalmist wrote, "*Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name*" (Psalm 138:2). The Word of God is so highly exalted that it is held as a higher standard than even the Name of God. If Church history tells us anything, it tells us that false doctrine entered into the Church very early. For example, one of the earliest heresies encountered in Church history was that of baptismal regeneration – the teaching that the waters of baptism actually wash away one's sins. This teaching can be found in the so-called "church fathers" almost as soon as the last of the apostles died. Baptismal regeneration was so widely accepted by the church fathers at the time, that it wasn't even recognized as heresy. So, if one were to argue that doctrine should be tested by history, then we should probably all believe in baptismal regeneration! But, of course, the Bible itself does not support baptismal regeneration, since we are saved by grace through faith, and not by works (Eph. 2:8), and that's why we reject baptismal regeneration. So, ultimately, the question of whether Dispensationalism is true or not must be decided on the basis of Scripture, not history.

Among Protestants, the biggest criticism against Dispensationalism comes from Reformed Theology. Proponents of Reformed Theology frequently appeal to the historical argument. They will claim that since Reformed Theology (or Covenant Theology) is to be preferred over Dispensationalism because it is a more historical faith than Dispensationalism. Yet, this is a particularly bad argument for any reformed theologian to make, since reformed theology was at one time considered to be the newly taught position. In fact, this very same historical argument was made by the Catholic authorities against the teachings of Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century. Here's what John Calvin said about those who were accusing him:

... they cease not to assail our doctrine, and to accuse and defame it in what terms they may, in order to render it either hated or suspected. They call it new, and of recent birth... they ask if it be fair to receive it against the consent of so many holy Fathers and the most ancient custom; they urge us to confess either that it is schismatical [i.e. causing division] in giving battle to the Church, or that the Church must have been without life during the many centuries in which nothing of the kind was heard... in calling it new, they are exceedingly injurious to God, whose sacred word deserved not to be charged with novelty.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it is surprising that many who hold dearly to the doctrines of John Calvin make the same kind of historical argument against Dispensationalism. In addition, we might add that the idea of Dispensationalism was first suggested in the mid 1600's by the French mystic and philosopher Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), while the competing doctrine, Covenant Theology, was first suggested only about 50 years before that. In fact, both doctrines are relatively new.

### Are the *Sine Qua Non* ancient or recent?

The real question that should concern us is not when Dispensationalism as a complete system was first taught, but rather, whether the three-fold *sine qua non* (see Lesson 1) is to be found in the Bible. If we're going to ask about how ancient a doctrine is, let's not look to the church fathers of the second and third centuries – much less to the middle ages – but let's go all the way back to the first century and see what the Bible says. The testimony of Scripture is really the first and foremost history that we are interested in.

In the last lesson we defined and gave the Biblical support for the three features of Dispensationalism's *sine qua non*: (1) A distinction between Israel and the Church; (2) a consistently literal interpretation of the Bible; and (3) the glory of God as the

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, "Prefatory Address to the King of France," *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

underlying purpose of God in the world. Since these are taught in the Bible, they are more ancient than the reformers, more ancient than the Catholic Church, and more ancient than the early Church fathers. The second and third points are not generally debated among conservative Christians. The biggest sticking point is the first – the Israel/Church distinction. So let's consider this in greater detail. Does the Bible really teach that Israel and the Church are distinct?

The Bible presents Israel and the Church as being distinct from each other in at least five ways: (1) They have distinct origins; (2) they have distinct bases of existence; (3) they are distinct in how they are constituted; (4) they are distinct in the nature of their relationship to God; and (5) they have distinct culminations.

### 1. *Distinct origins*

Both Israel and the Church had distinct beginnings, and they were not at the same time. For over three thousand years of human history, Israel did not even exist in the world. From the creation of Adam and Eve until the time of Jacob there was no entity known as "Israel." We first read of Israel in the Bible in Genesis 32:28 when God changed Jacob's name to "Israel." Israel started out as one man, then became a family ("the children of Israel"), then a people group ("the Israelites"), and finally a nation. Israel has had a long and varied history, but Israel had a distinct beginning in time.

The Church also had its own distinct beginning. The Church was not in existence at any time in the Old Testament, nor was it in existence when Christ came. In Matthew 16 Jesus specifically prophesied of a future time when He would build his Church,

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:16–18)

The Church could not come into existence until the Holy Spirit started performing His unique baptism. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit no one could be added to the Body of Christ, but that baptism was entirely future to the public ministry of Christ on the earth. On the day that Christ ascended into heaven, forty days after His resurrection, He told His disciples, "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:4–5). Ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples in a very powerful way and for the first time performed the unique ministry known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the Church was born. The Church has existed for close to two thousand years now, but it had a definite beginning in time, and its beginning was distinct and different from the beginning of Israel.

### 2. *Distinct bases of existence*

Israel and the Church both exist due to different bases. Israel's existence depends upon the covenants that God made with the descendants of Abraham (confirmed through Isaac and Jacob). We will develop this theme of the Biblical covenants in greater detail in Lesson 4. But for now, let us notice the comment that the apostle Paul made about the covenants in Romans 9:4 where he referred to the "Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants." The covenants pertain to Israel; Israel is defined by the covenants, and the covenants form the basis for Israel's existence. In particular, there are four covenants that constitute the basis of Israel: The Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New covenants. A fifth covenant, the Mosaic, also pertains to Israel and plays an important part in Israel's history. In Lesson 4 we will detail specifically how these covenants relate to Israel.

The Church, on the other hand, has a different basis for its existence. We have already described above the baptism of the Holy Spirit and how it was essential for the bringing into existence of the Church. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not a one-time act occurring only on the Day of Pentecost. As 1 Corinthians 12:13 clearly shows, the Spirit baptizes every believer into the body of Christ. Every time a lost sinner trusts Christ as Savior, immediately, at the time of his spiritual rebirth, he is also baptized by the Holy Spirit and placed into the Church. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is to the Church what the covenants are to Israel. Both Israel and the Church have a basis for their existence, but the bases are distinct and different: the covenants for Israel, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit for the Church.

### 3. *Distinct in how they are constituted*

When we refer to how they are constituted, we are speaking of the way in which they are put together as a group. As noted above, Israel began as an individual, then successively became a family, a people-group, and finally a nation. Once Israel came out of Egypt at the exodus, every reference to her is either as an ethnic people-group or as a nation. The Church, on the other hand, is neither an ethnic people-group nor a nation. The Church is made up of people from every conceivable nationality and ethnicity, and all ethnic and national walls that formerly divided people are removed in Christ (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:13-16; 3:6; Col. 3:11).

Throughout the history of the Church, many grievous errors have resulted from viewing the Church as a nation. This began in the fourth century with what historians have referred to as “the Constantinian Change.” Until the fourth century, Christianity was an outlawed religion in the Roman Empire, and the Romans routinely persecuted the Christians. But in AD 313 Emperor Constantine, whose mother was a Christian, decided to legalize Christianity, eventually making Christianity the official Roman religion. This was perceived at first to be a blessing, since the persecutions came to an end. But in the following centuries, first under the Byzantine Empire, and later under the Holy Roman Empire, the Church as a national political entity became engaged in wars and crusades that distracted it from its Great Commission of preaching the gospel. Thus, the unscriptural view of the church as a nation led to many other unbiblical practices.

Some will object to the idea that the Church is not a nation by appealing to 1 Peter 2:9, “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.*” But there are three facts you must keep in mind when thinking about this verse: (1) This verse is a quote from Exodus 19:5-6. In its original context it was addressed to national Israel, not the Church; (2) 1 Peter is addressed not to all Christians in general, but specifically to Hebrew Christians of the diaspora. They were Jews who had believed in Jesus as their Messiah. As Jews, they had their own ethnic connection with the nation of Israel, and this verse from Exodus was especially meaningful to them. It is unlikely that this verse would have been quoted to a Church that was composed largely of Gentile believers; (3) Peter’s point in quoting this verse was to say that as God’s people, they ought to be holy. In other words, the verse was quoted to focus on *holiness*, not nationhood. As chosen priests, they were to be holy. The fact that Exodus referred to them as a “nation” is incidental to Peter’s purpose in focusing on holiness. Peter was not saying that the Church is a nation. He was saying that Christians, as God’s people in the New Testament era, are to be holy, just as God had called Israel to be holy in the Old Testament era. There is no other verse anywhere in the New Testament that even comes close to suggesting that the Church could be considered a nation.

### 4. *Distinct in the nature of their relationship to God*

Israel and the Church have different relationships to God. There are three features that characterize Israel’s relationship to God: (1) physical descent from Jacob, (2) obedience of the Mosaic law, and (3) faith as exemplified by Abraham. On the other hand, the Church is related to God simply by faith alone.

### 5. *Distinct culminations*

Not only did Israel and the Church begin at different times, they will also come to a conclusion at different times. Israel will be completed at the end of the Millennial kingdom. Throughout the thousand years of the millennium people will both be born and will die (Isaiah 65:20) and through birth added to the nation. But the final resurrection that will come at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20:11-14) will mean an end to any additions to the nation of Israel. The Church has its own separate culmination. The Church has been growing by conversion for nearly two thousand years, but one day the last person to be added to the Church will receive Christ, and the Church will be removed from the earth at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Rom. 11:25). The rapture precedes the Tribulation Period and Millennial kingdom; therefore, the Church’s completion precedes Israel’s by at least 1,007 years.

## Are there other ancient features of Dispensationalism?

The *sine qua non* are absolutely essential features to Dispensationalism, but there are other features that generally accompany dispensational teaching. Two in particular would be the understanding of the outworking of God's program according to varying dispensations; the other being belief in a pretribulation rapture.

### 1. *Dispensations*

Dispensational teaching nearly always presents some sort of a division in God's dealings with man throughout the ages according to varying dispensations. These divisions are often depicted by means of time lines and charts that divide human history up into seven (or possibly some other number) dispensations. This way of viewing things was not invented in the nineteenth century. One can find such divisions expressed in the teachings of many early Christians shortly after the death of the apostles. Examples can be found in the writings of Justin Martyr (110-165), Irenaeus (130-200), Clement of Alexandria (150-220), and Augustine (354-430).

### 2. *Pretribulation Rapture*

Prior to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was common for opponents to Dispensationalism to claim that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture of the Church could not be found anywhere in the history of the Church prior to the time of John Nelson Darby (1880-1882). However, much important research has emerged since then to show very clearly that much earlier than Darby there were those who taught the pretribulation rapture doctrine. In the past two decades at least four very significant pretribulation rapture references from before the time of Darby have been brought to light. Morgan Edwards, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Baptist preacher; *The History of Brother Dolcino*, a 14<sup>th</sup> century notary of the diocese of Vercelli in northern Italy; Pseudo-Ephraem, a 7<sup>th</sup> century Syrian bishop; and The Apocalypse of Elijah, 3<sup>rd</sup> century Egyptian Christian. Now, as we asserted earlier, the truth of a doctrine is not proved by the fact that it was taught early in the history of the Church, but it is nevertheless interesting that one of the most prominent arguments leveled against Dispensationalism is now falling apart at the seams.

## Who were some of the important early pioneers of Dispensationalism?

### 1. *John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)*

John Nelson Darby was a parish priest in the established Church of Ireland. Under his ministry hundreds of Catholics were coming to faith in Jesus. However, when the Archbishop of Dublin insisted that all converted Catholics must pledge their allegiance to George IV as sovereign ruler of Ireland, Darby felt that the state was meddling in the affairs of the Church, so he withdrew from the Church of Ireland and joined a separatist group, the Plymouth Brethren. As a result of a horse riding accident in 1827, Darby spent time recuperating in his sister's home. During this time of recuperation, he spent many hours in study of the Scriptures. It was at this time that he began to develop the ideas of systematized Dispensationalism. Through his prolific writings, and through preaching and teaching tours throughout Europe, England, and the U.S., Darby introduced many Christians to a dispensational approach to the Bible.

### 2. *C.I. Scofield (1843-1921)*

Former U.S. Attorney for Kansas, Scofield was brought to faith in Christ through the ministry of a YMCA evangelist in 1879. Scofield's interest in Bible prophecy drew him to the teachings of dispensationalists, and he eventually wrote books on the subject and became a popular conference speaker. His Scofield Reference Bible included dispensationally oriented study notes and has probably done more than any single printed work to popularize Dispensationalism than any other.



### 3. *Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952)*

Initially a gospel singer and evangelist, Chafer travelled for some years with C.I. Scofield, which led to his becoming quite knowledgeable of Bible doctrine. In time he became a professor at Philadelphia School of Bible (1914), then nine years later pastor of Scofield Memorial Church in Dallas, Texas, and general secretary of the Central American Mission. A year after that he was named president of the newly formed Dallas Theological Seminary. This seminary has been the most prominent academic training center for Dispensationalism world-wide. Dr. Chafer's 8 volume *Systematic Theology* was the first complete systematic theology written from a dispensational perspective.

### 4. *Charles C. Ryrie (1925-Present)*

Professor of systematic theology and dean of doctoral studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, also president and professor at Philadelphia College of the Bible (now Cairn University). He wrote the definitive work on Dispensationalism in his book, *Dispensationalism Today*, more recently revised and updated and titled, simply, *Dispensationalism*. Three other important books of his are: *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, *Basic Theology*, and the *Ryrie Study Bible*.

## What are the seven dispensations?

When used in a theological sense, the word "dispensation" refers to an administration of God. In other words, it refers to the way in which God administers His affairs in the world. Most dispensationalists discern seven distinct dispensations in the outworking of God's program in the world. They are as follows:

#### 1. *Innocence*

Before the fall, while Adam and Eve were still in their state of innocence in the Garden of Eden, God administered his program through the leadership of Adam.

#### 2. *Conscience*

After the fall the administration changed. Worship included sacrifice, and since there is no record of an oral or written revelation to man, it is presumed that man responded to God based on the dictates of his conscience.

#### 3. *Human Government*

After the world-wide flood, several changes in administration occurred: (1) God gave to human government the responsibility of capital punishment; (2) God gave man the right to eat meat for the first time; (3) God promised never to wipe out all living creatures by flood again.

#### 4. *Promise*

Beginning with Abraham, God began to work in the world through one specific people-group – the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is based on the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12.

## 5. *Law*

Still working through the people-group now known as “Israel,” God gave specific, detailed laws in the Mosaic Covenant that were to mark this people out as distinct and separate from the rest of the nations (the Gentiles). Yet, Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles.

## 6. *Grace (or Church)*

The Mosaic Covenant came to an end at the cross and God began administering His affairs through a new group called “the Church” or “the Body of Christ.” This new group consists entirely of individuals redeemed by faith in Christ who come from all the various people-groups in the world. In the Church there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

## 7. *Kingdom*

The final dispensation will be the Kingdom of the Messiah, a 1,000 year period of time under the direct rule of Jesus Christ who will administer a perfect kingdom of peace and righteousness, such as the world has never seen. At the end of the kingdom, the Son will hand over rule to the Father as all creation enters in to the eternal state.

### 3 What are the principles of interpretation required for Dispensationalism?

Lesson 1 presented the centrality and importance of a consistently literal interpretation to Dispensationalism. In this lesson we want to explain exactly what that means. There are certain principles that guide a consistently literal interpretation. These must be observed without wavering if one is to arrive at a correct understanding of the Scriptures.

#### Literal interpretation

It may sound repetitive to say that “Literal Interpretation” is a principle of “Literal Interpretation”! But the label “literal” is easily misunderstood and needs to be defined and explained. There are two popular misconceptions about what literal interpretation means. In the first place, when we use the word “literal” today, most people think this means *literal* as opposed to *figurative*. But this is not the case. When used to describe this method of interpretation “literal” is used as opposed to “spiritual” or “allegorical” (see lesson 1). And this brings us to the second misconception; many Christians assume that a “spiritual interpretation” is good, simply because it is “spiritual.” But this fails to understand what is meant by a “spiritual interpretation.” In Lesson 1 we spoke of how the ancient Greeks developed a non-literal method of interpreting their sacred writings in order to avoid the embarrassment of the immoral behavior of their gods. Through the influence of the famous philosopher Plato, the Greeks had adopted a belief known as *dualism*. According to dualism there are two eternally existing, opposing realms: the realm of the physical and the realm of the spiritual. According to the dualistic Greeks, the physical world we live in is something of a cheap imitation of the real world – a spiritual world – in which the gods live. Along with this idea went the idea that things associated with the physical world were evil; whereas things associated with the spiritual world were good. When applied to interpretation, they said that a normal, straightforward reading of a text was part of this physical world and was meant to point us to a deeper spiritual meaning. So, the non-literal, allegorical interpretation was called the “spiritual” interpretation. This is confusing to many Christians, because we tend to use the word “spiritual” to mean something else. To Christians, “spiritual” means something like “Godly,” “holy,” and “pure.” But when applied to a method of interpretation, “spiritual” means taking the words of a text and treating them as if they were merely a metaphor or allegory for some meaning obscured or hidden behind the literal text.

When the early church first started using the Greek method of spiritual interpretation it was limited to the region around Alexandria Egypt. Two of the influential teachers from this area were Clement of Alexandria and Origen. According to Dr. Zuck,

Clement taught that the Mosaic prohibitions against eating swine, hawks, eagles, and ravens (Lev. 11:7, 13–19) represent respectively unclean lust for food, injustice, robbery, and greed. In the feeding of the 5,000 (Luke 9:10–17) the two fish represent Greek philosophy... [And Origen taught that] in Jesus’ triumphal entry the donkey represented the Old Testament, its colt depicted the New Testament, and the two apostles pictured the moral and mystic senses of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, the mother church in Jerusalem continued to be influenced by their Jewish pastors who continued to practice a literal interpretation. All that changed, however, when the Roman Emperor Hadrian expelled the Jews from Jerusalem in AD 135. From that time on all the bishops of the Jerusalem church had Greek names, and they were strongly influenced by Greek thinking.

So “literal interpretation” means a straightforward, normal reading of the text. It is in opposition to “spiritual” or “allegorical interpretation.” However, literal interpretation includes the realization that normal language employs the use of figures of speech. Literal interpretation does not rule out the acknowledgment that there is figurative language used in the Bible. This is simply a normal use of language. If I say to you that it’s raining cats and dogs outside, you don’t suspect that there are felines and canines descending out of the clouds! In English we use this figure of speech to mean that it’s raining heavily, and everyone understands this figure of speech. It is a *figurative* use of language, but it is *normal*, and it is considered to be included in *literal* interpretation. Likewise, when the psalmist wrote, “*I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears*” (Psalm 6:6), we easily understand that he was referring to intense sorrow and many tears. Or, when Jesus said, “*I am the door of the sheep*” (John 10:7), He meant that He served the same purpose as a door, namely, that of allowing both entrance and exit.

Dispensationalism is based on the belief that the promises made to the Jewish people are to be understood literally, not applied allegorically to the Church. Let’s take one such example. Isaiah prophesied about a future glorious day for the city of Jerusalem:

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 36.

Isaiah 60:10–21 <sup>10</sup> And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. <sup>11</sup> Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that *men* may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and *that* their kings *may be* brought. <sup>12</sup> For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, *those* nations shall be utterly wasted. <sup>13</sup> The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. <sup>14</sup> The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. <sup>15</sup> Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through *thee*, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. <sup>16</sup> Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD *am* thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. <sup>17</sup> For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. <sup>18</sup> Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. <sup>19</sup> The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. <sup>20</sup> Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. <sup>21</sup> Thy people also *shall be* all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.

A literal reading of this passage leads to eleven observations about the future Jerusalem:

1. Jerusalem will be an actual city with walls built by Gentiles, 10.
2. Jerusalem's future condition will be a result of God's mercy on the city, 10b.
3. The gates of Jerusalem will remain open day and night, 11.
4. God will bring judgment on the nations that do not serve Jerusalem, 12.
5. Beautiful trees from foreign nations will beautify the temple there, 13.
6. Former enemies will worship the Lord there, 14.
7. Jerusalem will become an eternal city of rejoicing, 15.
8. Jerusalem will be enriched by the tribute brought from all the Gentile nations, 16-17.
9. Jerusalem will no longer experience violence, 18.
10. Neither the sun nor the moon will need to shine there, 19-20.
11. The Jewish people will be righteous and will fully inhabit the borders of the Promised Land, 21.

Covenant theologians either try to make this fit some historical description of Jerusalem or spiritualize the passage, making it into a reference to heaven and the experience of spiritual blessings that Christians will have there. But Dispensationalism takes the words at face value and realize that there has never been a time in history when Jerusalem fit this description, nor can these words possibly refer to heaven. Rather, this is a description of the future millennial kingdom when Jerusalem will be the capital of the world.

### Single meaning / authorial intent

Picture this in your mind: A group of Christians has met together in a home for a Bible study; folding chairs have been arranged around the living room; the host has provided some tasty refreshments; and the leader has led in the opening prayer. At this point the leader addresses the group and says,

“Tonight our study will be from Isaiah chapter 60, beginning with verse 10.”

Upon which, he proceeds to read,

“And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee.”

The leader continues,

“Now, as you think about this verse, let's go around the circle and have each one share what this verse means to you.”

This is not what I call a “Bible study”; this is what I call “communal ignorance”! But it *is* a popular method of studying the Bible. Perhaps the biggest problem with it (among many), is that it implies that there may be multiple appropriate meanings to a text. Let's be very clear about this: A Bible text may have many applications, but it has only one interpretation. The single meaning of a text must be determined on the basis of what the original author intended it to mean. If a newspaper reporter wrote, “1,500 people met on the steps of City Hall today to oppose the new tax increase,” we would not understand it to mean that 2,000 people had met in the city park to witness the world's largest banana split! Texts have meaning, and the meaning is to be determined by what the original author intended. Based on that single meaning, we may be able to determine multiple

applications to our lives, but the application must be based on a proper understanding of the single meaning of the text. Too often, in our haste to make the Bible relevant to our lives, we skip the work of determining the *meaning* of the text, and go right to trying to determine the *application*.

There are actually some academics who argue for the legitimacy of multiple meanings for written texts. This theory of linguistics is known as the “Reader Response Theory.” One area where we see this played out in American life is in how some legal experts interpret the U.S. Constitution. They view it as a “fluid” or “living” document. By this, they are saying that the meaning of the Constitution can change from what its authors originally intended. This kind of legal reasoning is used to try to justify certain interpretations of the Constitution that run contrary to a “Strict Constitutionalist” approach. Well, much the same thing happens when it comes to the Bible. There are strict literalists who hold to a single meaning of the Bible, and there are those who believe that the Bible is a “living document” whose meaning can change in different times and cultures.

While most Covenant theologians would agree in principle with the notion of single meaning, when it comes to certain Scriptures, especially those dealing with Israel and the future kingdom, they will apply multiple meanings to these texts. For example, what is the throne of David? The angel Gabriel told Mary that Jesus “shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: <sup>33</sup> And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32–33). Does this mean that Jesus will sit on a literal throne in Jerusalem ruling over the nation of Israel (the “house of Jacob”)? Or, does it mean that He will sit on a heavenly throne ruling in the hearts of Christians who have trusted Him as Savior? Can it mean both of these things? No. It can’t mean both of these things. It means only what the angel intended for Mary to understand by these words. That was undoubtedly based on what Mary would have understood from the Old Testament Scriptures, specifically the Davidic Covenant recorded in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89. This covenant promised that Israel’s Messiah would come from the descendants of David and that he would rule over the nation of Israel. But I can guarantee you that at Christmas time one can hear plenty of sermons insisting that a second meaning can be given to Gabriel’s words.

Another example of how this principle distinguishes Dispensationalism from Covenant Theology involves the question of who the people known as “Israel” are? The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 9:6, “... they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel.” This is routinely used by Covenant Theologians to claim that the “true Israel” is someone other than those physically descended from Israel. In other words, they believe that the Church is the true Israel of God, and that therefore the promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament have been transferred to the Church. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, maintain that “Israel” cannot mean two different things, and that one must determine the meaning of “Israel” on the basis of how Paul intended the Roman church to understand it. By examining the previous context in Romans 9, it is easy to determine what Paul’s intended meaning was. In verses 3-5 he wrote,

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: <sup>4</sup> Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service *of God*, and the promises; <sup>5</sup> Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

It is really quite obvious to an impartial observer that Paul intended the term “Israel” to refer to those physically descended from Israel. So, if that’s the case, then what did he mean in verse 6? What we see in verse 6 is not a *replacement* of Israel with someone else, but a *narrowing* within Israel. In Romans chapter 11, Paul will elaborate on the subject of the “remnant” of Israel (see Rom. 11:5). What Paul is saying in Romans 9:6 is that within the broad scope of the totality of those physically descended from Israel there is a narrower body of Jews who have exercised faith in the Messiah. God’s faithfulness to Israel is such that there will always be a remnant of Jews who are rightly related to God by faith. Paul was an example of one who belonged to that remnant (see Romans 11:1). Ultimately, the promises God has made to Israel will be realized by *believing Jews*. At the Second Coming of Christ, God will do a miraculous work of salvation in Israel and “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).

### Contextual consistency

There is no greater principle of interpretation than this. Any text of Scripture must be understood based on how it is used in its context. This means that one must consider what goes before and what comes after the text under consideration. Here’s an interesting example:

Zechariah 13:6 And *one* shall say unto him, What *are* these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, *Those* with which I was wounded *in* the house of my friends.

This verse might very easily be taken to be a prophecy of the first coming of Christ. After all, the same prophet, just one chapter earlier, in Zechariah 12:10, had spoken of the piercing of the Messiah. However, the context preceding Zechariah 13:6 informs us differently:

Zechariah 13:2–6 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, *that* I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land. <sup>3</sup> And it shall come to pass, *that* when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth. <sup>4</sup> And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: <sup>5</sup> But he shall say, I *am* no prophet, I *am* an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth. <sup>6</sup> And *one* shall say unto him, What *are* these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, *Those* with which I was wounded *in* the house of my friends.

The context makes it clear that the one wounded in this passage was a false prophet, not the Messiah. Context is often a crucial determiner of the correct meaning of a text.

Earlier in this lesson we showed how the context preceding Romans 9:6 determines how the term “Israel” is to be understood in that text.

Consistent literal interpretation of the Bible will tenaciously stick to these principles: Literal Interpretation, Single Meaning / Authorial Intent, and Contextual Consistency.

## 4 How does Dispensationalism inform us about Israel? – Part 1

Much confusion exists today about how Israel fits into the program of God. There is also much confusion over how the Church relates to Israel. Dispensationalism does much to clear up this confusion. In order to understand the distinction between Israel and the Church, it is important that we examine in more detail the nature of Israel's relationship to God. This relationship is based on a series of covenants that God has made with Israel.

### Covenants: Theological and Biblical

In this lesson we will outline the nature and content of these covenants. Romans 9:4, speaking of Israel, says, "Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." According to this verse, there are "covenants" that pertain to Israel. What are those covenants? We should be careful at this point to contrast the *Biblical* covenants from the so-called *theological* covenants.

#### 1. *Theological Covenants (Covenant Theology)*

Covenant Theology is a theological system that developed in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and was an outgrowth of the Reformation. Reformed theologians began to think about the doctrine of salvation in terms of two covenants – a "Covenant of Works" and a "Covenant of Grace." These covenants are not specifically named or described in any one place in Scripture, but they are deduced from the teachings of early reformed theologians. Some covenant theologians include a third covenant as well – the "Covenant of Redemption." Some of the theologians that were instrumental in developing Covenant Theology include: Swiss theologian Johannes Wollebius (1586–1629), the English Puritan William Ames (1576–1633), German theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), and Dutch theologian Hermann Witsius (1636–1708). The first major creed that embraced Covenant Theology was the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) which is the doctrinal statement for the Presbyterian Church.

**The Covenant of Works.** According to Covenant Theology, the parties to this covenant were God and Adam. The covenant was made in the Garden of Eden and promised eternal life to Adam, conditioned upon his obedience to God's commands. Failure to obey God's commands would result in death for Adam, as well as for his offspring. The general notion of the Covenant of Works roughly parallels the arrangement that God made with Adam in Genesis 2:16–17, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Along with this covenant often goes a related idea from Covenant Theology – "federal headship." Federal headship is the notion that Adam was appointed as federal head for the human race, so that the way he would respond to the Covenant of Works would represent the whole human race. Thus, if Adam disobeyed, his sin would be imputed to the entire human race, since he was their appointed representative. Scriptural support for the idea of federal headship is usually sought in the way covenant theologians interpret Romans 5:12–13.

**The Covenant of Grace.** Since Adam did not obey God's commands, and all humanity came under the condemnation of God, a second covenant is postulated by Covenant Theology. This covenant would provide salvation for God's elect, those whom He would choose from fallen humanity. This salvation would be based, not on works, but on God's grace. Most covenant theologians would say that the parties to this covenant were either God and Adam (after the fall), or God and fallen humanity. But some covenant theologians say that the parties were God and Abraham. The Covenant of Grace becomes the controlling feature to explain all of God's dealings with man after the fall and is seen as the central message of the Bible. The Biblical "New Covenant" is identified with the Covenant of Grace, but the Mosaic Covenant is also seen as an outworking of the Covenant of Grace.

The idea of federal headship is involved in this covenant as well; Christ, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead, was appointed by the Father to be the federal Head of all the elect, so that Christ's work on the cross can be imputed to all the elect. Scriptural support for this aspect of federal headship is sought from Romans 5:15–20.

**The Covenant of Redemption.** Some covenant theologians include this third covenant in their theological system. Others would see the details of this covenant as included implicitly in the Covenant of Grace. The parties to this covenant are seen as either two or three of the Persons of the Triune Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The covenant is said to have been made in eternity as part of the divine decree (Eph. 1:11). According to this covenant, the Father agreed to elect from mankind some for salvation; the Son agreed to perform the work necessary to redeem the elect; and in the view of some covenant theologians, the Holy Spirit agreed to apply the work of redemption to the elect.

**Evaluation of the Theological Covenants.** Though these covenants may be helpful in thinking about certain theological truths, they are not explicitly stated anywhere in Scripture, and they are not specifically named “covenants” anywhere in the Bible. The Bible does specifically name several agreements as “covenants,” but the theological “covenants” are not among those named as such in Scripture. Since they are theological deductions, they are only as good as the theological presuppositions that lie behind them. A Christian should carefully examine all that the Scriptures teach about each of these covenants before accepting or rejecting their truthfulness, either in part or in whole. Since there are actual Biblical covenants that go by the name “covenant,” perhaps it would be better to refer to these theological “covenants” by some other terminology. But, since they are so entrenched in the vocabulary of reformed theology, it seems that we are stuck with these labels.

## 2. *Biblical Covenants (Dispensationalism)*

When thinking of the Biblical covenants that pertain to Israel, there are five specific covenants made by God that are named in Scripture: the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15:18), the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19:5), the Land Covenant (Deuteronomy 29:1), the Davidic Covenant (Psalm 89:3, 28, 34, 39), and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33). There is one other covenant made by God that is named in Scripture that stands out in distinction from these others, that is the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:8-17). The Noahic Covenant is one made universally with all mankind, since it was made before there was a people singled out from Abraham’s descendants. It forms an important part of our understanding of the Dispensation of Human Government, but since it is not specifically related to Israel, we will exclude it from our consideration of the Biblical Covenants in this chapter.

Here is an important distinction to keep in mind: Of the five Biblical covenants that pertain to Israel, four are *unconditional* covenants that depend solely on the faithfulness of God for their fulfillment (Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New). The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, is *conditional*, and depended for its fulfillment upon the faithfulness of God’s people (Israel) to keep the stipulations laid upon them by the terms of the covenant. Two important features of covenants are *promises* and *stipulations*. A promise is simply a pledge made by one party that he will do something to benefit the other party. A stipulation is an obligation laid on one party by the other party. The unconditional covenants are marked by promises made by God; the conditional covenant (Mosaic), though it contains promises (for example, Exodus 19:5, 6; Leviticus 26:9-12), is marked by an abundance of stipulations.

**The Abrahamic Covenant.** This unconditional covenant was made with Abraham and his descendants. It chiefly involves God’s promise to give to Abraham and his descendants the geographical territory that lies within certain defined boundaries (Genesis 15:18-21, the Euphrates River in the north, the Nile River in the south, the Mediterranean Sea on the west, the Dead Sea on the east; compare Ezekiel 47:13-23). This is the land that God unconditionally granted to Abraham and his descendants. The covenant was reconfirmed with Abraham’s descendants (Genesis 17:7) through Isaac, not Ishmael (Genesis 17:19-21) and through Jacob, not Esau (Genesis 28:13-15; compare Exodus 2:24).

A subtle, but important, distinction should be made at this point. That is the distinction between a “covenant” and a “promise.” This may seem like an insignificant distinction to some, but it is a distinction that the Bible makes (Romans 9:4), and it becomes important later when we try to understand how the covenants relate to those who are not direct parties to the covenant. For example, how do Gentiles or the Church relate to the Abrahamic (or New) Covenant? We will pursue this line of thought later. But, for now, consider the fact that before God entered into a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15), He had already established a relationship with Abraham by *promise*. Discussions of the Abrahamic Covenant often begin by examining Genesis 12:1-3. This passage contains promises that God made to Abraham, and they include a reference to the land that would later be granted in the covenant, but Genesis 12 is not technically a “covenant.” It does, however, provide an important foundation for the covenant that would be enacted years later.

Genesis 12:1–3 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: <sup>2</sup> And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: <sup>3</sup> And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

The promises fall into three categories:

- National: “I will make of thee a great nation.”
- Personal: “I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.”
- Universal: “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Some of these promises have been fulfilled in part or in whole. The personal promises were fulfilled during the lifetime of Abraham, and of course, there continues to attach to Abraham a great name even today among those who belong to the three great monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The national promises were experienced especially from the period of the Judges until the Babylonian Captivity, but will see a renewed and fuller experience in the fulfillment of the Land, Davidic,



and New Covenants. We also should not fail to notice, that in addition to these three categories of promises, there is reference to the land in this passage. God's message to Abraham begins with His instruction that Abraham should go "unto a land that I will shew thee." But the details about this land are kept from him until a later date (Gen. 13:14-17, and in the covenant itself in Gen. 15). The universal promises have been experienced by Gentile peoples from Abraham's day right down to the present time. There is great blessing promised to extend to those who show favor to the descendants of Abraham, but trouble will unfailingly follow those who oppose Abraham's descendants.

**The Mosaic Covenant.** This is the lone conditional covenant that God made with Israel. Its essence is expressed in Scripture from Exodus 19 through Deuteronomy 28. This covenant contains both promises and stipulations. As mentioned above, the stipulations are the main focal point of this covenant and constitute the reason it is known as a *conditional* covenant. The abundance of stipulations is also the reason why this covenant is alternately known simply as "the law" or "the law of Moses." It's common for people to think of the law as the equivalent of the Ten Commandments, but the law is much more extensive than that. The Jews traditionally codify the law into 613 commandments, 365 negative ("thou shalt not") corresponding to the number of days in the solar year, and 248 positive ("thou shalt"), a number ascribed to the number of bones and main organs in the human body. This covenant is the controlling feature for most of the Old Testament. As long as it was in force, Israel could enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land only as long as they were obedient to these stipulations. The prophets of Israel frequently called Israel to return from their apostasy and come back to the stipulations of the Law.

According to the New Testament, the Law was designed to be temporary. The apostle Paul elaborated on this feature in Galatians 3 where he contrasts the Mosaic Covenant with the Abrahamic Covenant. After concluding that the law was not able to justify sinful man, Paul asks the question, "Wherefore then *serveth* the law?" (Galatians 3:19). His answer speaks of its temporary nature: "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Transgressions threatened to destroy the covenant nation and thus wipe out the promised line through whom the Messiah would come. The Law was added at the time of Moses in order to preserve the nation of Israel, keeping it separate and distinct from the Gentile nations until God could bring the Messiah (the promised seed) into the world. From God's perspective, the Law ceased to be in force after the cross: Galatians 3:24-25 "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." <sup>25</sup> But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster," Colossians 2:14 "[He blotted] out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;" Ephesians 2:15 "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace."

**The Land Covenant.** In earlier dispensational works this was referred to as the "Palestinian Covenant." The term "Palestine" has been used since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century to refer to the ancient land of Israel, but this is due to the Roman Emperor Hadrian's desire to insult the Jews following their defeat at the hands of the Romans in AD 135. Hadrian took the name from the ancient enemies of Israel, the Philistines (In Semitic languages, like Hebrew, the letter that sounds like our "P" can also be pronounced "Ph"). Today, Arab inhabitants of the land refer to themselves as "Palestinians," even though they have no racial ties to the ancient Philistines. These modern "Palestinians" claim that they, and not the Jews, have exclusive right to live in the land. For this reason, many dispensationalists are reluctant to continue using the term "Palestine." For this reason, we will refer to this covenant as the "Land Covenant."

Even with the above explanation, the title "Land Covenant" may be a bit of a misnomer. The actual definition of the land is what the Abrahamic Covenant is about. The main feature of the "Land Covenant" is that God promises to regather Israel from worldwide dispersion in the last days so as to bring them back into the Promised Land. This covenant is identified as one that is separate from the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy 29:1, "These *are* the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb" ("Mount Horeb" was an alternate name for "Mount Sinai"). This verse speaks of an additional covenant, one that is "beside," or "in addition to" the Mosaic Covenant. This is what we are calling the "Land Covenant." Deuteronomy 29 lays out the foundation for the covenant, and chapter 30 spells out the promises of the covenant. The foundation in chapter 29 foresees a future generation of Israelites that will live in a foreign land while the land of Israel lies desolate (Deuteronomy 29:22-28). This should be equated with the prediction of worldwide dispersion foreseen also in Deuteronomy 28:64-68. The promise of the covenant is that the LORD will regather the Israelites from all over the world and bring them back into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Deuteronomy 30:3 promises, "... then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee."

The Land Covenant is a major theme of much of the Old Testament, and even certain portions of the New Testament. Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14) is all about the fulfillment of this covenant. Jesus spoke of this worldwide regathering of Israel in His Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24:31, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Other significant passages dealing with the Land Covenant include Isaiah 11:11-16; 26:13-15; 27:12-13; 43:5-7; 66:20-22; Jeremiah 16:14-16; 23:3-8; 30:10-11; 31:8; Ezekiel 11:17-21; 20:34-38; 34:11-16; 39:35-39; Hosea 1:10-11; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:4-7; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zechariah 8:4-8.

Initial steps toward the fulfillment of the Land Covenant have been taken in the recent return of many Jews to the land of Israel and in the creation of the modern state of Israel. But there are still many more Jews in worldwide dispersion than there are Jews living in Israel itself. The fulfillment of this covenant awaits the Second Coming of Christ.

In the next lesson we will look at the Davidic and New Covenants, as well as how the covenants relate to Israel in the First Coming, their present experience, and the Second Coming of Christ.

## 5 How does Dispensationalism inform us about Israel? – Part 2

The last lesson introduced the subject of Israel's covenants. These covenants define Israel's relationship to God and give an outline of what God has planned for Israel in the last days. There are five of these covenants: The Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Land Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. We considered the first three of these in the last lesson. Now, let's consider the other two Biblical covenants.

**The Davidic Covenant.** This is a promise from God that the rightful king over Israel will always be someone from among David's descendants. Ultimately, this points to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Jesus had to come from David's lineage to qualify as the Messiah (Matthew 1:1, 6; Romans 1:3; Revelation 22:16). The historical account of this covenant is recorded in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 and 1 Chronicles 17:9-11. The context for this covenant looks forward to a day when the LORD will give Israel peace from all her enemies. 1 Chronicles 17:9-10 says,

<sup>9</sup> Also I will ordain a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, and shall be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning, <sup>10</sup> And since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over my people Israel. Moreover I will subdue all thine enemies. Furthermore I tell thee that the LORD will build thee an house.

These promises of peace were not fulfilled in David's or Solomon's lifetimes; later prophets understood them to refer to a future period pointing to the Messianic kingdom (cf. Isaiah 9:7; 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16). The actual promise of the covenant itself is expressed in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 (1 Chronicles 17:11-14),

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

This promise involves an eternal kingdom and an eternal throne. It also guarantees that the king appointed by God to be over Israel will always be from the lineage of David. In David's immediate future, this meant that the kingship would not be taken from his family, as had happened with King Saul. The kingship passed from David to his son, Solomon, and it was Solomon who built "an house for my name." But ultimately, it was not Solomon who would fulfill this covenant, but the Messiah. In fact, 1 Chronicles 17:11 makes it clear that this promise looked beyond Solomon to a future ruler. 1 Chronicles 17:11 says, "I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom." The expression, "shall be of thy sons" is literally, "shall be from thy sons." As the great Old Testament commentators, Keil and Delitzsch observed, "According to ... the linguistically correct translation, the words cannot be referred to Solomon at all, because Solomon was not a descendant of David's sons, but of David himself."<sup>4</sup>

Neither 2 Samuel 7 nor 1 Chronicles 17 actually uses the word "covenant" to describe this promise, but Psalm 89 is an extended discussion of the matter which uses the word "covenant" four times to refer to it (verses 3, 28, 34, 39). The 89<sup>th</sup> Psalm was written by Ethan the Ezrahite in the time of Solomon and focuses on the eternal nature of the Davidic Covenant. Being an eternal covenant also requires that it be understood as an unconditional covenant. There are no stipulations tied to this covenant. A literal interpretation of Psalm 89 insists that this covenant is fulfilled with respect to the nation of Israel, and not the Church. Nevertheless, Covenant Theology interprets this as being fulfilled by Jesus' presently being seated at the right hand of God in heaven. Thus, in Covenant Theology, the Davidic kingdom is now being fulfilled in the Church. Covenant Theology must resort to a spiritualizing interpretation of the Davidic throne, transferring it from Jerusalem to heaven. Dispensationalism sees this fulfilled only at the Second Coming of Christ when Jesus will literally sit on the Davidic throne in an earthly Jerusalem.

An attempt to find a compromise between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology was made in the late 1980s by several theologians who came up with a position they called "Progressive Dispensationalism." We will have more to say about Progressive Dispensationalism in Lesson 9, but let us say here, that Progressive Dispensationalism departs from historical Dispensationalism by agreeing with Covenant Theology that Christ's Davidic reign began at the ascension. Progressive Dispensationalists do believe in a future millennial reign of Christ, but they believe that the Davidic reign has already begun partially, and that there should not be as sharp a distinction between Israel and the Church as historical Dispensationalism has insisted upon.

**The New Covenant.** As Christians, this is the covenant we probably hear about more than any other. We give the name "New Testament," which means the same thing as "New Covenant," to the name of the last 27 books of our Bible (a designation first made in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century by Tertullian). Also, when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we frequently make reference to

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 521.

Luke 22:20, “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” First and foremost, however, we should realize that the New Covenant is a covenant made by God with Israel. The first reference in Scripture to the New Covenant is found in Jeremiah 31:31–34,

<sup>31</sup> Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: <sup>32</sup> Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: <sup>33</sup> But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Note that verse 31 specifically names “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah” as the parties to this covenant. As with the other covenants, this covenant is Israel’s (Romans 9:4). Ezekiel 36:24–38 is another major passage probably referring to the New Covenant, though it does not use the exact phrase, “New Covenant.” Here are some of the main features of the New Covenant:

a) Unlike the Mosaic Covenant, the New Covenant is unconditional.

Jeremiah 31:32 specifically states that the New Covenant will not be “according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake.” The covenant that was made when they came out of Egypt, of course, was the Mosaic Covenant. Israel could break this covenant because it was a conditional covenant – remember the 613 stipulations. But the New Covenant is said to be *unlike* the Mosaic. It cannot be broken, because it is an *unconditional* covenant. It consists of promises, but without stipulations. The Mosaic Covenant consisted of law which was written on tablets of stone imposed on the Israelites from without. By contrast, the New Covenant, while involving God’s Law, has the law internalized, written on the hearts of the Israelites. Obedience to God’s law, rather than being a stipulation, is part of how this covenant is fulfilled. It is a work that God performs in the hearts of the Israelites, rather than a work that the Israelites attempt to perform in their own strength.

b) The New Covenant gives universal, national regeneration.

The LORD promised in Jeremiah 31:33, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts,” and in verse 34, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” This speaks of inward renewal of the heart. This regeneration will be so thorough as to be nation-wide and include every single Israelite. Further description of this national regeneration is given in Ezekiel 36:25–27,

<sup>25</sup> Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.

Cleansing from sin, a new heart, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will all characterize the New Covenant.

c) The New Covenant is tied closely to the Abrahamic and Land Covenants.

Notice how the New Covenant passages speak of Israel’s experience as a regathered nation in the Promised Land:

- Jeremiah 31:4–5 “I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel. ... Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat *them* as common things.”
- Jeremiah 31:8 “Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, *and* with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither.”

- Jeremiah 31:10–11 “Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd *doth* his flock. <sup>11</sup> For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of *him that was* stronger than he.”
- Jeremiah 31:38–40 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the city shall be built to the LORD from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. <sup>39</sup> And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath. <sup>40</sup> And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, *shall be* holy unto the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever.”
- Ezekiel 36:24 “For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.”
- Ezekiel 36:28 “And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers.”

Covenant theologians generally claim that the New Covenant is being fulfilled spiritually by the Church, and that the New Covenant is simply the Covenant of Grace. In their view the Church has replaced Israel. Covenant theologians cannot hold this view, however, without spiritualizing the portions of the covenant that have national and land implications.

## National Israel at the First Coming of Christ

### 1. *Returned from Babylonian Captivity, but not worldwide dispersion*

Moses foretold two departures of Israel from the Promised Land. The first consisted of captivity and exile in a foreign land (Deuteronomy 28:49-62), which was fulfilled in the Assyrian (Northern Kingdom) and Babylonian (Southern Kingdom) captivities. The second consisted of worldwide dispersion (Deuteronomy 28:63-68), which was fulfilled after AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Christ’s first coming occurred between these two departures from the land. Many covenant theologians claim that the restoration of Israel was fulfilled by the return of the Jews from Babylonian Captivity. But this fails to take into consideration the second dispersion. The Jews who returned from Babylon were indeed looking for the Messiah, though many of them thought that the Messiah would be merely a human political figure. But even if they had accepted Jesus at His first coming, this second worldwide dispersion would have been necessary, even if it had been brief – like for the seven-year Tribulation Period. Isaiah prophesied that when Messiah comes to establish the kingdom it would be when the LORD would recover his people for the *second* time. Isaiah 11:11 “And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.”

### 2. *All elements of a kingdom present except for a qualified Davidic King*

Immediately prior to the first coming of Christ, apart from the necessity of a second dispersion from the land, nearly all the essential elements necessary for the Messianic Kingdom were in place: The people were living once again in the land promised to Abraham (Abrahamic Covenant); and the temple was once again functioning on Mt. Zion. The people of Israel may have felt that their return from Babylonian Captivity had fulfilled the promise of restoration (Land Covenant). The only missing element was the presentation to Israel of the Messiah, descended from David.

### 3. *Gospel of the kingdom and repentance*

When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, he announced the one remaining requirement for the Kingdom, the arrival of the Messiah (Matthew 3:1-3). This would fulfill the Davidic Covenant, but there was still one thing necessary before the Kingdom could be established by the Messiah – *national regeneration* (New Covenant). The call by both John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) to repentance made it clear that national regeneration had not yet occurred. By calling the people of Israel to repentance (a “change of mind” about their relationship with God) they were being summoned to confess their sins and accept God’s promise of forgiveness by faith. If Israel had responded positively, they might have had the Kingdom at that time. But because the King was rejected, the Kingdom was postponed for a future time. In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew Jesus gave seven parables presenting the “mysteries” of the Kingdom. The word “mystery” refers to something that was not previously revealed.

The primary mystery revealed in these parables was that, though the Messiah had appeared and been presented to Israel, the Kingdom would be postponed until a later date.

## National Israel at the present time

### *1. Partial return from worldwide dispersion*

Following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Jews went into worldwide dispersion in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28:63-68. Over the centuries a few Jews remained in the Land, just as some had remained during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. However, beginning in about the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Jews began returning from Eastern Europe in what is known as the modern “Zionist” movement. The numbers increased throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and now 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The modern State of Israel was established in 1948. Obviously, this is not a fulfillment of the Land Covenant, since many Jews continue to live in the diaspora (i.e. those living outside the Land of Israel). But the prophet Ezekiel foresaw that the return would consist of two phases. In his Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14). In the initial phase there would be a gathering of Jews without the breath of life from God (Ezekiel 37:7-8). After that, a second phase would involve God’s breath coming into them and imparting life (Ezekiel 37:9-10). This second phase corresponds to God’s fulfilling the New Covenant with Israel. The present day Zionist movement corresponds to the initial phase of Israel coming into the land, but without the benefit of spiritual life that can result only from the New Covenant.

### *2. Still a need for repentance on the part of Israel*

Since modern day Israel has still not experienced the fulfillment of the New Covenant nationally, there is still as much a need for a call to repentance as there was at Christ’s first coming. In the future Tribulation Period prophets of God will once again come to Israel and call them to repentance announcing that the Kingdom is near (see Revelation 11:1-6, 15; 12:10).

## National Israel at the Second Coming of Christ

### *1. The Land Covenant will be completely fulfilled.*

The Jews who remain among the Gentile nations will be brought back to Israel.

Isaiah 11:11–14 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. <sup>12</sup> And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. <sup>13</sup> The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. <sup>14</sup> But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

### *2. The Davidic King will arrive.*

Jesus will come to take His rightful place on the throne of David. The book of Revelation presents Jesus as the Root and Offspring of David (Revelation 5:5-6; 22:16). This is the same one who comes as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-19).

3. *Repentance will be accomplished through the New Covenant.*

When the New Covenant is fulfilled in national Israel at the Second Coming, all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25-27).

Ezekiel 11:19–20 And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: <sup>20</sup>That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

4. *All the unconditional covenants will be fulfilled.*

The Second Coming of Christ will see the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Land, David, and New Covenants. Jesus will rule as King on the throne of David over a saved Israel in the land promised to Abraham and his descendants.

## 6 How does Dispensationalism inform us about the Church? Part 1

Lesson 1 presented how the Church is distinct from Israel. Covenant Theology sees Israel and the Church as essentially the same thing. Because of this, Covenant Theology, as well as other non-dispensational theologies (such as Roman Catholicism), tend to see the Church in terms that are derived from the Old Testament and the Gospels. Dispensationalism, on the other hand, understands that the Church was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets (Ephesians 3:3-6). Therefore, Dispensationalism derives its understanding of the Church primarily from the New Testament Epistles and the Book of Acts. To a lesser extent, a few key passages in the Gospels have reference to the Church, but most of the subject matter in the Gospels concerns Jesus' ministry to national Israel.

At this point I should say something about how the Old Testament and the New Testament relate to each other. What I've said in the opening paragraph to this lesson has led some to accuse dispensationalists of "throwing out the Old Testament," or "throwing out the Gospels." This charge is, of course, nonsense. Dispensationalists believe as much as anyone that "all Scripture is ... profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16) and that with regard to the events of the Old Testament, "... all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). But there are obviously some things written in the Old Testament and the Gospels that all Christians agree do not apply directly to the Church. For instance, Christians do not worship at a temple or offer sacrifices. Neither do they forbid the wearing of clothing that has mixed fabrics (Leviticus 19:19). Likewise, no Christians take the commissioning of Christ's apostles in Matthew 10:5-6 ("Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.") as binding upon the Church today. Many dispensationalists have found the following axiom to be helpful: "All of the Bible is written *for* us, but not all of the Bible is written *to* us." There are eternally abiding principles underlying every part of the Bible that are as relevant today as ever. But specific instruction addressed directly to the Church is found principally in the New Testament Epistles.

### Distinct from Israel

Understanding that the Church is distinct from Israel, allows us to avoid many of the errors that arise from trying to make the Church correspond to Old Testament standards.

#### 1. *Supersessionism ("Replacement Theology")*

Supersessionism was mentioned in Lesson 1. This teaching is based in large measure on a faulty interpretation of Matthew 21:43,

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Supersessionists take this verse to mean that because of Israel's rejection of Jesus at His first coming, the kingdom has been taken away from Israel and given to the Gentiles (the Church). When Matthew 21:43 is read with supersessionist presuppositions, its meaning appears to be fairly straightforward, but the verse is not quite as straightforward as the supersessionist interpretation might suppose. This verse needs to be viewed in its context. The verse is Jesus' conclusion to the parable of the wicked tenants found in verses 33-41. According to this context, the kingdom is taken from the leaders of Israel, not the entire nation. The pronoun "you" ("The kingdom of God shall be taken from you...") clearly refers the chief priests and the elders of the people. The parable is one in a series of parables addressed to the chief priests and elders. This group of Jewish leaders had confronted Jesus when He entered the temple the day following the triumphal entry (Matthew 21:23). They desired to know the authority that justified Jesus' actions and words. Jesus' reply consisted in a counter-question regarding the authority of John (21:24-27) followed by a series of three parables (the parable of the two sons, 21:28-32; the parable of the wicked tenants, 21:33-41; and the parable of the marriage feast, 22:1-14). All three of these parables are addressed to the same group of leaders (21:28, 33; 22: 1). So, when Jesus said that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you," He was stating that the kingdom was being taken from the leaders of His day, not necessarily from the nation. Furthermore, the tenants in the parable cannot represent national Israel, since Israel is represented by the vineyard, not by the farmers, who stand for the leaders of Israel.

Jesus said that the kingdom would be given to a nation. Of the 39 occurrences of this word for nation in the Gospels, it nearly always refers to Israel when used in the singular (14 times, Matthew 21:43; Luke 7:5; 23:2; John 11:48, 50, 51, 52; 18:35). The only exception to this singular usage is in the expression, "nation will rise against nation" (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:10)



which involves a plural sense when understood as a phrase. It is inconceivable that Jesus would have referred to the kingdom being given to any nation other than Israel. His use of the singular almost certainly means that the kingdom is to be given to national Israel, but it is a future generation of Israel that will produce the fruits of the kingdom when it experiences the fulfillment of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

It is extremely questionable whether the term “nation” is a suitable term for the church. Some have countered that the term is used that way in 1 Peter 2:9, but there are two important observations to keep in mind about this particular verse: (1) 1 Peter is specifically addressed to Hebrew Christians. The expression “holy nation” is part of a quote taken from Exodus 19:6 which directly addressed the nation of Israel. The recipients of 1 Peter were the elect of the diaspora (literally “scattered seed”) of Israel (1 Peter 1:1), not saved Gentiles. So the term was more aptly used of them than it would have been in an epistle addressed to a church comprised mostly of Gentile believers. (2) 1 Peter 2:9 is not saying that the church is that holy nation referred to in Exodus 19:6; rather, Peter is applying a principle; namely, that God’s people should be a holy people (as in 1:16). The focus is on holiness, not nationhood. In the context of Exodus the people referred to were in fact a nation. Whether or not Peter’s readers are a nation is beside the point. The point is that God’s people should be a holy people. The term “nation” is used, not as a reference to the church, but as a reference to national Israel. The medieval concept of the church as a nation led to problems such as the Crusades, the accumulation of material wealth, and the abuse of power.

One other important observation about Matthew 21:43 here: To argue that the church is the nation that is now given the kingdom results in an absurdity, since the church is no more successful in bearing the fruits of the kingdom than Israel ever was. This is seen nowhere more clearly than in Jesus’ letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3. Jesus’ condemnation of the church’s works is nearly as condemnatory as He was of the Scribes and Pharisees. It would have been nearly impossible for Jesus’ hearers to understand his use of “nation” to refer to any nation other than Israel.

The nation to whom the kingdom of God will be given is none other than Israel, regathered in the last days, regenerated under the New Covenant, and reconstituted as a theocracy under the Messiah’s rule. Matthew’s Gospel, the Old Testament prophets, and the New Testament epistles all affirm that Israel’s status would be temporarily removed from them, only to be restored at a future date when the nation is spiritually revived. In the Old Testament this is seen quite clearly in the message of Hosea (especially Hos. 1:10-2:23; also Isaiah 66:5-13; Micah 4:6-8). The apostle Paul affirmed this same theme in Romans 11:11-15. Matthew also speaks of a future generation of Israel that will receive Jesus as her King (Matthew 24:34; 23:36-39).

The Church has not become the replacement heir of Israel’s promises. But the Church does have her own “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4), described also as “all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

## 2. *The Church in the Gospels (Red-letter theology)*

Most of what is recorded about Jesus in the Gospels concerns His presentation of the kingdom to Israel. For this reason, care must be exercised when trying to understand how Jesus’ words apply to the Church. This seems like a big problem to some Christians; although it needn’t be. However, because we refer to ourselves as “Christians” it seems reasonable to many of us that the words of Christ should form the major part of our faith. But this actually involves a potentially serious error. As Christians we are sometimes emotionally more attached to the words of Christ than we are to those found in the New Testament Epistles. However, because of the doctrine of progressive revelation, the later revelation (Epistles) should be understood as being clearer, more complete, and more relevant than earlier revelation. Overreliance on the words of Christ is sometimes referred to as “Red-letter theology” (because so many Bibles print the words of Christ in red letters).

The Church is only directly referred to in a few places in the Gospels. There are only three occurrence of the word “church” in the Gospels at all (Matthew 16:18, and twice in Matthew 18:17). Besides these three references, there are probably only two or three other direct references to the Church in the Gospels (John 4:21-23; chapters 13-17; possibly John 10:16). Of course this does not mean that the Gospels are of no use to the Church. As the inspired Word of God, they express the inerrant and authoritative Word of God every bit as much as any Old Testament book. There are binding principles that can be derived from the Words of Christ that we should apply to our lives. And, most importantly, the Gospels tell us of the redemptive work that Christ accomplished on the cross. But to take Christ’s words addressed to the nation of Israel and try to make them apply directly to the Church is to ignore an important dispensational distinction.

## 3. *Ministry of the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit’s ministry in the Church is unique to this present age. At least three aspects of the Holy Spirit’s ministry make the Church unique and different than Israel. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit had an important ministry in the Old Testament among the people of Israel, but there is both a heightening of that ministry, as well as the addition of new ministries in

His relationship to the Church. The Old Testament knew of both the Holy Spirit's indwelling (Genesis 41:38; Numbers 27:18; Daniel 4:8) and of His filling (Exodus 31:3; 35:31), but these were only known to have been true about a few select individuals, and the Holy Spirit's presence with some was only temporary (Numbers 11:16-17; 24:2; Judges 3:10; 1 Samuel 10:6; 16:14; Psalm 51:11).

In the Church, the Holy Spirit's relationship is to all believers, not just a select few, and it is a permanent relationship. In John 14:16-17 Jesus told His disciples,

I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; <sup>17</sup> *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

This was a promise of a greater ministry of the Holy Spirit than was known before. There are three particular ministries of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Church that make the Church unique and separate from Israel.

**1. The Permanent Indwelling of the Holy Spirit.** When Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit "dwelleth with you, and shall be in you," He was promising a greater work than was known among God's people in previous times. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is related to God's temple residing within individual believers' lives. 1 Corinthians 6:19, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" Jesus had spoken to the Samaritan woman of a coming time when the true worship of the Father would not be restricted to a physical temple, John 4:21-24,

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.

In the future millennial reign of Christ, there will once again be a temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-44; Isaiah 2:2-3; Zechariah 8:20-23). But under the current dispensation (administration) there is no physical temple appointed by God. Instead His Holy Spirit takes up residence in the life of each believer, so that each believer's body constitutes a holy temple, a place of worship. For other important verses related to the Holy Spirit's indwelling, see Romans 5:5; 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; John 7:37-39.

**2. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit.** We never read of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. This is a ministry of the Holy Spirit that was totally unknown to the Old Testament saint. When we come to the Gospels, we find that John the Baptist referred to it as a future work, Matthew 3:11, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire" (see also John 1:33). That the Baptism of the Holy Spirit never occurred during the public ministry of Christ is clear from Acts 1:4 spoken just before Christ's ascension, "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." The Baptism of the Holy Spirit first occurred on the Day of Pentecost as an initial act of forming the Church. Understanding that the word "baptism" literally means "immersion" helps us understand what happened. Though there were other phenomena, such as speaking in tongues, that accompanied that initial baptism of the Spirit, the essential work was that of immersing believers into the body of Christ. Paul affirmed to the Corinthian church that all believers are placed into the church by means of this same ministry, 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

**3. The Sealing of the Holy Spirit.** Seals were common features in the ancient world. They were usually either in the form of a signet rings or a stand-alone bulla. They had either inscriptions or some sort of symbolism engraved in them, so that when pressed into soft clay or wax, they would leave a distinct impression. People in Biblical times used these seals to place their mark of ownership on some item. Three passages speak of the Holy Spirit as the seal that God has placed on us (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:12-14; 4:30). The first two of these references also refer to the Holy Spirit as an "earnest" or "down payment." There is a cultural background to this down payment idea. In the first century, one could go to the market place, and make a down payment on an item. At this time, he would use his seal to put a mark of ownership on the item so that no one else would purchase it. At a later time, he would return to the market, make final payment and take the item home. Of course, our salvation has been paid in full by the death of Christ, but the idea behind the Holy Spirit's being an "earnest," is that God has purchased us through the death of Christ, then placed the seal of His ownership on us, and He will come to bring us to His home at some future date.

Two additional teachings involving the distinction between Israel and the Church are Sabbath Observance, and the Pre-Tribulational Rapture. These will be discussed in the next lesson.

## 7 How does Dispensationalism inform us about the Church? Part 2

In the last lesson, we began an examination of the ways in which the Church is distinct from Israel. This included a discussion of (a) supersessionism, (b) the Church in the Gospels, and (c) the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In addition, there are a couple of other features that highlight the uniqueness of the Church.

### 4. *Sabbath Observance*

Another key distinction between Israel and the Church involves Sabbath observance. Neglect in distinguishing between Israel and the Church has caused great confusion over the significance of the Sabbath. Traditional supersessionist thinking has caused many Christians to view Sunday as the “Christian Sabbath,” and that by going to church on Sunday, one is obeying the Third Commandment (as, for example, the Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. XXI). Others, taking a more literal interpretation of the Sabbath commandment, think that they must keep Saturday as the appropriate day of worship (Seventh Day Adventists, Seventh Day Baptists, and some Messianic congregations). Both of these positions have problems, and observance of proper dispensational distinctions helps us to think correctly about the Sabbath.

The very first reference in Scripture to the Sabbath is in connection with the creation week when God rested from His work of creation (Genesis 2:2-3). We are told that God rested on the seventh day (Saturday), but there is no indication from the text that Adam was ever told to rest on the seventh day. In fact, there is no indication anywhere that anyone other than God from Adam until Moses rested on the Sabbath Day. One may search the Scriptures in vain to find any reference to Sabbath observance by Seth, Methuselah, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. The next reference to the Sabbath is in Exodus 16:26-30 where Israel was commanded not to collect manna on the Sabbath, because it was to be considered a day of rest for them. One might reasonably ask, Had God previously given Sabbath observance as a commandment to men? Apparently not. Ezekiel 20:12 says that God gave His Sabbaths to Israel as a sign of His covenant with them. Note throughout the twentieth chapter of Ezekiel the expression “My Sabbaths” in verses 13, 20, 21, and 24. Likewise, Exodus 31:12-17 states that God had given His Sabbaths to Israel as a sign of His covenant relationship with that nation. Violation of Sabbath observance was punishable by death. And Nehemiah 9:13, 14 implies that Sabbath observance was unknown to men until it was revealed to Israel through Moses.

Those who do insist on Sabbath observance for the Church often use a sort of substitute definition. The Biblical definition of the Sabbath is a day of *rest* (Exodus 31:12-17). But often a substitute definition is used, calling it a day of *worship*. This is a failure to understand the nature of worship in the Old Testament. Israel’s worship revolved around the feasts and sacrifices, not a public meeting on the Sabbath. Sabbath as a day of worship only arose after the destruction of the temple in connection with the institution of the synagogue. But this was not how God had constituted public worship for Israel. The fact is, for most Christians, the day of worship (whether Sunday, Saturday, or any other day) is anything but a day of rest! Much work is involved in getting ready for church, going to church, possibly setting up and taking down of equipment for the church service, etc. God’s instructions to Israel for the Sabbath simply involved staying home and resting.

The New Testament is clear in teaching that the Mosaic Covenant ceased at the cross (Galatians 3:24–25; Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15; see Lesson 4); since the Sabbath served as a sign for that covenant, there can be no significance for Sabbath observance today. Besides, the Church is not related to God by covenant, the way Israel was. Apparently, some false teachers were trying to impose Sabbath observance on the church in Colosse, to which the apostle Paul replied, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*” (Colossians 2:16). It appears that the early church made a practice of congregating on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), probably to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, but this was never laid down as a law. The Church is free to meet publicly for worship on any day it so chooses (Romans 14:5-6).

### 5. *Pre-Tribulational Rapture*

One other important distinction between Israel and the Church involves when we anticipate the future coming of the Lord. This will be developed more fully in Lesson 12. Both Israel and the Church have a promise of the future coming of the Messiah. Israel looks for the arrival of the Messiah, the son of Abraham and descendant of David to rule in the kingdom (Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:2; etc.). When He came the first time, the rulers of Israel did not recognize Him (Isaiah 53:2-4), but He promised that He would come again (Matthew 13:40-43; 24:29-31; 25:31). This Second Coming is a coming to the earth to rule from the throne of David, but it is not His coming for the Church. His coming for the Church will be a coming to the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) to catch His bride, the Church, up to the Father’s House in heaven (John 14:1-3). This coming

for the Church is known as the “rapture.” The coming of the Lord for the Church at the rapture is quite a different event than His coming for Israel at the Second Coming. The Scriptures present the Church’s hope for the rapture as a blessed hope (Titus 2:13) that delivers the Church from the coming Tribulation Period (1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 3:10).

## Church polity

A dispensational view of the Church will also inform us to a certain extent about Church polity, that is, the way the Church is organized, how it functions, and how it is governed.

Israel was a people with a priesthood (Deuteronomy 18:1-8); the Church is a people who *are* priests (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). This is an important distinction. In Israel the common man (“lay person”) needed to approach God by going through a priest. But in the Church “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). For this reason, the apostles considered all members of the Body of Christ as their brethren and as equals. The apostle Paul, for example, anticipated coming to the church at Rome and building them up by means of his apostolic ministry (Romans 1:11), but at the same time, he expected that the Roman believers would also contribute to building him up in the faith reciprocally (Romans 1:12). The Roman Catholic Church came to adopt a supersessionist position whereby it believed it had taken over Israel’s priesthood. They had a high priest (pope), individual priests (bishops) and levites (lower clergy). This elevated the clergy above the laity in contradiction to the New Testament teaching of the priesthood of all believers. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is held to be a Baptist distinctive, but it is also generally seen as one of the primary contributions of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther spoke of the priesthood of all believers, as did Calvin and other reformers. But much of reformed theology, also holding to supersessionism, was inconsistent in applying the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. They, like the Roman Catholic Church, maintained a certain level of clergy/laity distinction. Some protestant churches even refer to their ministers as “priests” (something the New Testament never does). Distinctive clerical robes, collars and other items of dress, as well as the physical elevation of the minister above the congregation during church services are all carry-overs from this supersessionist clergy/laity distinction. Now, to be sure, there is a rightful place of respect that the New Testament requires for those who teach sound doctrine (Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Galatians 6:6), but the division of believers into classes of clergy vs. laity is unscriptural and certainly runs counter to dispensational distinctions between Israel and the Church.

The way we view Church government (polity) is also influenced by dispensational distinctions between Israel and the Church in the area of the priesthood of the believer. Generally in the history of Christianity three forms of Church government have been observed:

- Episcopal Church Government – making the bishop (Greek *episkopos*) the head of the church. An extreme form of this type of government is seen in the Roman Catholic Church with the pope as the supreme head (bishop) of the church.
- Presbyterian Church Government – making a board of elders (Greek *presbyteros*) the governing authority over the church.
- Congregational Church Government – making the entire congregation the same as the governing authority that directs the church.

A dispensational view that rejects supersessionism and acknowledges the priesthood of the believer is most comfortable with a Congregational form of church government, since each and every member of the church has an equal standing before God and is a priest in his or her own right. However, a Presbyterian form may be seen as honoring this principle, as long as the elders are seen as representatives who are elected by the congregation on a regular basis. The important thing is maintaining the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

## Is the church a “kingdom”?

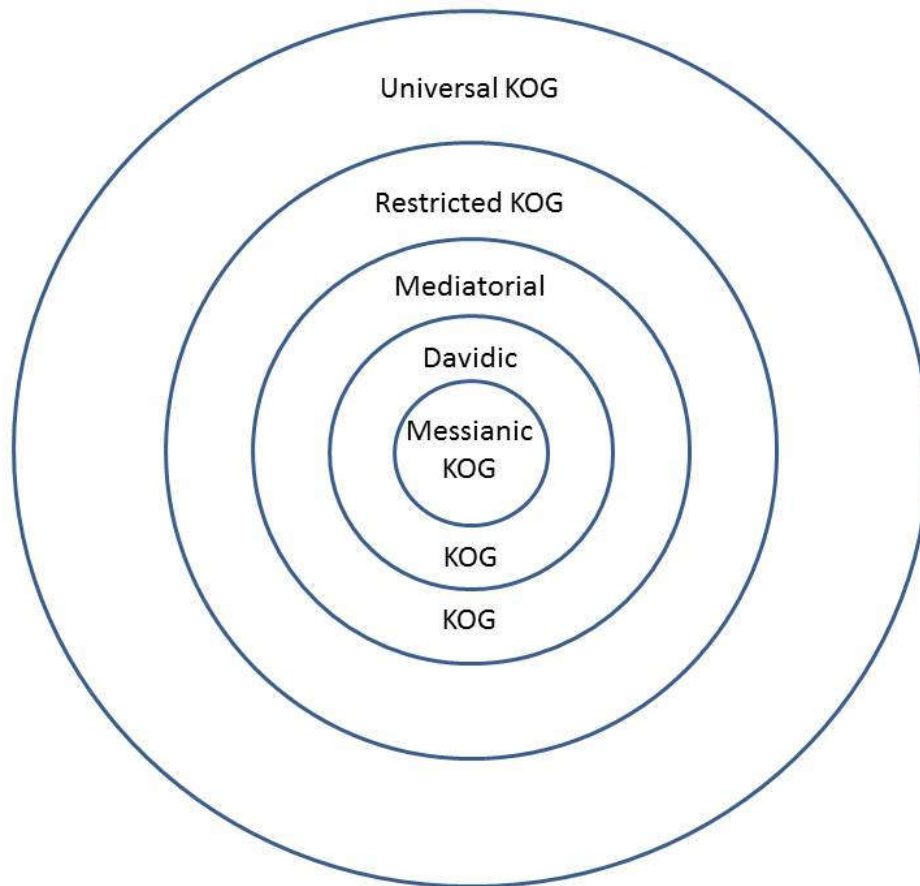
In Lesson 6 we examined whether 1 Peter 2:7 justifies viewing the Church as a “kingdom.” We determined that there was not sufficient support from that verse to conclude that the Church was in fact a kingdom. Nevertheless, it is common in Christian circles to hear references to the Church as if it were a kingdom. One often hears such comments as, “We’re furthering the kingdom,” “This crusade aims to bring masses of people into the kingdom,” “Those missionaries are working to expand the kingdom,” and “That preacher is involved in kingdom business.”

“Inaugurated Eschatology” is the name given to the idea that the kingdom of God was inaugurated at the first coming of Christ, but that its full realization awaits the Second Coming when Christ will set up His kingdom fully on earth. This position is also sometimes referred to as the “Already-not-yet” view of the kingdom. This view sees the church as an expression of the

Messianic kingdom and is shared by both Covenant premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists. And yet, expressions like “kingdom work” are frequently used unwittingly by many dispensationalists.

The term “kingdom” is used in a variety of ways in Scripture: (1) In the broadest sense it may refer to the *Universal Kingdom of God* in which God rules as King over all His creation – both fallen and redeemed (Psalm 103:19-22). (2) In another sense, it sometimes refers to the *Restricted Kingdom of God* in which God rules over those in willing submission to Him and refers to a kingdom into which one must enter, (John 3:3; Colossians 1:13). (3) In still other contexts, particularly the Old Testament and the Gospels, it refers to the *Mediatorial Kingdom* where it refers to the way God governs His affairs on earth through man’s mediation (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-8; Daniel 2:37-38; 4:17). (4) A specific form of the Mediatorial Kingdom would be the *Davidic Kingdom*, the outworking of the Davidic Covenant. (5) A more limited form of the Davidic Kingdom is the Messianic Kingdom, the ultimate and final form of the Davidic Kingdom (Isaiah 9:7).

There is overlap between these various aspects of the kingdom, and they may be viewed diagrammatically as a series of concentric circles as follows:



In addressing the question of whether the Church is a kingdom, it is important to distinguish carefully the various senses of the term “kingdom.” When examining the New Testament epistles, though there is occasional use of “kingdom” terminology to refer to the church, it is relatively infrequent, compared to the Old Testament and Gospels. Consider the frequency of “kingdom” in the Gospels as over against the Epistles.

- **Gospels:** The Davidic Kingdom (including its more limited Messianic form) is a major focus of the Gospels. The term “kingdom” occurs 127 times in the Gospels (82% of all New Testament occurrences), most often as a reference to the Davidic/Messianic Kingdom.
- **Epistles:** The term “kingdom” is not a major focus in the epistles. “Kingdom” occurs only 19 times (only 12% of all New Testament occurrences; another 9 times in Revelation).

Of all the references either to “king” or “kingdom” in the New Testament, many refer to earthly kings or kingdoms of the past or present. Only 14 references could in any sense be taken to refer to some kind of a realized Kingdom of God in the Church:

1. 1 Timothy 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
  - This verse refers to Christ as the “eternal” king, thus it cannot be referring to an *inaugurated* kingdom. Christ (or possibly the Father) was equally the eternal king before the First Advent, as He was during the time of His humility, and in His exaltation. This is either a reference to the *Universal Kingdom of God* or the *Restricted Kingdom of God*.
2. Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
  - This is a reference to the *Restricted Kingdom of God*
3. 1 Corinthians 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.
  - This is a reference to the *Restricted Kingdom of God*.
4. 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.
  - These verses do not establish the present age as an inaugurated kingdom, since they only refer to a *future* kingdom that believers will inherit, the *Messianic Kingdom*.
5. 1 Corinthians 15:24 then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.
  - This verse does not establish that the present age is an inaugurated kingdom, since the action of handing over the kingdom to the Father occurs only after the resurrection. The verse makes no comment on whether the present age is the kingdom or not. It could equally well be explained along either premillennial or amillennial lines, but from a premillennial perspective, it is clearly a reference to the *Messianic Kingdom*.
6. 1 Corinthians 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
  - These verses do not establish the present age as an inaugurated kingdom, since they only refer to a *future* kingdom that believers will inherit, the *Messianic Kingdom*.
7. Galatians 5:21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
  - These verses do not establish the present age as an inaugurated kingdom, since they only refer to a *future* kingdom that believers will inherit the *Messianic Kingdom*.
8. Ephesians 5:5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
  - These verses do not establish the present age as an inaugurated kingdom, since they only refer to a *future* kingdom that believers will inherit the *Messianic Kingdom*.
9. Colossians 1:13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.
  - A reference to the *Restricted Kingdom of God*.
10. Colossians 4:11 and *also* Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.
  - This verse is interesting in that Paul has been mentioning quite a number of his fellow workers in the surrounding context, but in this verse he specifically refers to those who are “from the circumcision.” Their labors “for the kingdom of God” may have been specifically in reference to calling Jews to repent so as to bring in the Davidic kingdom, much as the apostles did in the early chapters of Acts. This may in fact be a reference to the *Messianic Kingdom*, but only as a future expectation, not a present realization.
11. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.
  - A reference to the *Restricted Kingdom of God*.
12. 2 Thessalonians 1:5 *This is* a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.
  - A reference to the *Restricted Kingdom of God*.
13. 2 Timothy 4:1 I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:
  - This verse does not establish the present age as an inaugurated kingdom, since it refers to a future kingdom that comes with Christ’s appearing, the *Messianic Kingdom*.
14. 2 Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.
  - This verse does not establish the present age as an inaugurated kingdom, since it refers to a future heavenly kingdom, the *Messianic Kingdom*. It is “heavenly” because it represents the rule of “heaven” on the earth, much like the phrase “kingdom of heaven” that occurs in Matthew’s Gospel.

Thus, while in some cases the Church might legitimately be described in terms of the *Restricted Kingdom of God*, it is a minor focus of the New Testament epistles. Failure to distinguish between the various aspects of the Kingdom of God can lead to great confusion. Alva McClain referred to six problems:

First, it makes the present age the period of the Mediatorial Kingdom. Second, it has the Church in its present imperfect state performing functions which can only be fulfilled when the body of Christ is complete and perfected. Third, it dissolves the divinely covenanted purpose in the nation of Israel. Fourth, it does not distinguish clearly the two offices of Christ as Priest and King. Fifth, it makes the present age of the Church the final period of historical redemption. Sixth, it seats mortal, sinful, and fallible men on the throne with the risen and glorified Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), 438.

## 8 How does Dispensationalism differ from Covenant Theology?

The major theological position that competes against Dispensationalism is Covenant Theology. In many of these lessons we have contrasted the dispensational position from that of Covenant Theology, and in Lesson 4 we presented the basis of Covenant Theology in the theological covenants. It might be helpful at this point to summarize the differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. (For an excellent book treating this topic, see *There Really is a Difference* by Renald Showers).

With regard to the *sine qua non*

You will remember that in Lesson 1 we identified the three-fold *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism as identified by Dr. Charles Ryrie: a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture, a distinction between Israel and the Church, and the glory of God as the controlling purpose of God's dealings with His creation. These three points are not only helpful in defining Dispensationalism, but also help in distinguishing it from Covenant Theology.

### 1. *Consistent Literal Interpretation*

"Hermeneutics" is the term that is used to refer to the science and art of interpretation. It's most common usage is in reference to *Biblical* interpretation; although, you can find the term used in many secular university literature courses referring generally to how literature is interpreted.

Dispensational hermeneutics insists on interpreting *all* of Scripture literally, that is, according to the normal conventions for understanding written language. Covenant Theology, on the other hand, is willing to depart from the literal interpretation of Scripture for portions of the Bible relating to God's future program for Israel. This particular difference between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology is seen most acutely in the Old Testament Prophets. The Prophets spoke primarily to Israel (Jonah and Nahum being exceptions), and they had much to say about the coming of the Messiah and the future kingdom of the Messiah. Both dispensationalists and Covenant theologians interpret the prophecies about Christ's first coming literally. But Covenant theologians tend to interpret prophecies about the Second Coming and the kingdom allegorically. When the prophets are taken literally, the future kingdom is seen to be located on the earth with a capital in Jerusalem and Israel occupying a place of prominence over the Gentile nations. This concept of the kingdom simply has no logical place in Covenant Theology, so covenant theologians spiritualize these prophecies and make them refer to heavenly realities.

### 2. *Distinction between Israel and the Church*

Covenant Theology unites all of God's dealings after the fall under the single Covenant of Grace. This means that there is only one people of God throughout all of human history. As such, there can be no real distinction between Israel and the Church, as Dispensationalism holds. Covenant Theology *does* distinguish between *ethnic* Israel and the "*true Israel of God*" (See further on this below), but the Church is seen to consist of all the elect, so there is a Church in the Old Testament and Gospels, The New Testament Church is simply identified with the true Israel of God. It is this assumption, more than anything else, which leads covenant theologians to employ a non-literal interpretation in so much of the Old Testament and Gospels. This failure to acknowledge the Biblical distinction between Israel and the Church always leads to some degree of supersessionism ("Replacement Theology").

### 3. *Doxological Purpose of God*

The word "doxological" comes from the Greek "*doxa*" which means "glory." When dispensationalists refer to a "doxological purpose" they mean that God's ultimate purpose in all His dealings with His creation are for His glory. Covenant theologians also claim to focus their theology on God's glory. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a major creed that expresses the teaching of Covenant Theology. The Westminster Confession states about Scripture: "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole ... is, to give all glory to God" (I.1), and in



answer to the question, “What is the chief and highest end of man?” the Westminster Catechism answers, “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.” (Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 1). These are both good statements. But the problem with Covenant Theology is that it is not consistent about adhering to their claim of a doxological purpose. By explaining God’s purposes in terms of the overarching Covenant of Grace, in practice they make *the salvation of the elect*, rather than the glory of God, the controlling purpose in God’s dealings with His creation. This would be called a “Soteriological Purpose of God” (from the Greek *soteria*, “salvation”). Practically speaking this results in Covenant Theology having too a limited view of God’s purposes in such things as creation, the family, human government, angels, Israel, and the kingdom. There can be no doubt that when viewed from man’s perspective, nothing could be more important than our salvation. But is it right to impose this same priority of importance onto God? *All* that God has done, is doing, and will yet do, is for His glory. This includes the salvation of the elect, but it also includes many other things. The very first thing recorded in the Bible is the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:1). This was for God’s glory (Psalm 19:1-6) and had nothing to do directly with the salvation of the elect. God’s institution of the family occurred before the fall (Genesis 1:26-28) and was designed for His glory. God also has a non-soteriological purpose for human government for His glory (Genesis 9:5-6; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 1:13-17). These other purposes are difficult for the Covenant Theologian to explain under the rubric of the Covenant of Grace.

Not only does the soteriological focus of Covenant Theology result in too limited a view of God’s purposes, another problem is that it may tend to make Covenant Theology too much of a man-centered theology. Now, Covenant Theologians will doubtless object to this criticism. And, indeed, reformed theology (including Covenant Theology) has always claimed to be God-centered and focused on the glory of God. But it might more truthfully be said that covenant theology has a dual focus: one God-centered, the other man-centered. This is seen in the Westminster Catechism’s statement, “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.” Which is more important? Glorifying God? Or enjoying Him? One is a God-centered focus; the other is a man-centered focus. One recent popular reformed theologian even rephrased the Westminster statement as follows: “The chief end of man is to glorify God *by enjoying* Him forever.” (John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003], 111). The man-centeredness of this edited version of Westminster is seen in the subtitle of the book it comes from: “*Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*.” Webster’s Dictionary defines “Hedonism” as “the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life.” If the chief way we glorify God is by our *enjoying* Him, then our primary focus can too easily become human enjoyment. And while there is certainly nothing wrong with our enjoying God (Psalm 1:2; 37:4; 1 John 1:4), there are clearly times when it is right for God’s people to suffer and experience great sorrow in the process of God’s being glorified. Such was the case for Job, and the apostle Paul describes the great sorrows and suffering he experienced for God’s glory (1 Corinthians 15:31-32; 2 Corinthians 1:8). My first pastor used to remind our congregation, “God is more interested in your holiness than in your happiness.”

## With regard to Israel

### 1. *Literal Israel vs. the “True Israel of God”*

Because of the second facet of the *sine qua non* God’s purposes for Israel are important to Dispensationalism. These purposes largely define God’s prophetic plan with respect to the Tribulation Period and the Millennial Kingdom. This is one reason why dispensationalists are keenly interested in Biblical prophecy. Covenant Theology combines both Israel and the Church into one unified people of God under the Covenant of Grace. This poses some problems for Covenant theologians when they encounter New Testament references to Israel, such as Romans 9:6; 11:25-26; Galatians 6:16.

Romans 9:6, “*For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.*” This is taken by covenant theologians to mean that the true children of Abraham, those who are in the most true sense ‘Israel,’ are not the nation of Israel by physical descent from Abraham but those who have believed in Christ. Those covenant theologians who hold to a future salvation of Jews take this verse to mean that when Jewish people according to the flesh are saved in large numbers at some time in the future, they will not constitute a separate people of God. But this verse forms part of the explanation as to why Paul’s sorrow of heart (verse 2) may be mitigated. His sorrow was over the lost condition of his “kinsmen according to the flesh who are Israelites” (verses 3-4). The fact that lightens this burden is that not all of these kinsmen will be lost. There is not a replacement of ethnic Jews with non-Jews, but rather a narrowing of all ethnic Jews, to a believing remnant of Jews.

Romans 11:25-26, For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.<sup>26</sup> And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. This is taken by many covenant theologians to mean that all saved people constitute the new Israel, the true Israel of God. However, it is clear from verse 27 that Paul had in mind the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31, as well as Isaiah 59:20-21 when he wrote that “all Israel will be saved.” Both of these Old Testament passages express the hope of national restoration for Israel as well as spiritual salvation for the nation. The “salvation” envisioned in Isaiah 59 is one in which the LORD repays “fury to His adversaries and

recompence to His enemies ... so they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun” (59:18-19). This is a salvation in which Israel’s national enemies to the east and the west are brought into subjection to the LORD’s rule and authority. And in Jeremiah 31 the salvation of Israel is depicted as a time when “they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness,” (Jeremiah 31:23). This is a description of restored cities, villages and farms for Judah. This is a national promise of restoration for Israel and Judah in the Messiah’s kingdom. It is in no way a description of the Church. The Church is simply not in view either in Isaiah 59, Jeremiah 31, or Romans 11:26.

*Galatians 6:16, And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.* Covenant theologians understand this verse to mean that “the Israel of God” is the same as “as many as walk according to this rule.” But the word “and” that comes between these two can just as easily be taken to mean that there are two separate groups being referred to here. Most likely Paul was praying that peace would come *first*, upon those who walk according to the rule of justification by faith (the subject of the Book of Galatians), and *second*, upon the believing remnant of Israel whom he hoped would soon come to faith in Christ, thus ushering in the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom.

## 2. *National Israel vs. Ethnic Israel*

Historically, most covenant theologians have seen no special place for Israel or the Jews in God’s plan for the future. Increasing numbers of covenant theologians today are seeing some kind of a future in God’s plans, based on Romans 11:26 (see above). If they *do* see a future for Israel, it is significantly different than that which is understood by dispensationalists. This is seen nowhere more keenly than in the use of the adjectives “national” and “ethnic” with respect to Israel. Covenant theologians will speak of a future for “*ethnic* Israel,” meaning simply that there will be an end-time revival among ethnically Jewish people who will come to faith in Christ, and be added to the Church. But they do not see any place for a future restored *nation* of Israel that has any special place in God’s program. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, see a future *national* restoration of Israel, based on the Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New Covenants. It is quite common among dispensationalists to read about “*national* Israel.”

## 3. *Kingdom Purposes vs. “Salvation” Purposes*

Dispensationalism recognizes that God has other purposes besides the salvation of the elect. One of these purposes is the establishment of His kingdom on the earth. This kingdom purpose is first seen explicitly in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were told to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26). With man created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), this would have been the “kingdom of God” with Adam ruling as God’s viceroy. The fall of man corrupted the image of God making it impossible for man to serve as that viceroy apart from God’s intervention. Nevertheless, Jesus said that this kingdom had been prepared since before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). God’s plan for restoring the kingdom involved His selection of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not only to provide for the coming of the Messiah, but also to create a unique nation among men through whom He could demonstrate His just and glorious rule among men.

## With regard to the Church

### 1. *Beginning of the Church*

The Westminster Confession of Faith expresses Covenant Theology’s definition of the Church as as follows:

The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Eph. 1:10, 22–23, Eph. 5:23,27,32, Col. 1:18). (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV.1)

By including “the whole number of the elect” in the Church, such Old Testament figures as Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham, and Isaiah would be considered as part of the Church. But this is hard to square with Jesus’ statement that the Church was yet future to His own public ministry (Matthew 16:18). Furthermore, since the Baptism of the Holy Spirit had not yet occurred in the Old

Testament (Acts 1:4-5), there was no means by which these Old Testament saints could become incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Including all of the elect into the Church requires that Covenant Theology has the Church beginning either immediately after the fall, or perhaps even at the creation of Adam.

## 2. *Consummation of the Church*

Since Covenant Theology has one people of God all united under a single Covenant of Grace, there is no logical place in their system for a pretribulational rapture of the Church. If people are to be saved during the Tribulation Period, then, according to Covenant Theology, they must become part of the same Body of Christ to which God's saints have always belonged, and it makes no sense for the Church to be raptured before the Tribulation. Not all covenant theologians even believe in a rapture, but those who do, believe in a *post*tribulational rapture. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, understand that God will complete His program for the Church before the Tribulation Period begins, and that the Tribulation Period has specific purposes regarding the nation of Israel; it is the seventieth seven-year period of time designated as pertaining to Daniel's people, Israel (Daniel 9:24) and is referred to as the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). For this reason, among many others, God must complete His program for the Church before the Tribulation Period begins. Those saved during the Tribulation Period are still saints, but in much the same way as were Old Testament saints, before the Church began on the Day of Pentecost.

## 3. *Circumcision and Baptism*

Covenant Theology understands baptism to be the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament practice of circumcision. For this reason, covenant theologians have traditionally been paedobaptists (those who baptize infants), based on the fact that circumcision was to be performed on a baby boy's eighth day after birth (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3). There are some Baptists who are covenant theologians, and they have a more difficult time explaining why they do not baptize infants, though they still affirm that baptism serves the same purpose as circumcision. Dispensationalists do not have this problem to deal with when discussing baptism. For the dispensationalist, baptism is not related to circumcision, so there is no theological pressure on dispensationalists to connect baptism in any way with infants. This does not mean that all dispensationalists hold to believer's baptism. But if they practice baptism of infants, they must provide some explanation other than a connection with circumcision. Most dispensationalists seem to accept the doctrine of believer's baptism.

## 9 What different views claim to be “Dispensationalism”?

We have had a lot to say about the differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. But it is important to realize that neither Covenant Theology nor Dispensationalism has adherents that are in complete, 100% agreement with each other on every point within their systems. We have already pointed out that within Covenant Theology, there are some who hold to *two covenants*, while others hold to *three covenants*. There are also differing views on how the Mosaic Covenant relates to the Covenant of Grace. Well, it is also true that within Dispensationalism there are varying views. The two most notable variant forms of Dispensationalism are known as *Ultra-Dispensationalism* and *Progressive Dispensationalism*. In this lesson, we will describe both of these variant forms and point out the problems with both positions.

### Ultra-Dispensationalism (also called “Hyper-Dispensationalism”)

Ultra-Dispensationalism was first developed by a great Biblical scholar named Ethelbert W. Bullinger (1837-1913). He should not be confused with another famous theologian, Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), although E.W. Bullinger was a descendant of H. Bullinger’s. Throughout this lesson the remaining references to “Bullinger” will be to E.W. Bullinger.

Bullinger was greatly interested in Biblical prophecy and was drawn to the teachings of Darby and other early Dispensationalists. For many years he edited a monthly magazine called *Things to Come*. While he was a great scholar, and authored a very helpful book, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, he was also guilty of some rather fanciful methods of interpretation. His book *Numbers in Scripture* puts forth his extravagant numerology, a system of interpretation that reads spiritual significance into numbers that are used in the Bible. This book includes 44 chapters, each of which is devoted to the spiritual significance of a specific number or combination of numbers! For the most part, Bullinger was interested in the literal interpretation of Scripture, but he did get carried away with both numerology and excessive typology. Another book of his, *How to Enjoy the Bible*, contains a mix of both literal hermeneutics and excessive numerology and typology.

His Ultra-Dispensationalism derives from his unique view that the church did not begin on the Day of Pentecost, but rather with the teaching of the Apostle Paul. He based this idea on Scriptures such as Ephesians 3:1-7,

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, <sup>2</sup> If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: <sup>3</sup> How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, <sup>4</sup> Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) <sup>5</sup> Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; <sup>6</sup> That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: <sup>7</sup> Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. (See also Colossians 1:25-27; Romans 11:25)

Thus, the Body of Christ in Bullinger’s view did not come into existence until it was revealed to Paul sometime after Acts 28:28, and believers before this revelation to Paul belonged to a sort of Jewish-Christian extension of the Law dispensation. For this reason, he believed that the only part of the New Testament that truly spoke directly to the Church were the prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. One of the factors that may have motivated Bullinger to develop this unique approach was a desire to explain the apparent differences between the teaching of James and the teaching of Paul. He was convinced that James’ initial readers were believers in Christ, but were still under the law, similar to those who heard Christ and believed in Him during His public ministry.

Others have followed Bullinger’s lead and have developed similar views of Ultra-Dispensationalism. Some ultra-dispensationalists, however, hold a less extreme view than Bullinger’s. There are those who see the Church beginning either in Acts 13 with Paul’s first missionary journey, or in Acts 9 at Paul’s conversion. These less extreme ultra-dispensationalists would include Paul’s earlier epistles (Romans – Galatians) as directed to the Church, as well as the prison epistles. So, while they all agree that the Church began after Pentecost and at some time associated with Paul, they do not all agree specifically on when the Church *did* begin. Thus, they have a slightly different view of when the dispensation of Grace (or the dispensation of the Church) began.

So you may be wondering, what difference does any of this really make? Does it really matter when the Church actually began? There are at least three areas of church life that are affected by Ultra-Dispensationalism: Water Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Divine Healing.

## 1. *Water Baptism*

Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize disciples in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19-20). Most Christians, including most dispensationalists, understand this to be an important part of the Great Commission for the Church. Ultra-dispensationalists, however, understand Matthew 28:19-20 only to be a commission for the eleven apostles to last through all, or a portion of, the period covered by the Book of Acts. Thus they conclude that the Church was never given a command to baptize disciples. Their view is that water baptism is a Jewish rite related to ceremonial washings associated with Judaism, and that it really has no place in the Church. Of course, for dispensationalists who see the Church beginning on Pentecost, it is obvious that water baptism was practiced as a Church ordinance in the early days of the Church (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 13, 36-39; etc.). But if the Church did not begin until well after the Day of Pentecost, as maintained by ultra-dispensationalists, perhaps these baptisms were merely ritualistic Jewish washings.

Of course, if we accept that the Church began on the Day of Pentecost, the examples from the early chapters of Acts would probably convince us that water baptism is a valid ordinance for the Church today. We demonstrated in Lessons 2 and 6 why the Church began on the Day of Pentecost. But ultra-dispensationalists do not accept these early chapters as being descriptive of the Church. Further New Testament teaching about water baptism, however, confirms that this ordinance was not limited to the period before Paul's conversion. Note that Paul himself was baptized (Acts 9:18; 22:16). Also, the first Gentiles to be added to the Church were baptized (Acts 10:47-48), and some of Paul's earliest converts were said to have been baptized (Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 1 Corinthians 1:14-16). Clearly, the less extreme form of Ultra-Dispensationalism *ought* to recognize the validity of water baptism on the basis of Paul's having baptized his converts. It does appear that Paul recognized Jesus' command to baptize disciples in water.

## 2. *The Lord's Supper*

With respect to the Lord's Supper, there is a difference between the extreme Ultra-Dispensationalism of E.W. Bullinger and the less extreme forms that developed later. Those who follow Bullinger's teaching do not believe that the Lord's Supper was intended for the Church at all. The Apostle Paul's only discussion of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-24) was written before he wrote the Prison Epistles. So Bullinger reasoned that the Lord's Supper was related to the Jewish Passover, and that when the Church began during Paul's Roman imprisonment, it ceased to be relevant. The less extreme Ultra-Dispensationalists do observe the Lord's Supper, since Paul taught about it in 1 Corinthians 11.

## 3. *Divine Healing*

What the Bible teaches about the spiritual gifts has been controversial since very early in the history of the Church. As early as the second century, a heretical group of Christians, known as *Montanists* (Named after their leader, "Montanus") observed that certain gifts – such as prophecy, tongues, and divine healing – were no longer being practiced. The Montanists believed that these gifts ought to be brought back into practice, and so they claimed to have the ability to prophesy, speak in tongues, and perform miracles of healing. Montanism was condemned as heretical by a series of Church synods in Phrygia. The issue arose again later during the time of the Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> century). Both Luther and Calvin rejected efforts to bring back these gifts. And, of course, in more recent history, Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement, the Third Wave (Vineyard) movement, and most recently some New Calvinists, have sought to reinstitute these miraculous sign gifts. There are compelling arguments against these gifts continuing beyond the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century; however, explicit Scriptural statements (other than the debated 1 Corinthians 13:8-10) are not found. The main arguments are based on theological deduction. Ultra-Dispensationalists sought to simplify the argument by noting that divine healings were limited to the earlier chapters of Acts, and seemed to have completely disappeared by the later ministry of Paul.

## 4. *Evaluation of Ultra-Dispensationalism*

To their credit, Ultra-Dispensationalists hold to a clear distinction between Israel and the Church. They also hold mostly to a literal interpretation of the Bible. The biggest problem with Ultra-Dispensationalism is its failure to understand the nature of what a dispensation is. A dispensation is defined in terms of how God administers His affairs, not by how, or to what degree, men understand God's administration. It is true that only with Paul's later revelations did the Church come to understand some of the

details of the Church's true character (such as the distinction between Israel and the Church), but that does not mean that the dispensation only began with this revelation to Paul. We have shown in earlier chapters how it was the baptism of the Holy Spirit that began the Church. To assign the period from Pentecost to a time during the post-conversion life of Paul either to the Law Dispensation or some unique, short-lived dispensation is entirely unacceptable and results in the disastrous jettisoning of the important ordinances of Baptism and possibly even the Lord's Supper.

## Progressive Dispensationalism

A second group going by the name "Dispensationalism" is a fairly recent theological position calling itself "Progressive Dispensationalism." We have said much in previous lessons about the differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. At times, the conflict between these two theological systems has been unfortunately strident. We are admonished in Scripture to be at peace with all men (Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14). In response to the strident nature of the conflict between Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians, a group of dispensational scholars toward the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to find a compromise position between the two positions that would promote greater dialog and less strife. This group of scholars began formulating a theology that kept what they considered to be the best that Dispensationalism had to offer, and also accepted what they considered to be some good things that Covenant Theology had to offer. Their first public unveiling was at a meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 1986 in what was known as the "Dispensational Study Group." Since then, this group has continued to meet regularly along with the Evangelical Theological Society's annual meeting. They have also written extensively and have become quite influential in many Bible Colleges and Seminaries. Today, many people who refer to themselves as "Dispensationalists" really hold to this hybrid form of Dispensationalism, known as "Progressive Dispensationalism." There are 3 characteristics that mark Progressive Dispensationalism: (1) A present Davidic reign of Christ, (2) Greater continuity between Israel and the Church, (3) A departure from a consistently literal interpretation of the Bible.

### 1. *A Present Davidic Reign of Christ*

Of the 3 characteristics, this first one is really the main, controlling feature of Progressive Dispensationalism. It is the claim that Christ's Davidic rule began at the ascension. Traditionally, Dispensationalism has held that the Davidic reign of Christ is completely future, awaiting the Second Coming and the setting up of the Millennium. Progressive Dispensationalists, on the other hand, posit a two-phase Davidic reign: (1) an inaugurated phase, beginning with Christ's ascension; and (2) a final, completed phase beginning at the Second Coming for the Millennium. In this way, Progressive Dispensationalists all claim to be Premillennial, but they also believe that the Church is an initial, inaugurated phase of the kingdom. Their argument is based largely on their interpretation of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. In this sermon, Peter quoted both Psalm 132:11 (Acts 2:30, which speaks of Messiah's Davidic rule) and Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-35, which refers to the ascension). The Progressives claim that Peter intentionally linked these two verses together in his sermon to show that the Davidic rule had already begun. Traditional Dispensationalists, however, have countered that these verses occur in different parts of Peter's sermon, making separate points, and were not intended to be linked together. Clearly, the Davidic throne, when viewed from the perspective of the Old Testament, was a literal, earthly throne located in Jerusalem, ruling over national Israel within the geographical boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant. But the Progressive view requires reinterpreting this throne in a non-literal way to include a heavenly rule over the Church – a non-national entity – without any geographic limitations.

### 2. *Greater Continuity between Israel and the Church*

A long-standing complaint of Covenant Theologians, is that Dispensationalism splits up the people of God into two separate groups: Israel and the Church. Progressive Dispensationalists share this complaint and seek to find greater continuity between the two. This, of course, is necessary for Progressive Dispensationalism if they want to have Christ ruling over the Church as a partial fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. The Davidic Covenant was clearly made with David and his descendants with regard to kingly rule over Israel. It never specified any rule over Gentile nations, unless it had to do with Gentile nations that were subjugated by Israel. Progressive Dispensationalism seeks to bring the Church into the fold of Israel to a certain extent in order to justify their view that Christ's present ministry in the Church is a Davidic rule. This violates one of the key components of the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism as identified by Ryrie, namely, the distinction between Israel and the Church. For this reason there is real justification for calling this movement something other than "Dispensationalism." But the chief scholars in the movement all teach (or used to teach) at dispensational schools and are keen on keeping the name "Dispensationalism." For this reason, they claim that Dispensationalism had already undergone substantial changes from the days of Darby until the time that

Ryrie defined it in terms of the *sine qua non*. The Progressives say they are simply moving the theology on to the next logical phase in its ongoing evolution. Dr. Ryrie, however, objected to this notion, saying that the only developments from Darby until his own writings were minor, but that the changes being suggested by the Progressives were major changes that went beyond the kinds of minor developments seen earlier.

### 3. *A Departure from a Consistently Literal Interpretation of Scripture*

In order to support the idea that the throne of David could be identified as something other than an earthly rule from Jerusalem over national Israel within specified geographical boundaries, it is necessary for Progressive Dispensationalists to employ a less than literal form of interpretation. The name given to this type of interpretation is “Complementary Hermeneutics.” According to complementary hermeneutics, promises made to Israel in the Old Testament can be expanded and applied to another group of people, applying in a way that is different from the way it was originally intended, when reinterpreted by the apostles, as long as the original promise to Israel is not canceled. This assumes, of course, that the apostles actually did reinterpret the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament, a point denied by traditional Dispensationalists.

### 4. *Evaluation of Progressive Dispensationalism*

Does it really matter whether Christ’s present ministry is seen as an inaugurated Davidic rule or not? Lesson 7 addressed the question of whether the Church can legitimately be viewed as a “kingdom.” In one limited sense, it might be said that believers in the church are part of the “Restricted Kingdom of God,” and the New Testament does on a few occasions use “kingdom” language in this respect. But this is a far cry from saying that the Church is somehow an inaugurated form of the Davidic Kingdom. If the Davidic Kingdom has already been inaugurated, there are at least 2 potential theological problems: (1) There is no rationale for a Tribulation Period which is to precede the Kingdom, and thus there is no logical reason to suppose there should be a pretribulation rapture. Furthermore, if there is a continuity between Israel and the Church, there seems little reason to exclude the Church from the Tribulation Period. So far, most Progressive Dispensationalists have claimed to retain a pretribulation rapture position, but it has not been a major focus of their teaching. (2) The Kingdom is supposed to be a time of great physical healing, so it is difficult to maintain that the spiritual gift of healing has ceased during the present Church age. Some Progressive Dispensationalists in fact have wavered in this area and have been much more willing to accept the idea of continuing gifts of healing, prophecy and tongues.

To their credit, Progressive Dispensationalists have attempted to strike a conciliatory tone in the ongoing discussions between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. We should always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and too often theological arguments become overly strident, and even hurtful. Nevertheless, we need to be cautious about compromise in the area of truth. It is the studied opinion of this author that Progressive Dispensationalism has given away too much of what is vital to Dispensationalism; it has gone too far in the direction of Covenant Theology.

## 10 How Does Dispensationalism Inform Us about the Present Ministry of Christ?

*Jesus, Savior, reigneth forever and ever;  
Crown Him! Crown Him! Prophet and Priest and King!  
-- Fanny Crosby, 1869*

The previous lesson introduced the basic idea behind Progressive Dispensationalism, namely, that Christ is currently ruling from the Davidic throne. This is an idea that Progressive Dispensationalists borrowed from Covenant Theology. You might also recall that in Lesson 7 we considered the question of whether or not the Church could be thought of as a “kingdom.” These ideas all relate to how we view the present ministry of Christ. We might also ask ourselves, How does Christ’s present ministry relate to His ministry in the past and His ministry in the future?

### What about the reformed doctrine of Christ as “Prophet, Priest, and King”?

Eusebius, the 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Caesarea, was the first to write about a threefold ministry (referred to in Latin as the *munus triplex*) of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. The Reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century made this a major part of their teaching about Christ’s ministry and it finds its way into most of the major Reformed creeds, as well as many theology texts, both reformed and dispensational. This teaching about the threefold ministry is based on the fact that the meaning of the word “Christ” is “anointed.” The word “Christ” is actually a Greek word, and it does indeed mean “anointed”; It is the equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew word “Messiah” which also means “anointed.” In the Old Testament when certain individuals were inducted into their official capacities, anointing with oil occurred as part of the official ceremony. This symbolized the impartation of ability on the one who was being inducted. In relation to the threefold ministry of Christ, it is often said that there were three anointed offices in the Old Testament: prophet, priest, and king, and that Jesus fulfills all three of these anointed offices.

Anointing was most certainly a part of the ceremony for inducting both priests (Exodus 30:30-32; 40:12-15) and kings (1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Kings 1:39; 2 Kings 9:1-6; 11:12) into their offices. But prophets were not normally anointed. Thus, the title, “The Lord’s anointed” or some similar phrase became a common name for Hebrew kings (1 Samuel 12:3-5; 2 Samuel 1:14-16; Psalm 89:38, 51; Lamentations 4:20). Prophets, on the other hand, seem not to have been normally anointed. The one possible example of anointing for a prophet occurs in 1 Kings 19:16 where Elijah was instructed to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet. However, when the time actually came, Elisha was not actually anointed; instead, Elijah cast his mantle on Elisha, rather than anointing him with oil (1 Kings 19:19; 2 Kings 2:13-14); it was a sort of figurative anointing.

Psalm 110 combines both the priestly and kingly ministries of Christ in wonderful prophecy about the Messiah. In this Psalm, the Messiah is said to be “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4). A more precise translation of the Hebrew text might be “a priest forever like Melchizedek.” There was no “order of Melchizedek” in the sense of a perpetual succession of priests in such an order. There was only one Melchizedek, and the only other priest like him was Jesus Christ. Jesus could not be a priest under the Mosaic Covenant, since those priests all were required to be of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3:10; Hebrews 7:5), and Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1-3; Hebrews 7:14). The Book of Hebrews makes the point that since Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, therefore Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to Levi’s priesthood (Hebrews 7:1-17). Psalm 110 also speaks of the Messiah’s kingly rule in verses 1-2, and 5-7.

Both the priestly and kingly functions of the Messiah were also prophesied by Zechariah. In Zechariah 4:14 there is a reference to the “two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” The context of chapters 3 and 4 make it clear that the immediate reference is to Joshua and Zerubbabel. Joshua was the high priest at that time, and Zerubbabel, though only governor at the time, was from the tribe of Judah, and was qualified to serve as king. Thus these two men typified the coming Messiah (or “Anointed One”) who would one day combine both of their offices.

While it might be a bit of a stretch to assert that there were three anointed offices in the Old Testament, there were clearly two – priest and king. The prophetic ministry was another very important ministry under God’s direction. It does seem legitimate to think of Christ’s ministry as being prophetic (Hebrews 1:1-2), priestly (Hebrews 8:1-2), and kingly (Matthew 25:31). As a prophet, He came from heaven to earth, took the form of man, and communicated God’s will to men (John 1:1, 18). As a priest, He came to offer a perfect sacrifice of Himself on the cross for our sins (Hebrews 8-10), and He continues in His priestly role today by offering prayers of intercession on our behalf (Romans 8:27; Hebrews 7:25). As a king, He will come again and sit on the throne of David to rule over His kingdom for 1,000 years (Luke 1:32-33; Matthew 25:31; 1 Corinthians 15:23-25; Revelation 19-20). There is a chronological progression to these three ministries: His prophetic ministry is past; His priestly ministry is both past and present; and His kingly ministry is future.



Fanny Crosby's great hymn, "Praise Him! Praise Him!" quoted at the beginning of this lesson, sums up all three of the ministries: "Crown Him, Crown Him, Prophet and Priest and King." If I can be permitted to be a little bit critical of a great hymn writer (I absolutely love Fanny Crosby's hymns), I might observe that while one may crown a king, one does not crown prophets or priests! We might allow a hymn writer a bit of poetic license, and, after all, "Anoint Him, Anoint Him, Prophet and Priest and King," just wouldn't sing quite right in that hymn. But I wonder, when we speak of "crowning" Him in terms of His present priestly ministry, do we subtly give in to the idea that He is presently ruling in his role as Davidic king? Perhaps not, but music can be a powerful force in forming ideas in our minds, and we should give great care to bring every thought into obedience to the Word of God.

### Christ's relationship to the Father's throne and to the throne of David

Both Covenant Theologians and Progressive Dispensationalists believe that Christ is presently ruling as a king from the throne of David. They claim that when Jesus ascended to heaven and sat down at the Father's right hand, He obviously sat down on a throne, and that this throne must therefore be His kingly throne. But this line of reasoning involves an assumption; it assumes that the throne at the right hand of the Father's throne must be the Davidic throne. That this is a faulty assumption can be shown fairly easily from Jesus' own words in Revelation 3:21, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Where Jesus is seated now He actually refers to as the throne of "My Father," and this throne is distinguished from a future throne which Jesus refers to as "My throne." Thus, we can see that Jesus is presently seated in the Father's throne, and that He will have a different future throne in which overcoming believers might share His rule. The angel Gabriel described Christ's future kingly ministry to Mary in Luke 1. In that passage, Gabriel said, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. <sup>32</sup> He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: <sup>33</sup> And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." His future throne will be the throne of David, and when He is given that throne He will "reign over the house of Jacob." Since He is not presently reigning over the house of Jacob, we should conclude that He is not yet ruling from the throne of David.

### How does the New Testament present Christ's present ministry?

Dispensationalists will recognize a distinction between the present ministry of Christ and His future kingly ministry. But this raises the question about His present ministry. If He is not currently reigning as Davidic King, then what *is* His present ministry? One way to answer that question is simply to go back to the "prophet, priest, and king" paradigm, and say that His presently ministry is a priestly ministry. That would be a correct answer, but just not a complete answer. It turns out that Christ presently has many ministries, none of which are kingly.

#### 1. *Building the Church*

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "I will build My Church." As we have shown in earlier lessons, this building began on the Day of Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's "immersing" of believers into the body of Christ. Ever since that day, Christ has been building His Church. While the "Prophet, Priest, and King" paradigm might be helpful in thinking about some of Christ's ministries, it doesn't really take in this building metaphor. But there are other Scriptures besides Matthew 16:18 that picture the church as a building, for example 1 Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 2:20; Colossians 2:7; and 1 Peter 2:5.

#### 2. *Directing the Church as its Head*

The Church is often referred to as Christ's "body" (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30; Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15). In these passages, Christ is pictured as the "head" of this body (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19) because He gives direction to the Church and controls the Church. He accomplishes this through the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit and by means of the instruction provided in the Word of God. As its Head, Christ is also serves as Master and Lord over the Church; the Church is meant to be in submission to its Head.

### 3. *Preparing a Place*

In Christ's final discourse to His disciples before He went to the cross (John 13-16), He spoke to them about what life would be like for them after He was gone. Among other things, Christ sought to comfort their grieving hearts by reminding them that He was going to prepare a place for them in the Father's House (John 14:1-3). They were clearly troubled at the thought of His leaving them, and He reminded them that He would not leave them as orphans, but that the Holy Spirit would come to be with them in the intervening period (John 14:15-18, 25-26). During this period of time while the Holy Spirit was the acting Agent, present with the Church on the earth, Christ Himself would be preparing a place in heaven. This place will be the primary dwelling place for the Church during the seven-year Tribulation Period before we return with Christ at His Second Coming. So, for 2,000 years now, Christ has been preparing that place. The blessed hope of the Church is that He could come at any time to take us there!

### 4. *Interceding for the Saints*

Both the Second and Third Persons of the Godhead (The Son and the Holy Spirit) are said to make intercession for believers in this dispensation. Romans 8:26-27 says that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us, since we do not know what we should pray for as we ought. This may be involved in the command found in Ephesians 6:18 that we should pray "in the Spirit." But not only does the Holy Spirit intercede for us, Christ also makes intercession. According to Romans 8:34, "Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." It is interesting to observe that this verse appears to connect Christ's being seated at the right hand of God with His *priestly ministry*, not His kingly ministry. This would confirm what we have said above about Christ's kingly ministry being future, and not related to His present seating at God's right hand. Christ's intercessory ministry is also mentioned in Hebrews 7:25, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

### 5. *Psalms 110 and Melchizedekian Ministry (contrasted with Davidic kingly ministry in Psalm 2 and other passages)*

Brief mention was made above to Psalm 110. Here, we should take a closer look at this unique Psalm. It is unique in that it is the only Psalm to refer explicitly to Melchizedek (verse 4). The only other places in Scripture that speak of this individual are Genesis 14:18-20 and Hebrews 5:6-10; 6:20-7:28. Melchizedek was both king and priest in Jerusalem. In fact, his name *Melchizedek* means "king of righteousness." But, though he was a king, it was his priestly function that the Scriptures focus on. In Genesis 14, Abraham communes with God Most High (*El Elyon*) through a sacred meal of bread and wine served by Melchizedek. Then, Abraham paid a tithe to God Most High through Melchizedek. Both of these actions – the sacred meal and the paying of tithes – view Melchizedek in his priestly role. Psalm 110:4 says that the Messiah will be a *priest* after the order of Melchizedek; it does not say that He will be a *king* after the order of Melchizedek. Psalm 110 describes Messiah's involvement in a great eschatological battle, what we refer to commonly as the "Battle of Armageddon." The battle is described as follows:

The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. <sup>6</sup> He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill *the places* with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. <sup>7</sup> He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head. (Psalm 110:5-7)

We tend to think of battles as being fought by kings, not priests, but this is due to our western mindset. In the Mediterranean and the Middle East there were warrior priests in ancient times who fought at the direction of God. Psalm 110 pictures the Messiah as such a warrior priest. He is a priest like Melchizedek, yet he fights a ferocious battle, striking down kings in the day of his wrath. In verse 3 He is seen as being accompanied by a volunteer army of fellow priests: "Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power," [signifying their voluntary service] "in the beauties of holiness [or "holy garments"] from the womb of the morning; thou hast the dew of thy youth" (Psalm 110:3). These volunteer fellow priests are likely the Church saints and Tribulation saints, dressed in priestly garments, who accompany Christ to the earth at His Second Coming. Christ's priestly ministry, therefore, is one which sees Him as involved in battling the evil forces of the antichrist during the Tribulation Period as a great warrior priest and preparing the world for the Davidic reign which will follow in the Millennial Kingdom.

The references in Hebrews speak of Christ's Priestly ministry first as presenting His own body on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 5:6-10); second as introducing a change both of priesthood and of law (Hebrews 7:11-12), thus signifying the

end of the Mosaic Covenant at the cross; and third as offering powerful intercession for those who come to Him (Hebrews 7:25-26).

### Conclusion

This lesson has been a study of the present ministry of Christ to determine whether Christ is currently ruling as a Davidic King. Christ has many wonderful ministries in which He is involved in the present dispensation, including building the Church, directing the Church as its Head, preparing a place for the Church in the Father's House, and interceding for the saints at the right hand of God. But none of these ministries involves His Davidic reign. The Davidic reign awaits the Second Coming when Christ will literally rule the world from Jerusalem on the actual throne of David.

## 11 – How does Dispensationalism Inform us about the Future Kingdom?

A major theme of both the Old Testament and the Gospels is the Kingdom. As Christians we often think about our future as being with God in heaven, but it is surprising how little information there is about heaven in the Old Testament. Did you ever wonder how Old Testament saints, like David, Abraham, or Isaiah, would have thought about their future? Did they anticipate being with God in heaven? Probably not to the same degree as Christians do today. More likely, the Old Testament saint had his eyes fixed on the Kingdom – a time in which Messiah will rule from Jerusalem in righteousness, justice, and peace, and the saints can inhabit the earth unmolested, free to work their farm plots in peace or pursue their business without having to worry about swindlers and thieves. To be sure, there is an occasional glimpse of heaven in the hopes of the Old Testament saint, but the primary Old Testament focus is on the Kingdom.

### 1. How does a literal interpretation of the Old Testament portray the kingdom?

Lesson 3 introduced three important principles of interpretation. One more important principle is that the Old Testament must serve as the foundation for understanding the New Testament. Here is another important feature that distinguishes Dispensationalism from Covenant Theology. In Covenant Theology there is a tendency to develop a doctrine from the New Testament, then read that theology back into the Old Testament. It should be obvious that this is backwards from the way God revealed His Word. In one way this practice involves reading the New Testament out of context (the Old Testament can be seen broadly as the context that precedes the New Testament). This tends to bias the interpreter in favor of a theology that was developed non-contextually.

The dispensationalist, on the other hand, seeks to understand the Old Testament in its own setting and let it speak for itself. Then, if the New Testament refers to a topic already dealt with in the Old Testament, that topic should be understood in a way that is consistent with the way it was presented in the Old Testament. One of the qualities of Scripture that we can appreciate greatly is a quality known as *perspicuity*. The word *perspicuity* is simply a big word for *clarity*. When we say that the Bible is perspicuous, we mean that it was given in clear, plain language that was intended to be understood by the original recipients. Some people do not believe that the Bible is perspicuous; they believe that the true meaning is deeply hidden behind symbols, mysteries, and codes. But God Himself says that His Word is given in clear, plain language intended to be understood even by children and simple people. Consider these verses:

- Deuteronomy 30:11–14 *For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.* <sup>12</sup> *It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?* <sup>13</sup> *Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?* <sup>14</sup> *But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*

God's Word is not far off; it's not hidden; it's not a puzzle or enigma. It is near, available, and understandable.

- Psalm 19:7–8 *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.* <sup>8</sup> *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*

God's Word is so plain, it is available even to the simple to make him wise.

- Psalm 119:105 *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

God's Word is not dark and hidden; it is like a lamp, giving light to a dark path.

- 2 Peter 1:19 *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.*

The prophetic Word of God is like a light that shines in a dark place, reminding us of Psalm 119:105 (above). When Peter said that it was "more sure," he was comparing the Word of God to the ineffable experience he had on the Mt. of Transfiguration (2 Peter 1: 17-18). As great as that Mt. of Transfiguration experience had been, the Word of God gives greater assurance, not because its meaning is locked up in mysteries and puzzles, but because its meaning is clear, understandable, and perspicuous.

So, when we come to the subject of the Kingdom, we should begin with an Old Testament picture of what that Kingdom looks like, since that Old Testament picture was intended to be clearly understood by any Old Testament saint, and was the picture that the apostles would have had. Then we can proceed to view the New Testament teaching of the Kingdom in the light of that Old Testament picture. When we examine the Old Testament teaching of the Kingdom, we find at least 13 characteristics of the Kingdom:

1. Moral and spiritual uprightness, Psalm 15:1-5; 24:1-6
2. Geographic changes to Jerusalem and the surrounding region, Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2
3. Prominence of Israel over the Gentile nations, Isaiah 2:2-3
4. Gentiles will be included in the Kingdom, Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2
5. Peace among nations, Isaiah 2:4
6. Animals will revert to Edenic vegetarianism, Isaiah 11:6-7
7. Universal knowledge of the Lord, Isaiah 11:8-9
8. A Renovated heavens and earth, Isaiah 65:17
9. A Renovated Jerusalem, Isaiah 65:18
10. No infant mortality, Isaiah 65:20
11. Age of death will be 100 years, Isaiah 65:20
12. Death will be for unbelievers only, Isaiah 65:20
13. Fruitful personal life, Isaiah 65:21-24; Micah 4:3-5

We could, no doubt, add many other characteristics, but these are quite descriptive and give us a good snapshot picture of what the promised Kingdom looks like from the perspective of an Old Testament saint. Whatever the New Testament revelation might add to this, it will not change it. What God revealed to the Old Testament saint was not said tongue-in-cheek, as if God had said, “Here’s what the Kingdom will look like, but later I’m going to change my mind and make it a spiritual existence in heaven instead.” No; the Kingdom will be a real Kingdom on the earth, with Jesus Christ ruling from David’s throne in Jerusalem; it will be a Kingdom of peace, justice, long life, and prosperity. This was the Old Testament saint’s “blessed hope.”

## **2. How is the kingdom different from heaven (or the eternal state)?**

The New Testament brings out more clearly a distinction between the Kingdom and Heaven than does the Old Testament. The Old Testament has only obscure and brief references to heaven as a place believers will inhabit, for example, Isaiah 65:17; 66:22 which speak of a “new heaven and a new earth,” or when Job anticipated one day when he would “see God” (Job 19:2). In the New Testament, believers are said to go directly to heaven in their spirits immediately upon death as they await their resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; Luke 23:43). At the rapture living believers will receive glorified bodies and be caught up to heaven and Church saints who have previously died will receive their resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 14:1-3). Having been caught up to heaven, Church saints will remain with Jesus and accompany Him when He returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation Period to take His place on the Millennial throne for the 1,000 years of the Kingdom (John 14:3; Revelation 19:1-16; Jude 14). After the Millennium, the eternal state will see a “new heaven and new earth” which will be the habitation of all saints for all of eternity (Revelation 21-22; 2 Peter 3:10-13; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Covenant Theology starts with the New Testament description of heaven and concludes that this is the place where saints live with God. They then read this description of heaven back into the Old Testament description of the Kingdom and conclude that the earthly descriptions of the Kingdom must be spiritualized so that they can describe ultimate realities in heaven. By reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament, they are forced to deny the literal interpretation of the Old Testament texts which in turn makes those Old Testament texts something other than perspicuous for the Old Testament saint. Covenant Theology then turns its attention to Revelation 20 and, if they are amillennial or postmillennial, concludes that the 1,000 years must be figurative referring merely to an indefinitely long period of time.

Dispensationalism is the only system that truly gives the Old Testament text its proper place as a description of the Kingdom. Dispensationalism also makes a proper distinction between heaven and the Kingdom. By beginning with the Old Testament and moving forward into the New Testament, Dispensationalism maintains a proper, perspicuous reading of all the Scriptural texts.

## **3. What is the role of the following groups in the kingdom?**

### *a. The Church*

Following the rapture, the Church will be with Christ wherever He is. John 14:3 says, “I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.” And 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, “we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” So, when Christ returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation Period, we should assume that the Church will accompany Him. Church saints will be included in the saints that come with the Lord at that time (Jude 14; Revelation 19:14). Furthermore, the apostles were told that in the Kingdom they would be involved in judging (i.e. governing) Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). It is a reasonable assumption that if the apostles will have governing responsibility over Israel, then other believers will likely be given some sort of governing capacity in the administration of the Kingdom.

#### *b. Resurrected Old Testament and Tribulation Saints*

As we pointed out before, the “blessed hope” of the Old Testament saint was life in the Kingdom. The death of an Old Testament saint did not rule out his future enjoyment of the Kingdom. The closing verse of the Book of Daniel contains a personal promise made to the prophet: “But go thou thy way till the end *be*: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” (Daniel 12:13). Daniel was told that he would die (“rest”) but that “at the end of the days” he would stand in his lot. The original Hebrew word for “lot” is a word that suggests an allotted portion of land. In Daniel’s case it would signify the personal portion within the tribal allotment for his tribe of Judah. Such would be true in general for all Old Testament saints, as Isaiah proclaimed, “Thy dead *men* shall live, *together with* my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew *is as* the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26:19). These Old Testament saints will be resurrected and have glorified bodies that are not subject to death, corruption, or sin. Likewise, those who come to faith in Jesus during the Tribulation Period, known as Tribulation Saints, will be resurrected at the Second Coming and will inhabit the Millennial Kingdom in glorified, resurrected bodies. They are seen during the Tribulation Period as present in heaven in an intermediate state without a resurrection body,

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: <sup>10</sup> And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? <sup>11</sup> And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled. (Revelation 6:9–11)

At the Second Coming, these Tribulation Saints will have their bodies resurrected and they will enter the Kingdom in glorified, resurrection bodies (Revelation 20:4). Both Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints will enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom. They may also have some sort of administrative responsibilities like the Church.

#### *c. National Israel*

At the conclusion of the Tribulation Period, some Jews will have survived the antichrist’s persecution and will see the Lord at His return. These are the remnant of Israel that will be saved as a result of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 11:26-27). They will constitute the

nation of Israel and live within the geographical boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant. Unlike the Church, the Old Testament saints, and the Tribulation saints, these will still be living in their mortal bodies. They will have children born to them in the Kingdom. Since the first resurrection (i.e., the resurrection of the just) will have already been completed (Revelation 20:4-6), these will not die, but will remain alive throughout the entire 1,000 years of the Messianic Kingdom. Presumably, they will be given glorified bodies for the eternal state, much like living Christians at the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-54), but the Bible does not state this anywhere explicitly. The twelve tribes of Israel will be reconstituted as twelve regions in the land (Ezekiel 47-48).

#### *d. Gentile Nations*

Most of what the Bible says about the Kingdom relates to the nation of Israel, but the Bible also speaks of Gentile nations in the Kingdom. After all, outside of the geographical boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant there is still plenty room for many people outside of Millennial Israel (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2). In fact, the Lord's purposes for the Kingdom extend back to the beginning of creation, long before He called Abraham. Jesus made a very interesting comment in His Olivet Discourse. In Matthew 25:31-46, the Lord described a judgment of the Gentiles that will take place at His Second Coming. Just before the Millennium begins, He will separate the Gentiles who survived the Tribulation Period into two groups – the sheep (saved) and the goats (unsaved). The saved Gentiles will enter the Kingdom, while the unsaved Gentiles will be excluded from the Kingdom. To those Gentiles who enter the Kingdom, the Lord will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). So, we see that the kingdom was prepared for the righteous Gentile nations, as well as for Israel. This is reflective of God's original purpose for mankind in the Garden of Eden:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion [i.e., rule as a king] over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth... And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26, 28; compare Psalm 8:4-8)

The Gentile nations will be ruled by Jesus as their King, and at the beginning of the Millennium, they will all be saved. However, as time progresses, they will bear children who will have sin natures. The children of these Gentiles will each need to make a decision as to whether or not they will acknowledge King Jesus as their Savior from sin. Those who do not receive Jesus as Savior will die in their sin at the age of 100 years. This appears to be what Isaiah is saying in Isaiah 65:20 "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner *being* an hundred years old shall be accursed." On the other hand, all Gentiles who trust in Jesus as Savior will live throughout the entirety of the 1,000 years, like those in the nation of Israel.

According to the Prophet Zechariah, Gentiles will worship the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem, "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.<sup>23</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold



of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that* God *is* with you” (Zechariah 8:22–23). This worship will specifically include observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. “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” (Zechariah 14:16).

### **Conclusion**

When Christians refer to the “Kingdom” they are often thinking vaguely about “Heaven” or perhaps even about the progress of the Gospel during the present age. But these ideas are really notions that we have inherited from Amillennialism and Covenant Theology. A dispensational view of the Kingdom realizes that God has a purpose extending all the way back to the foundation of the world for a great Kingdom on the earth ruled over by His perfect representative. There will be place in this Kingdom for Old Testament Saints, Church Age Saints, Tribulation Saints, a saved and reconstituted nation of Israel, and righteous Gentile nations.

## 12 How does Dispensationalism inform us about Future Events Leading up to the Kingdom? – Part 1

Much of this series on Dispensationalism has focused on the subject of the Kingdom. But there are other prophetic events about which Dispensationalism helps us to think clearly and about which other theological systems are confused. These are the three major events that precede the Kingdom: the rapture of the Church, the Tribulation Period, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

### Pretribulational Rapture

The rapture, or “catching up” of the Church is clearly revealed in Scripture. Some people claim that the word “rapture” is not found in the Bible. However, the word “rapture” comes to us from the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, “Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” The expression “caught up” was translated into Latin by the verb *rapiemur* which gives us the English term “rapture.” This Latin verb is a form of the basic verb *rapio, rapui, raptus*; it simply means a “snatching away.” The Bible speaks of a future event that is to be anticipated by Christians in which all believers will be snatched away from the earth to meet Jesus in the air and return to the Father’s House. Since Covenant Theology does not distinguish between Christ’s coming for the Kingdom and Christ’s coming for the Church, those influenced by Covenant Theology tend to view this event as taking place at the same time as Christ’s coming for the Kingdom. But Dispensationalism helps us to understand that the rapture is a separate event that will take place at least seven years before Christ comes for the Kingdom.

#### 1. *Three Principal Texts*

There are many references to the rapture in the New Testament, but there are three in particular that give us a composite picture of this event. They are John 14:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; and 1 Corinthians 15:51-54.

##### a) John 14:1-4

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it* were not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also. <sup>4</sup> And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

From this text we learn:

1. After His death and resurrection, Jesus would return to the Father’s house in heaven (verse 2).
2. In the Father’s house, Jesus would prepare a place for His disciples (verse 2).
3. Jesus would later return to receive His disciples to the Father’s house in heaven (verse 3).

It is particularly important to note from this text that Jesus takes His disciples to the Father’s House. This is an important difference from Jesus’ coming at the beginning of the Kingdom. At His coming for the Kingdom, Jesus will gather all people on the earth to Jerusalem. But at the rapture, Jesus will take His people to heaven, to the Father’s House.

##### b) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. <sup>15</sup> For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: <sup>17</sup> Then we which are alive

and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

From this text we learn:

1. When Jesus returns, God will send with Him those who “sleep in Jesus” (verse 14). This is a reference to the souls of those who have died as members of the Body of Christ ever since the Day of Pentecost.
2. The bodies of those believers who have died since Pentecost will be resurrected (verse 16) to be reunited with the souls that have accompanied Jesus.
3. Believers who are alive on the earth at the time of this event will not die, but will be caught up (raptured) alive together with the resurrected bodies of previously dead saints (verses 15 & 17).
4. The meeting of all Church Age saints with Christ takes place “in the clouds” and “in the air” (verse 17).
5. Following this event, believers will constantly be “with the Lord” (verse 17).

Here it is important to note that this meeting with the Lord takes place “in the air,” not on the earth as at His coming for the Kingdom. Those who are taken away from the earth are taken away in blessing to be with the Lord. But at Christ’s coming for the Kingdom, those taken away are taken away for judgment, to be excluded from the Kingdom (Matthew 24:37-41).

### c) 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

From this text we learn:

1. The subject of the rapture was considered to be a “mystery” (verse 51). This means that was a previously unrevealed truth. The Old Testament says nothing about the rapture; it was not a topic revealed in previous Scriptures. This is because the Church itself is a mystery not revealed in the Old Testament (Ephesians 3:3-6).
2. The rapture involves two classes of people: those who sleep (i.e., have died), and those who do not sleep (i.e., have not yet died) (verse 51). This parallels the information given in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.
3. Those who sleep will experience a resurrection, those who do not sleep will undergo a change. This “change” is a kind of metamorphosis in which the mortal bodies we now inhabit will be transformed into glorified bodies (verses 51-53).

The information in this passage is not substantially different from that given in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, though it does add that the change that takes place occurs instantaneously.

From the above passages, we can construct the following five-stage sequence of events that will constitute the rapture:

## 2. *Five Stages*

### a) Christ goes to the Father’s House

The sequence of events associated with the rapture was begun at the ascension of Christ. This brought Christ’s earthly ministry to an end began His present session at the right hand of the throne of God. Among His other present ministries (see Lesson 10), Christ is preparing a place in the Father’s House for the Church (John 14:2). This parallels the Jewish wedding custom of a bridegroom preparing a room in his father’s house as a place to receive his bride at their wedding. In the case of Christ’s preparing such a place, the wedding feast and ceremony will coincide with the rapture.

### b) Christ descends to the air

At some future time known only to God, Christ will descend from heaven to the air to receive the Church to Himself as His bride. As He descends, He will bring with Him the souls of all those who have died in faith since the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, (1 Thessalonians 4:14). This is not the same as the Second Coming. The Second Coming will be a coming of Christ to the earth to begin His millennial kingdom reign. His descent to the air will not terminate in His coming to the earth, but rather will eventuate in His return to the Father's House (John 14:3).

c) The dead in Christ are raised

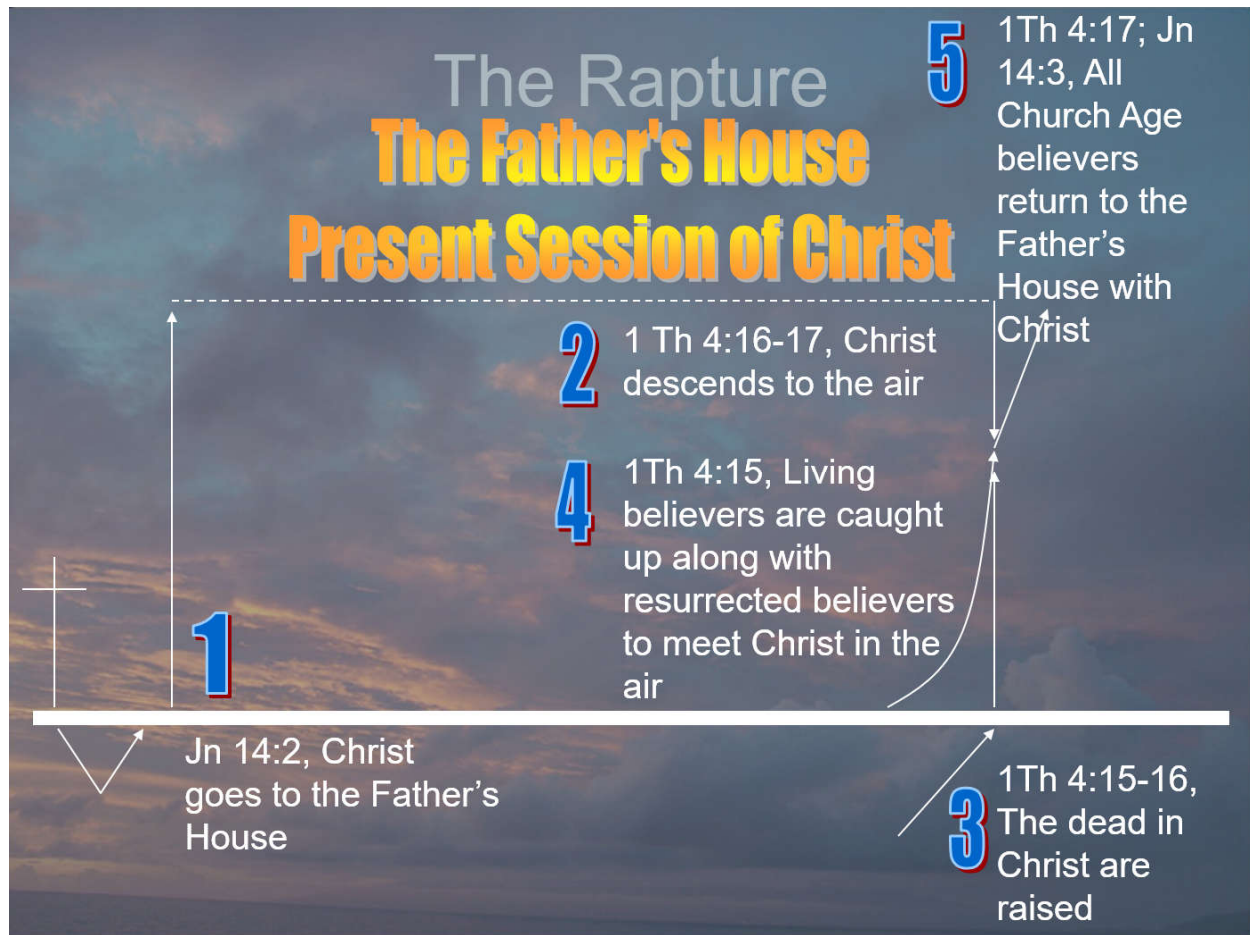
As Christ descends to the air, a great resurrection will take place. Everyone who has died in faith since the Day of Pentecost will be raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53). These resurrected bodies will be caught up to the air to be united with the souls that have accompanied Christ from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16-17).

d) Living believers are caught up and changed

This fourth stage is the actual *rapture*, ("catching up"). At the same time as resurrected bodies of believers are caught up to the air, living believers will experience a change in which their mortal bodies are transformed into glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-53) and will be caught to meet Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17).

e) All Church age believers return to the Father's House with Christ

Immediately following this grand meeting in the air all believers from the Church age will accompany Christ back to the Father's House to inhabit the mansions (literally, "dwelling places") He has prepared for us. This will be the principal dwelling place for the Church for the seven years of tribulation that precede the Kingdom (John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:17).



### 3. Differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming

Though the Rapture and the Second Coming share many features in common, there are several notable differences between these two events. These differences prove that they are not the same event. Non-dispensationalists frequently point out that since there are so many similarities between the rapture and the Second Coming, they must be the same event. While it is fairly easy to prove logically that two things are not the same – all one must do is demonstrate at least one difference – it is relatively difficult to prove that two things are the same. To prove that two things are the same, it must be demonstrated that they are exactly the same in every respect. For example, one can easily list many similarities between a peach and an apricot, but this does not prove that they are the same fruit (many similarities, but some rather significant differences). Similarly, the fact that many similarities exist between the Rapture and the Second Coming does not prove that they are the same event. If only one clear difference between these two events can be demonstrated, then it must be concluded that they are different events. Five such differences are noted below:

Rapture	Second Coming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saints meet Christ in the air</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saints meet Christ on earth</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All saints – both living and resurrected – receive glorified bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resurrected saints receive glorified bodies, but living saints remain in mortal bodies</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saints accompany Christ to the Father's House</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saints inhabit a renovated earth</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No mention of battle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Campaign of Armageddon, much bloodshed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No mention of sun, moon, stars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phenomena of sun, moon, stars</li> </ul>

In the 1800s, John Nelson Darby noticed the many differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming and began to investigate the Scriptural teaching on the Rapture. He concluded, as have many others, that the Rapture is an event that is not only distinct from the Second Coming, but that it must precede the seven-year Tribulation Period that leads up to Christ's Second Coming. This has consistently been the position held by dispensationalists ever since.

#### 4. *Reasons for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture*

There are several different views on the timing of the Rapture, but the two most commonly held are the Post-Tribulation Rapture view and the Pre-Tribulation Rapture view. Other views include: Mid-Tribulation Rapture, Partial Rapture, and Pre-Wrath Rapture views. In the interest of space, we will only examine the two most common views – Post-Tribulation and Pre-Tribulation.

##### a) Argument against Post-Tribulation Rapture

**Imminence and the Rapture.** The New Testament presents the Rapture as an event that is imminent. This means that it could occur at any moment. It does not necessarily mean that the Rapture will occur soon. After all, the apostles believed the Rapture was imminent when they wrote about it nearly 2,000 years ago. But to say that the Rapture is imminent is to say that there is no other event that *must* occur before the Rapture can take place. Such verses as James 5:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:7; and Philippians 3:20-21 all portray the Rapture as an imminent event. Believers are said to be waiting expectantly for the Lord to come for them at any moment. They are not urged to look for signs of His coming, but rather to look for the Lord Himself to appear. On the other hand, with regards to the Second Coming those who will be living during the Tribulation Period will be urged to look for the many signs that will occur during that period of time. Jesus said to them, “When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even at the doors*” (Matthew 24:33). Many prophesied events must precede the Second Coming, including: The rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem with a restored priesthood and sacrificial system, the rise of the antichrist, a persecution of the Jews more intense than has ever been experienced in their history, a one-world government, commissioning of 144,000 Jewish evangelists, and catastrophic world-wide judgments sent from heaven against an unbelieving world. Because of these prophesied events, the Second Coming cannot be described as an imminent event. But since the Rapture is portrayed in Scripture as imminent, it cannot be a post-tribulation event.

**God's People in the Tribulation.** The Tribulation Period is described in Scripture as a period of time when God is doing a specific work with His people Israel. It is specifically referred to as “the time of Jacob's trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). Daniel 9:24 portrays the Tribulation Period is described as a time that pertains to Daniel's people (i.e. Israel) and to Daniel's holy city (Jerusalem). Furthermore, God's appointed servants for proclaiming the gospel during the Tribulation Period are 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:1-8). Since the Church is a body of believers in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, it appears that there would be a double standard if God were to keep the Church on the earth during the Tribulation Period. The Post-Tribulation Rapture view confuses God's program for Israel with God's program for the Church.

**Death and Sin in the Kingdom.** If the rapture were to occur at the same time as the Second Coming of Christ for the Kingdom, there would be a real problem explaining how there could be death and sin in the Kingdom. Isaiah 65:20 describes conditions in the Kingdom as follows: “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, Nor an old man that hath not filled his days: For the child shall die an hundred years old; But the sinner *being* an hundred years old shall be accursed.” Now, if the Rapture were to occur at the beginning of the Kingdom, then everyone who entered the Kingdom would have glorified bodies, no one would ever sin, and no one would ever bear children. A Post-Tribulation Rapture theory has no way to explain the presence of death and sin in the Kingdom. But if the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation Period, then the Kingdom will be populated by the righteous who survive the Tribulation and go on to bear progeny, some of whom will never trust Christ as Savior, and who will die during the Kingdom.

##### b) Argument for Pre-Tribulation Rapture

**Israel and the Tribulation Period.** As discussed above when dealing with “God's People in the Tribulation,” the Tribulation Period is a time in history uniquely designed by God to deal with the Jews. The present dispensation is one in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14-18; 3:2-6; Galatians 3:28; 5:6; 6:15; Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13). By way of contrast, the Tribulation Period will be a time during which God's appointed servants are 144,000

Jews (Revelation 7:2-8; 14:1-5). Also, according to Daniel 9:24 the entire seven years of the Tribulation are a period of time are “determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city [i.e. Jerusalem].” In Jerusalem, there will be a rebuilt Jewish temple where people will worship God (Revelation 11:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). These descriptions of God’s dealings seem hardly possible if the Church is present on the earth. Thus, it seems necessary that the Church be removed before the Tribulation Period begins.

**Imminence and the Rapture.** Jesus told Peter that His coming for the Church could *possibly* occur before the death of the apostle John (John 21:21-23). Of course it didn’t, but that set the stage for the early Church to expect the coming of the Lord at any time. When James said that “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:8) he was suggesting that there was nothing else that needed to be fulfilled prophetically before the Lord’s coming. In the next verse James described the coming of the Lord as if it were like a judge standing just outside the courtroom, ready to enter at any moment (James 5:9). Paul praised the Thessalonian believers because when they turned to God they became such as those who “wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The verb “wait” (Greek *anamenō*) suggests the idea of waiting up for someone to return home at night. The Corinthian believers were similarly commended for “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:7). Here the Greek word “waiting” (*apekdechomai*) is different but means “to wait with eager expectancy.” The same Greek word occurs in Philippians 3:20, “we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” These verses strongly suggest that the apostles and early Christians were not expecting the Tribulation Period to begin before the rapture. The Tribulation Period will present many prophesied signs that will occur before the Second Coming, such as worldwide famine and pestilence, the rise of the antichrist, the rebuilding of the Jewish temple, the appearance of the 144,000, the emergence of a one-world government and economy, and terrific judgments on nature and human life. Jesus’ words to the saints of the Tribulation Period are, “when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors.” So, while Tribulation saints are told to look for signs, Church age saints are told simply to look for the Lord. We are not looking for the antichrist, but for the Lord Jesus Christ!

**Promise of Deliverance from Wrath.** The Tribulation Period is a unique time in the history of the world that will see the wrath of God poured out on humanity in a way unparalleled by any other time in history (Isaiah 24:1-4, 19-20; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:27; 12:1; Zephaniah 1:15; Matthew 24:21, 29; Revelation 15:1, 7; 14:10, 19; 16:1). Jesus described it as “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21). While Christians have often experienced persecution throughout Church history, the Church is promised deliverance from this unique time of extremely intense wrath poured out by God (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; Revelation 3:10; Luke 21:36).

**Paul’s Expectation to Remain Alive.** Jesus portrayed the Tribulation Period as a time of such intense persecution that the normal expectation for most saints will be martyrdom. He said, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake... then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:9, 21-22). By way of contrast, the apostle Paul expected that he and most of the believers he wrote to would remain alive until the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Philippians 3:20-21). Paul could not possibly have had this expectation if he believed the Rapture was to occur after the Tribulation Period.

**The Work of the Restrainer.** 2 Thessalonians 2:\*3-\*8 discusses the rise of the antichrist (referred to as the “man of sin” or “man of lawlessness”) during the Tribulation Period. Paul wrote that there was something that was currently restraining the appearance of this nefarious individual. He described it in the following way: “ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time” (verse 6), and, “he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way” (verse 7). The verbs “withholdeth” and “letteth” are both the same in the original Greek (*katecho*) and refer to an action of restraining. Not all Bible scholars are in agreement as to what exactly is currently restraining the appearance of the antichrist, but most dispensationalist scholars agree that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church which serves as a restraining influence against evil in the world that is currently keeping Satan from bringing his man to power (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:20-22; 2 Timothy 1:14; John 16:5-10). When the Church is removed at the Rapture, this influence will also be removed, giving Satan his window of opportunity to bring the antichrist to a position of power in the world.

**No Mention of the Church in the Tribulation.** There is no other Book of the Bible that give quite as detailed a description of Tribulation events as the Book of Revelation. The Book of Revelation is divided into three parts: (1) Christ’s message to the Church today, chapters 1-3; (2) Christ’s message about the future Tribulation Period, chapters 4-19; and (3) Christ’s description of the future Millennial Kingdom and Eternal State, chapters 20-22. It is quite interesting to note that while the word “Church” occurs some 20 times in chapters 1-3, it does not occur even once in all of chapters 4-19, but it is found again in 22:16. Why is the Church absent from the chapters describing the Tribulation Period? Most likely, it is because the Church was raptured before the Tribulation Period began.

## 13 How does Dispensationalism inform us about Future Events Leading up to the Kingdom? – Part 2

The previous lesson introduced the first of three great future events leading up to the Kingdom. In this lesson we will take a brief look at two more future events that will precede the Millennial reign of Christ.

### The Tribulation Period

“Tribulation Period” is the popular name given to a great seven-year period of time leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. The more common Biblical name for this event is “The Day of the Lord,” a phrase that is found some 23 times in the Old Testament and 5 times in the New Testament. Other Biblical names are:

- The Time of Jacob’s Trouble, Jeremiah 30:7
- The Seventieth Week, Daniel 9:27
- The Time or Day of Trouble, Daniel 12:1; Zephaniah 1:15
- The Wrath of God, Revelation 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1
- The Hour of Temptation (or “Trial”), Revelation 3:10
- The Wrath to Come, 1 Thessalonians 1:10
- The Wrath, 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 11:18
- The Great Tribulation, Matthew 24:21; Revelation 2:22; 7:14
- The Tribulation, Matthew 24:29

Here’s how Isaiah described this time:

<sup>9</sup> Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, Cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate: And he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. (Isaiah 13:9)

<sup>1</sup> Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, And turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. <sup>2</sup> And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; As with the servant, so with his master; As with the maid, so with her mistress; As with the buyer, so with the seller; As with the lender, so with the borrower; As with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him. <sup>3</sup> The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: For the LORD hath spoken this word. <sup>4</sup> The earth mourneth *and* fadeth away, The world languisheth *and* fadeth away, The haughty people of the earth do languish... <sup>19</sup> The earth is utterly broken down, The earth is clean dissolved, The earth is moved exceedingly. <sup>20</sup> The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, And shall be removed like a cottage; And the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; And it shall fall, and not rise again. (Isaiah 24:1–4. 19–20)

Jeremiah said, “Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it: It *is* even the time of Jacob’s trouble; But he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7).

The name “Tribulation” is commonly used to refer to this period of time because of the way Jesus referred to it in His Olivet Discourse: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21; see also Revelation 2:22; 7:14).

So, why would God plan such a time of confusion, destruction, death, and wrath for the earth? The Bible reveals three purposes for the Tribulation Period:

#### 1. *To make an end of wickedness and wicked ones*

Isaiah 13:9 says, “Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, Cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate: And he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it” (see also Isaiah 24:19–20). In many ways the days before Noah’s flood were parallel in wickedness to the days that immediately precede the Tribulation Period. Genesis 6:5–7 describes those days this way:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.



God extended a gracious message of salvation to that wicked, pre-flood world through the preaching of Noah (2 Peter 2:5). But wickedness, like a cancer, grows uncontrollably. In Noah's day, the wickedness of man increased so greatly that God eventually told Noah, "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13). When Jesus prophesied about the Tribulation Period in the Olivet Discourse, He said, "As the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37). The Tribulation Period will serve a purpose very much like the flood of Noah's day, to cut the cancer of wickedness out of the earth, and thus make a way for the Kingdom of righteousness.

## 2. *To bring about a worldwide revival*

While the terrible judgments of the Tribulation Period will result in the destruction of vast numbers of wicked people, not all will be lost. Unlike Noah's day, there will be a tremendous revival that takes place during the Tribulation Period. The preaching ministry of the 144,000 (Revelation 7:4-8) will result in the salvation of a great multitude of people from all over the world, from all the different nations (Revelation 7:9-17). The vast majority of these will suffer martyrdom at the hands of a powerful end-times force known as "Babylon" (Revelation 17:5-6), and also through the fierce tyrannical rule and persecution of the antichrist (Daniel 7:21; Revelation 11:7; 13:7). The persecution of believers during the Tribulation Period will be so intense that if the days of the Tribulation were allowed to continue, every last believer would perish from the earth. But God has predetermined to limit the time of the Tribulation to seven years so that some believers will survive to enter the Kingdom. This is what Jesus was referring to when He said, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). The word "shortened" (Greek *kolobo*) has the idea of "cutting short" or "terminating." It does not mean that the Tribulation Period will be less than the prophesied seven years, but rather that the end of the seven years will finally arrive, and some of the saints will survive to enter the Kingdom. One of the reasons some of the saints will survive is that the 144,000 will be so successful in winning so many to faith in Christ. In addition to the 144,000, there will also be an angel that announces the gospel of the Kingdom (Revelation 14:6-7). No doubt, this angelic message will also contribute to the great harvest of souls for the cause of Christ. All these believers will be Tribulation Saints, not members of the Church. The Church will have been removed from the earth before the beginning of the Tribulation. These Tribulation Saints who meet with martyrdom will be resurrected at the Second Coming and will enter the Kingdom in glorified bodies. Those who survive without being martyred will enter the Kingdom in mortal bodies and will bear children during the thousand years of the Kingdom.

## 3. *To break the power of the holy people*

The former two purposes of the Tribulation Period had to do primarily with Gentiles. This last purpose concerns the Jews. The prophet Daniel predicted long ago that the "power of the holy people" needed to be "broken." In our own time, we have seen the Jewish people emerge from the ashes of the holocaust to form a mighty nation with a vibrant economy; cutting edge technology in science, electronics, and agriculture; first-class universities, and the most powerful military in the Middle East. Three times, Israel has defended itself and won wars against massive Arab armies determined to destroy the tiny nation. All this is evidence, on the one hand, of the mighty power of a gracious, sovereign, miracle-working God. But on the other hand it is also evidence of what may be the chief obstacle in the way of Israel's finding salvation from sin through faith in the Messiah Yeshu'a (Jesus). That obstacle is her own stubborn confidence in the great strength with which God has blessed her. Israel has become so confident in her own cleverness and military strength, that she cannot humble herself to acknowledge her sin and need for forgiveness through the Messiah. God promises to extend His grace to the humble and lowly (Proverbs 3:34; 1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6). The great successes Israel has experienced are truly a wonderful blessing from God, but until her confidence in her own strength and ability are broken, Israel will never turn to Christ. The prophet Daniel foresaw that this would be precisely the situation Israel would face in the last days, and for this reason he prophesied,

Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. <sup>6</sup> And *one* said to the man clothed in linen, which *was* upon the waters of the river, How long *shall it be* to the end of these wonders? <sup>7</sup> And I heard the man clothed in linen, which *was* upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that *it shall be* for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these *things* shall be finished. (Daniel 12:5-7)

The "time, times, and an half" in verse 7 are a reference to the final three and a half years of the Tribulation Period. The angel in Daniel's vision proclaimed that this final period of intense persecution of the Jews would serve "to scatter the power of the holy people." The word "scatter" might be better translated "smash" (Heb. *naphats*). When Israel has fled from the cities into the deserts and mountains to hide from the antichrist's intense hatred and powerful military, from a position of no strength at all,

God's holy people will turn to the Messiah and plead for salvation. And at that time, Jesus will return, rescue the remnant of Israel, judge all who have survived (Matthew 25:31-46), and will set up the Kingdom, fulfilling His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## The Second Coming of Christ

The great climax of all prophecy might be considered the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus said, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matthew 25:31). Many Christians have a mental image of the Second Coming as a singular, momentary event that takes place in an instant of time. However, the Scriptures actually speak of the Second Coming as a sequence of events occurring over a period of several days, followed by a 75-day interval before the Kingdom begins. In this lesson we can only give a bare outline of this sequence. Seven important events are included in this great climax of prophecy.

### 1. *The Campaign of Armageddon*

Often referred to as the "Battle of Armageddon," this is really not a single battle, but more of an extended military campaign. At the very end of the Tribulation Period, the armies of the antichrist will assemble in the broad plain in northern Israel known as the Plain of Esdraelon, also known as the Jezreel Valley. Revelation 16:16 refers to this place as "Armageddon," due to the raised military outpost, "Megiddo," located prominently on its northwest. In Hebrew the "Mountain of Megiddo" would sound something like, *HarMegiddon*, which comes across into Greek as *Armegiddon*. Revelation describes this gathering of armies as follows:

<sup>13</sup> And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *come* out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. <sup>14</sup> For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, *which* go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. <sup>15</sup> Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed *is* he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. <sup>16</sup> And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. (Revelation 16:13-16)

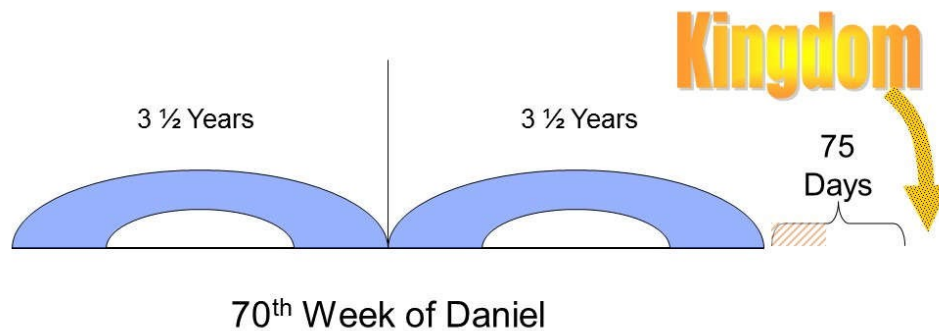
One of the earliest Biblical references to this campaign is found in Psalm 2:1 which speaks of the kings of the earth and the rulers engaging in a counsel of war against the LORD and His Anointed (or Messiah).

From the Valley of Armageddon, these armies will proceed to Jerusalem where they will besiege the city and eventually destroy one third of the holy city (Zechariah 12:1-9). This, in turn, will bring about a great repentance on the part of the Jews who remain in the city. They will turn to the Lord in humbleness of heart and cry out for His deliverance (Zechariah 12:10-13:1).

### 2. *The Second Coming of Christ*

The actual Second Coming is what brings the campaign of Armageddon to an end. Some covenant theologians have taught a spiritualized version of the Second Coming which views this as a coming of Christ to each individual believer at salvation in order to reign spiritually in his heart. But the Bible portrays this coming as a literal, visible coming to the earth to reign as King on the throne of David. Matthew 24:30, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." And, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matthew 25:31; also Acts 1:11; Revelation 19:11-16). The Second Coming will result in the defeat of the antichrist and his armies (Revelation 19:19-21).

The Kingdom will not commence immediately upon the arrival of Christ to the earth. Instead, the Bible speaks of an interval of 75 days during which a number of events must transpire before the Kingdom can begin. The Tribulation Period of seven years is divided into two halves, each consisting of 1,260 days (3 ½ years of 360 days each). The beginning of the second half is marked by an abomination committed by the antichrist in the Jerusalem temple. Accordingly, the Second Coming occurs 1,260 days after this abomination. But Daniel 12:11-12 makes this very interesting comment: "And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice* shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, *there shall be* a thousand two hundred and ninety days." <sup>12</sup> Blessed *is* he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days." The reference there to 1,290 days and to 1,335 days suggests that there is an intervening period of 30 days, then an additional 45 days, before the actual commencement of the Kingdom.



During this 75-day interval a number of important events must transpire before the thousand years of the Kingdom can actually begin. The following five events are among those things that must occur in this 75-day interval.

### 3. *The Removal of the Abomination of Desolation*

As Daniel 12:11-12 state, the timing of the 75-day interval is related to the abomination of desolation. This abomination will consist of a desecration of the Jerusalem temple on the part of the antichrist and is referred to in Daniel 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; and Revelation 13:14-15. The abomination apparently consists of the antichrist taking up residence in the temple and demanding that the whole world worship him as god. At times, presumably when he is not physically present in Jerusalem, this worship will be directed toward an image of the antichrist that will be set up in the temple as well. Before the Kingdom can commence, the site of the temple must be thoroughly cleansed and sanctified. This will require the removal and destruction of this abominable idol.

### 4. *The Judgment of the Antichrist and False Prophet*

The antichrist and the false prophet will both be slain by the Lord at the Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:20). Following this, they will both be resurrected and cast alive into the Lake of Fire. For the rest of humanity, condemnation to the Lake of Fire will take place at the Great White Throne judgment after the thousand years (Revelation 20:7-15). But for a thousand years, the only inhabitants of the Lake of Fire will be the antichrist and the false prophet. Since the rest of humanity is not sent to this place of torment without first appearing before the Lord as their judge, it seems to be a reasonable inference that there will be some formal judgment and sentencing of the antichrist and the false prophet during the 75-day interval. However, the Bible does not overtly describe this judgment.

### 5. *The Imprisonment of Satan*

Satan, the evil master-mind who will inspire the antichrist, will not immediately be cast into the Lake of Fire at the Second Coming; this will not take place until after the thousand years. Instead, he is sent to a place of temporary confinement known as "the bottomless pit" (or the "abyss"). This bottomless pit is a place where God confines demons (see Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:11). According to Revelation 20:3 this bottomless pit becomes Satan's place of confinement for the thousand years.

## 6. *The Judgment of the Gentiles*

Joel 3:1-3 speaks of a great judgment of Gentile nations that will take place in conjunction with the Second Coming. This judgment will also take place during the 75-day interval. While Joel speaks only of the condemnation of wicked Gentiles who will be excluded from the Kingdom, Jesus gave an expanded description of this judgment and revealed that there will also be some believing Gentiles who will enter the Kingdom (Matthew 25:34-45).

## 7. *The Resurrection of Old Testament and Tribulation Saints*

While Church age saints will have been resurrected at least seven years before the Second Coming (at the Rapture), saints from the Old Testament and from the Tribulation Period will be raised at some point during the 75-day interval. The resurrection of Old Testament saints is seen in such passages as Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; and Daniel 12:12-13. The resurrection of Tribulation Saints is referred to in Revelation 20:4.

In addition to the seven items described above, there may be any number of other things, administrative and otherwise, that need to take place during the 75-day interval – such things as setting up the administration and government of the Kingdom, apportionment of land to various family and national entities, determination of borders, certain geological and geographical changes that will take place, etc. But once the Kingdom is in place, the world will see conditions as they have never been seen before. The closest historical approximation to the Kingdom was the experience that Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden before the fall. But even then, God's ruler, Adam, was a man subject to temptation and sin. However, in the Kingdom, God's ruler, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45; Romans 5:14), Jesus Christ, will rule in perfect righteousness; God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!