

Features

Is There a Future for Israel? by Ronald Diprose

If the church replaces Israel as some theologians hold, is there a future for Israel? Does it matter? This article responds to that question and reinforces the promise to Abraham, “Those who bless you I will bless, and those who curse you I will curse.”

The Covenants of the Bible by David J. MacLeod

Isn't that Covenant Theology? This question is repeated often in church life when the term “covenant” is used in teaching and preaching. Dr. Macleod addresses the subject of the biblical covenants in this issue and the basic concepts of Covenant Theology in the next issue of *Journey*. Read this article in order to reason clearly concerning this debated subject.

The Millennium Question by Sean Lillis

Is there really going to be a literal, earthly Millennial Kingdom with Jesus ruling as King from Jerusalem? Sean Lillis establishes the clear biblical teaching on the glory of that coming Kingdom. “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”

The Pretribulation Rapture by Jack Fish

There is growing discussion concerning the timing of the Rapture in relationship to the Tribulation. Dr. Fish presents a convincing argument for the pretribulation Rapture of the church. Have your beliefs strengthened or your position challenged: Either way, enjoy this thoughtful article.

Preterism – It's Already Happened by David Harper

A school of interpretation holds that much of the prophecy of the book of Daniel and of the prophetic ministry of Jesus has already been fulfilled. This article addresses the origin of that movement and presents the weaknesses in its presuppositions.

The Tenets of Progressive Dispensationalism by Kenneth Daughters

Is dispensationalism a work in progress? In a sense, it always has been, with adjustments being included as understanding of relevant Scriptures increases. This article will enable you to evaluate your personal position as you understand the variations set forth in progressive dispensationalism.

Whatever Happened to Prophecy?

By David A. Glock

The giant-sized chart hardly fit across the back of the platform at the "Hall" where we all gathered for an extended series of special meetings. The series was undetermined in length depending on the time needed for the traveling brother to complete the series, and the measure of endurance of the faithful saints who would not think of forsaking their assembling together. It seemed to me as a child that the series would never come to an end—especially because the traveling brother was residing with my family (The meals were wonderful!). I should have guessed it would be a long series. The chart was entitled, FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY! Because of this series a favorite hymn that I often requested in the Sunday evening Gospel Meeting was NO NIGHT THERE, # 397 in Choice Hymns of the Faith hymnal. Hardly a contemporary hymn for an eight-year-old!

From birth until my departure from home to attend Emmaus Bible School when I was 18, my father conducted family devotions without fail. After dinner, one chapter of the Bible, the book of Chronicles and all, two verses each. Then prayer, and then the repetition of 1 Thessalonians:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:16-18). In a country cemetery in Iowa, down the street from Emmaus, across from a cornfield, rest the remains of my parents and my dear wife. Inscribed on the grave markers are portions of the promises of the oft-repeated verses from Thessalonians. PROPHECY IS VERY RELAVENT. Childhood lessons are important! God in His great grace has not only saved us, but in Holy Scriptures He has revealed the whole story of salvation—the beginning, the middle, and the end. The story ends well!

Prophecy was so much a part of the Brethren movement that Charles Spurgeon said of them, "Ye men of Plymouth, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" This was not meant as a compliment, but it really is nonetheless. Many exhortations of Scripture relating to daily living find their basis in the certain hope of the future return of the Lord. A few follow:

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2, 3).

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of

which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen (2 Pet. 3:11, 12, 17, 18).

The last issue of Journey related to the decline of expository preaching in the churches. There is likewise a decline in emphasis of the teaching of prophetic truth—this giving way to applicational challenges and so-called relevant topical exhortation. Consequently, issues relating to prophecy have become confused and blurred. This issue of Journey will treat some of these subjects with the hope of helping to restore clarity of thinking and a renewal of a biblical emphasis of future things. Subjects presented include:

- Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation?
- Is There a Future for Israel?
- Will Christ Reign on the Earth?
- Are Christ's Olivet Discourse Prophecies Already Fulfilled?
- What is Progressive Dispensationalism?
- Covenant Theology and the Covenants of the Bible

If anybody still has the chart FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY, perhaps we could dust it off and get back up to speed on the biblical future. This would help us to live as pilgrims and strangers and ambassadors and citizens of heaven! It will also help us to know what to engrave on grave markers!

Is There a Future for Israel: What Is Replacement Theology?

What do we mean by "Israel"?

By Ron DiProse

In order to know whether or not there is a future for Israel we need to ascertain what we mean by "Israel." Is it historic Israel, a people group, the State of Israel, or all of these? We will use the Bible as our guide in order to decide how to answer this question. It is always helpful to know the beginnings of something in order to grasp its true meaning, so that is where we will start.

The Bible teaches that God created Israel very deliberately, a long time after the formation of ancient nations like Assyria and Egypt (Gen. 10; 12:1–3; Isa. 43:1–7). The name Israel was given to this people at the time of Jacob (Gen. 32:27–28). Later Moses explained that God's choice of Abraham and his descendants was not on the basis of any special merit (Dt. 4:37; 7:6–8), but to be a people consecrated to Himself, for the working out of His purposes with

mankind (26:18–19). Moreover it is important to remember that the creation of this elect people, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is part of a design to bring blessing to the entire world (Gen. 12:3). In order that this promised universal blessing become a reality, it was necessary that the patriarchs and their descendants have a special relationship with God. It was also necessary they have a territory where they could experience divine blessing or chastisement, according to whether or not they obeyed the Law given to them by God (Gen. 15:18-19; Ps. 105:4-11; Dt. 28). No other nation has ever had a similar relationship with God (Amos 3:2). There are more than 2,000 mentions of Israel in the Hebrew Bible and 73 in the New Testament. This makes Israel the second subject of Biblical revelation, second only to God Himself. Israel is one of the four institutions God has created: the family (Gen. 2:24), government (Gen. 9:6), Israel (the book of Genesis), and the church (Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:1-42; 11:15). So the answer to our question “What do we mean by Israel?” is: *The name Israel refers to a historic, ethnic people created by God, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who have been entrusted with a territory in which to live and serve Him.*

Does Israel have a future?

It is amazing that the Israelites, who usually go under the name of “Jews” (from *Judah*), are still a recognizable people group after two millennia of being exiled, hunted, persecuted, and massacred by the millions. Many times the Jews have tried to assimilate with the people among whom they were dispersed but this has not worked. They have remained “a separate people, not counted among the nations” (Num. 23:9). Today about seven million Jews live in part of the Promised Land, significantly called Israel; an equal number live in other countries. In Romans 11:25–29 the apostle Paul informs us that even unbelieving members of the nation of Israel continue to be part of God’s elect people. At present this part of Israel remains hardened but at the conclusion of the times of the Gentile nations, the Redeemer will come to Zion, induce a national repentance and thus “all Israel will be saved, as the prophets have written” (Rom. 11:26). Thus Israel will be restored and, as a nation, will enter into the new covenant. At this writing, the prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, has created a government of national unity because of the extreme risk of having to face war with Iran and with its allies. Had the other Middle Eastern nations and indeed the United Nations respected international law, there would be no risk of war. When the representatives of the main allied forces met at San Remo, Italy, on April 26, 1920, to divide up what had been the Ottoman Empire, they incorporated the Balfour Declaration into international law, allotting to Israel all the territory which now includes Israel, Jordan, and the disputed territories which commonly go under the name of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria). Among the signatories were the prime minister of Great Britain, David Lloyd George; a representative of the United States government; and the Italian representative who hosted the conference. On July 24, 1922, the Mandate to bring about Israeli statehood was entrusted to Britain by the newly established League of Nations and became operative in September 1923. This mandate required Britain to encourage the establishment of Jews in the

Jewish homeland, grant citizenship to Jewish immigrants, and promote the constitution of a Jewish Nation¹.

These decisions, and the willingness of Great Britain to accept the role of mandatory power, constitute a rare example of human governments acting in harmony with God's revealed will and purpose (Gen. 15:18). In his discourse to the philosophers of Athens Paul declared it is God's prerogative to determine the times set for all nations "and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:24–26). Unfortunately the respect shown by international politics for the shape of the Promised Land as determined by God was short-lived. However, the nations need to know that failure to respect the boundaries of the territories assigned by God to Israel carries with it the promise of divine judgment. Speaking of the gathering of the nations around the borders of restored Judah and Jerusalem, God says: "Then I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land" (Joel 3:1–2).

By 1925 Britain had assigned all the land east of the Jordan River to Emir Abdullah, to form the kingdom of Jordan, intended for the Arab populations living in the area. During the following decades Britain allowed Arab pressure to stop it carrying out the terms of the Mandate. Even so, on November 19, 1947, the newly formed United Nations voted on a resolution which assigned a small portion of the territory formerly allotted to Israel for the establishment of a *Jewish* state. The rest of the territory west of the Jordan was partitioned off for "Palestinians." The Jews accepted this arrangement, although the territory assigned them was but a fraction of that written into international law in 1922. Several remarkable changes in political policy, especially on the part of Russia, assured the required two-thirds majority when the vote was taken by the United Nations General Assembly. Thus David Ben-Gurion was fully in his rights when on May 14, 1948, he proclaimed the birth of the sovereign State of Israel. The Arab nations did not accept the United Nations resolution and immediately waged war against the nascent State of Israel. Against all human odds Israel survived. So far as financial support of Israel is concerned, Golda Meir tells in her autobiography that this came partly from the Jewish community in the United States and partly from the extraordinary development of Israeli industry and agriculture. Christian Zionists have also played a part but the nation's survival was due to other factors.

The history of the modern State of Israel has been accompanied by the progressive fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel 36:25–26. This prophecy envisages the Jews returning to their homeland in unbelief and then experiencing spiritual renewal. On the day the modern State of Israel was born, Messianic believers living in the country numbered less than 30. Now there are more than 100 Messianic assemblies throughout the land. Such spiritual renewal accords with biblical prophecy, suggesting that the creation and survival of the modern State of Israel is the fruit of the workings of divine providence in history. This leads us to conclude that Israel does have a future, in view of the restoration of all things as envisaged by the prophets (Acts 3:21).

¹ For a complete documentation of these decisions and the relative texts, see Eli E. Hertz, *This Land is My Land, "Mandate for Palestine" Legal Aspects of Jewish Rights*, (New York, NY, Myths and Facts, Inc., 2008).

What is Replacement Theology?

For more than 19 centuries the Jewish people have been the object of contempt and suspicion. One of the causes of this attitude is Replacement Theology, the idea that *Israel has been repudiated by God and has been replaced by the church for every aspect of the working out of His plan*. It is important to trace the origin of this idea because much of Christendom takes for granted that this is what the Bible teaches. In practice it is thought that wherever you find “Israel” in the Bible you should understand the text to be talking about the church, particularly where promises are involved.

Some years ago I was surprised to discover that, while Replacement Theology had been the majority position within Christendom from post-apostolic times until the middle of the 19th century, just three months after the founding of the modern State of Israel the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches issued a cautious repudiation of the concept, on the basis of God’s continuing covenant with Israel!² This sudden change of opinion suggested to me that Replacement Theology was more the product of circumstance than the fruit of careful reflection on God’s Word. I was challenged to consider the following New Testament passages thought to favor Replacement Theology: John 8:30–59; Matthew 21:42–44; Acts 15:1–18; Galatians 3:26–29; 6:16; Ephesians 2:11–22; Hebrews 8:1–13; 1 Peter 2:4–10; Philippians 3:4–9; and 1 Thessalonians 2:15–16. So I examined these passages carefully in their context and came to the conclusion, that for the New Testament writers, *God’s purpose in the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, does not imply the repudiation of Israel as the elect nation*.³ On the other hand there are passages such as Romans 11 which strongly deny Replacement Theology.

Of course to those Jews, past and present, who do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah whose coming was predicted by the Hebrew prophets, much in the New Testament will appear anti-Judaic, despite the fact that one of the major prophets predicted the advent of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34). To Jews who ignore the fact that Jesus brought this covenant into being through His atoning sacrifice (Lk. 22:20), passages in which new covenant believers, both Jews and Gentiles, are said to share in something more glorious than that formerly experienced by Israel (Eph. 2:11–21; Heb. 11:39–40), and those that describe the church as a *chosen people* and a *royal priesthood* (1 Pet. 2:9–10), will seem to be both illegitimate and arrogant. The same can be said of statements according to which Gentiles are admitted into the sphere of God’s blessing without entering the covenant of Law (Acts 15:7–11; Rom. 3:2–31).

It is worth noting that the apostle Peter is careful not to use the definite article in 1 Peter 2:9–10, although some translations have wrongly introduced it, making verse 10 say: “Now you are *the* people of God” (NIV). Peter had previously affirmed that God will fulfill all of His promises to Israel (Acts 3:19–21). So when Peter writes very accurately “a people of God” in his first letter, he is confirming James’ statement that God is “taking from the nations a people for

² *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and Its Member Churches*, Allan Brockway, Paul van Buren, Rolf Rendtorff and Simon Schoon, eds. (Geneva, WWC Publications, 1988), 5–9.

³ For an exposition of these passages see my *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology*, (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004 [now distributed by IVP]), 29–68.

himself” (Acts 15:14). This marks the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, that all nations will be blessed through his descendants, but does not imply the repudiation of Israel. In fact, Jewish readers who shared the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah would have been surprised if there were no evidence in the apostolic writings of God “taking from the nations a people for himself” (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 49:5–6; cf. Acts 13:46–47; Gal. 3:8). Concerning unfulfilled elements of Old Testament promise, such readers would have found reassurance reading the words of Jesus and the apostles concerning a *second* coming of Christ (Mt. 13:36–43; 23:23; Lk. 19:11–27; Acts 3:20–21). In that day Zion (Jerusalem) and a restored Israel will be the center of the Messianic Kingdom.

But if the New Testament confirms the Old Testament expectation of a Messianic Kingdom, to coincide with the return of Christ in glory and the restoration of Israel to center stage in the working out of God’s plan in history, we must ask ourselves:

How then did Replacement Theology originate?

Few would dispute the fact that the disastrous Jewish war of A.D. 66-70, which saw the destruction of Jerusalem and the second Temple, began a process which changed the face of Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations.⁴ The most significant development within Judaism was the emergence of rabbinic Judaism as the only enduring form of the Jews' historical monotheistic faith. Apocalyptic forms of Judaism like that espoused at Qumran were discredited by the Roman victory in A.D. 70. The failure of the Jewish revolt led by Bar Kochba in A.D. 132-135 further discredited the Jewish hopes of an imminent kingdom.⁵ Meanwhile the importance of *Jewish* Christianity was reduced by the forced exile of the Jerusalem Christians to Transjordan in A.D. 66 and the loss of prestige Jewish Christianity suffered due to the destruction of Jerusalem.⁶

Following the Jewish war of A.D. 66-70, Rome was increasingly hostile towards both Judaism and Christianity because both were monotheistic and opposed the use of images. Moreover Christianity could not boast of a long history, unless it appropriated Jewish history as its own. This situation produced a spirit of rivalry between this new monotheistic community of faith and the older Jewish community. New Testament scholar Dieter Georgi (1929-2005) wrote: “Toward the end of the first century CE, Jews and Christians began to develop their own identities; not only against each other but also against the huge range of other options available to them both. These options were suddenly considered deviant.”⁷ According to Christian history and doctrine professor Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006): “The appropriation of the Jewish Scriptures and of the heritage of Israel helped Christianity to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and to argue that with the coming of Christ Jerusalem had served its purpose in the divine plan and could be forgotten.”⁸

⁴ See James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, London, SCM, 1991, pp. 230-259.

⁵ See F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, The Paternoster Church History, vol. 1, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1958, pp. 261-267.

⁶ Inasmuch as the Romans forbade Jewish Christians to live in Jerusalem after A.D. 135, the church there was purely Gentile in nature (Bruce, *ibid.*, p. 272).

⁷ Dieter Georgi, “The Early Church: Internal Jewish Migration or New Religion?” *Harvard Theological Review* 88/1 (1995): 65.

⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 5 vol. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989), 1:26.

There is no lack of evidence of this spirit of rivalry between Judaism and Christianity.⁹ At Jamnia, where Jewish sage Yohanan ben Zakkai had received permission from Rome to set up a school for rabbinical study, the rabbis developed puns to distort the meaning of the word *gospel*. Moreover the *Birkath ha-Minim*, a pronouncement against heretics which is part of the 12th benediction in the Jewish liturgical prayer, *Eighteen Benedictions*, is thought to be directed against Christians.¹⁰ There is evidence of this in early Christian apologist Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, written about A.D. 150. At a certain point Justin accuses the Jews of "cursing in your synagogues those that believe on Christ."¹¹ However such attitudes were not unilateral. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writing around A.D. 115, instigated his Christian readers to oppose all things Jewish. He claimed that the Hebrew prophets had lived according to Jesus Christ and not according to the Jewish law.¹² Meanwhile Christians freely appropriated to themselves much in the Hebrew Scriptures which was originally addressed to Israel by interpreting them allegorically.¹³

This negative stance of Christians against Jews and Judaism consolidated into an *Adversus Judaeos* tradition which permeated much of the writings of the church fathers, favoring the normalization of Replacement Theology. Pelikan writes: "Virtually every major Christian writer of the first five centuries either composed a treatise in opposition to Judaism or made this issue a dominant theme in a treatise devoted to some other subject."¹⁴ We only have room here to give two early examples of how Replacement Theology became a theological presupposition: that is, "something is taken for granted, that does not need to be proved."

The Epistle of Barnabas (ca. A.D. 140)

Commenting on the fact that Moses broke the original tables of stone when he became aware of the nation's transgression, this anonymous writer concludes the Lord never did give the promised testament to unworthy Israel; rather it has been given to the church which, through Christ, has received the promised inheritance (XIV, 5). Alluding to Exodus 33:1–3, *The Epistle of Barnabas* treats God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of a land as a parable of the Christians' inheritance through Christ (VI, 6-17).

The disinheriting of Israel comes to a head in chapter XIII. The basis of the discussion is Genesis 25:21–23 and in particular the phrase "the older will serve the younger" quoted by Paul in Romans 9:12. It is clear in the Genesis context that the older is Esau (and his descendants) while the younger is Jacob (and his descendants). Paul cites this prophecy in Romans to show that Israel's position as the elect nation depends upon God's purpose and not upon human works. The author of Barnabas completely ignores the way the phrase is used both in Genesis and Romans and links it with Genesis 48:17–19, contending that in both cases the younger child refers to the church, the true heir to the covenant. In fact the writing, as a whole, manifests the

⁹ See W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 135-136.

¹⁰ Bruce, op. cit., 267.

¹¹ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 16,4.

¹² To the Magnesians, VIII, 10.

¹³ Pelikan, *TCT* 1:14-27.

¹⁴ See my *Israel and the Church*, ch. 3, n. 48, for a partial list of Greek and Latin works belonging to the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition.

latent presupposition that *the church, the true heir of the promises, occupies the place that Israel had always been unworthy of occupying.*

Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew (ca. A.D. 150)

In his *First Apology* Justin understands Christianity to be a product of the logos present in Greek philosophy. It follows he has no reason to attach particular importance to physical Israel. Accordingly, in his *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*,¹⁵ Justin feels free to allegorize the Old Testament. An extreme example of this and clear evidence that by his time Replacement Theology had become a theological presupposition is where, in commenting on Isaiah 42:1–4, he calls Christians "the *true* Israelite race" (CXXXV). Contempt for the Jews, who showed no sign of disappearing from the scene, and unqualified praise for the church is clearly seen where Justin describes Trypho's kindred as "a useless, disobedient, and faithless generation" while the church is described as "those who were selected out of every nation have obeyed His will through Christ—whom He calls also Jacob, and names Israel" (CXXXV, 3–4).

Conclusion

In practice, Replacement Theology has become a way of reading the Bible which replaces Israel with the church and leads to the denial that ethnic Israel is still God's elect people and that Old and New Testament promises regarding a future Messianic Kingdom are to be understood literally. This in turn produces anti-Semitism, and its present expression, anti-Zionism.

¹⁵ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, A. Cleveland Coxe and Allan Menzies, 10 vol. (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1986), 1:194-270.

THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS AND COVENANT THEOLOGY
PART 1: THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS
BY: DR. DAVE MACLEOD

The covenants of God are an important topic in that the narrative of Scripture revolves around His covenant promises. Many noted students of the Word of God agree. Charles Spurgeon, the great London pastor and evangelist said, “The doctrine of the covenants is the key of theology.”¹⁶ On another occasion he said, “The doctrine of the divine covenant lies at the root of all true theology.”¹⁷ Evangelical statesman and theologian, J. I. Packer, wrote, “Biblical doctrine, first to last, has to do with covenantal relationships between God and man.”¹⁸ A 19th-century Presbyterian scholar wrote, “The doctrine of the covenants becomes the central principle of theology.”¹⁹ Walther Eichrodt, one of the premier Old Testament scholars of the 20th century argued that covenant was the controlling idea or “center” of all Old Testament theology.²⁰

The subject is not only important; it is difficult for at least two reasons: First is the problem of systematizing all the Bible says about the covenants and interpreting the data. Second is the sharp rift that arose over the subject in evangelical circles in the 20th century. The two parties in the conflict are proponents of dispensationalism and proponents of covenant theology.²¹

I have three goals in this two-part article: (1) Define the term “covenant,” (2) enumerate and explain the biblical covenants, and (3) set forth the essential features of covenant theology.

THE DEFINITION OF “COVENANT”

THE ENGLISH WORD “COVENANT”

The English word “covenant” is derived from the Latin *con venire* (“come together”). A covenant involves the “coming together” of two parties in some kind of mutual agreement. In addition to the idea of “agreement,” the English word is used in various contexts of a “compact, contract ... undertaking, pledge, or promise of one of the parties.” It can mean “a formal agreement ... or promise of legal validity.” In older usage it means “vow,” and “matter agreed upon ... or promised.”²² The word can mean the *relation* (“agreement”), the *action* of

¹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Greatest Fight in the World—C. H. Spurgeon’s Final Manifesto* (1891; reprint ed., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), 45.

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “The Wondrous Covenant, A Sermon on Heb. 8:10,” in *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1951), 5:449–458 [esp. 449].

¹⁸ J. I. Packer, “Introduction: On Covenant Theology,” in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body*; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics of Divinity* (London, UK: B. Baynes, 1822; reprint ed., Escondido, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 3.

¹⁹ A. B. Van Zandt, “The Doctrine of the Covenants Considered as the Central Principle of Theology,” *The Presbyterian Review* 3 (Jan., 1882): 28–39.

²⁰ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1961), 1:36–69. Cf. Gordon J. McConville, “Berith,” *NIDOTTE*, 1:752.

²¹ R. Todd Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift: The Fissuring of American Evangelical Theology from 1936–44*, SEHT (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2007). The rift continues and has been exacerbated by partisan views on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Differences of opinion of another sort exist in biblical criticism. See the essay in A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salters, eds., *Covenant as Context: Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²² OED, s.v. “Covenant,” 3:1069–70.

undertaking it (“make a covenant/contract”), or the *content* (“obligation”) undertaken. The covenant can be *bilateral* (“agreement of both parties”) or *unilateral* (“promise of one party”). The range of English meaning is close to that of the secular usage of the biblical words for covenant.²³

THE HEBREW WORD

The Hebrew word for “covenant” is *berith* and it is regularly accompanied by the verb *karath* meaning “to make” (literally, “to cut”). The etymology (root meaning) of *berith* is not altogether clear,²⁴ and there remains a wide range of opinions on the subject.²⁵

Old Testament usage, however, is not so opaque. A covenant is “that which bound two parties together. It was used for many types of ‘bond.’”²⁶ The word was commonly used for covenants between men. For example, the Old Testament records covenants between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:27; 26:28), Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:44), David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3; 23:18). Each of these was a mutually binding agreement between two parties, and this is the primary meaning of *berith*.

More important, however, are the divine covenants in which God entered a covenantal relationship with particular men or the nation of Israel. The Bible explicitly mentions covenants established with Noah (Gen. 6:18), Abraham (Gen. 15:18), Israel (Ex. 24:8), and David (Ps. 89:3). Furthermore, Jeremiah foretold the establishment of a “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31) with Israel in a future day, and Jesus spoke of His ratification of that covenant at the Last Supper (Lk. 22:20).

How then may we define a divine covenant? Theologian and author Palmer Robertson writes, “When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond.” He then offers this definition, “A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered.”²⁷ There are three ingredients in this definition:²⁸ First, a covenant is a bond; it establishes a relationship between God and man. In the making of a covenant God verbally declares the character of the bond being formed. Second, a covenant is a bond in blood or bond of life and death. The most common expression for the ratification of a covenant is “to cut a covenant.” This is illustrated in Genesis 15:9–10 and Jeremiah 34:18 where animals were killed and their divided parts were placed opposite one another. This action stressed the ultimacy of the bond. The slaying of the animals was a “pledge to the death,” it represented the curse that the covenant maker called down upon himself if he should violate the commitment he has made (Jer. 34:20). It is in the context of covenantal death that the death of Jesus must be understood. He died as a substitute for the covenant breaker. Third, a covenant is bond in blood sovereignly administered. The divine covenants were not characterized by

²³ Dennis J. McCarthy, “*Berith* and Covenant in the Deuteronomic History,” *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel, SuppVT 23* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 1972), 85, n. 1.

²⁴ M. Weinfeld, “*Berith*,” *TDOT*, 2:253–55.

²⁵ See Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99–102.

²⁶ J. Arthur Thompson, “Covenant (OT),” *ISBE*, 1 (1979): 790.

²⁷ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 4.

²⁸ Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 5–15.

bargaining, bartering, or contracting. The sovereign Lord of heaven and Earth dictated the terms of these covenants.

THE GREEK TERM

When the translators of the Septuagint came to the word *berith* they had a choice between two Greek words. The word *sunqhvkh* (*syntheukeu*) is a common word for compact, document of agreement, treaty, or covenant.²⁹ Septuagint translators deliberately avoided the word, however, because the structure of the word suggests an agreement arrived at by negotiation between equal partners (i.e., a bilateral agreement).

Instead, they chose the word *diaghvkh*, (*diatheukeu*) which was a legal term used of various forms of a binding expression of will, for example, a testamentary disposition or will (a usage not found in the Old Testament), a contract between two persons, and divine ordinances of the most forceful kind. It was a good choice for the divine covenants because they were unilateral dispositions of the sovereign will of God.³⁰

THE BIBLICAL OR HISTORICAL COVENANTS

THE NOAHIC COVENANT, Genesis 9³¹

The first occurrence of the word “covenant” in the Bible is in Genesis 6:18. Before the great flood God promised to establish a covenant with Noah. Unlike the later biblical covenants this covenant was made with all mankind through Noah. It was an unconditional promise that God would not again judge the whole earth with a flood. The Noahic covenant is also called the “covenant of preservation” or the “covenant of common grace.”³² By “common grace” we mean that the covenant only secures natural not redemptive blessings. Yet these blessings of preservation are the gracious gift of the Creator to all His creatures.

The Noahic covenant includes three great stipulations: (1) Mankind was to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1). Ancient anxiety over another global flood is laid to rest, as are modern anxieties over nuclear war, food shortages, and pollution. Noah and his children, ancient and modern, were told to have children. (2) The flesh of animals was added to man’s diet (9:3–4). (3) Man was to protect the sanctity of human life even to the degree of imposing capital punishment for murder (9:5–6). It should be noted that the ordinance of capital punishment was not merely part of the Mosaic Law, otherwise it would have lost divine sanction when that Law was abrogated. The stipulations of the Noahic covenant are permanent and universal.

EXCURSUS: OBLIGATORY AND PROMISSORY COVENANTS

²⁹ GELLXX, s.v. “*synthēkē*,” 657.

³⁰ Johannes Behm, “*diathēkē*,” *TDNT*, 2:126–27.

³¹ In light of Hosea 6:7 I would conclude that the “Covenant of Works,” sometimes called the “Covenant of Creation,” is actually the first of the biblical or historical covenants.

³² Donald MacLeod, “Covenant: 2,” *Banner of Truth* 141 (June, 1975): 24–25.

Before going further I should make two observations: First, the Noahic covenant is a universal covenant.³³ The remaining biblical covenants all belong to Israel in their primary application (see Eph. 2:11–12; Rom. 9:4–5).

Second, there are two types of biblical covenants found in the Old Testament: the obligatory type reflected in the covenant at Sinai (Mosaic covenant), and the promissory type reflected in the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants.³⁴ The obligatory covenant sets forth Israel's obligations to God, while the promissory covenant sets forth promises of God to Israel, which He says He will fulfill.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT, Genesis 12, 15, 17

Abraham was called by God while living in idolatry in Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:26–32; Josh. 24:2). In obedience to God he followed instructions that led him to the land of Canaan.

In Canaan the Lord made a promise to Abraham, which was solemnized by a covenant (15:18; 17:2). There were five elements to the promise:³⁵ (1) the personal promise of an honored name (Gen. 12:1–3). Abraham is revered to this day by the great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (2) The family promise of a “seed,” or a line of heirs, beginning with Isaac and culminating in a chief heir par excellence, the Lord Jesus Christ (12:3, 7; 13:14–16; 15:4, 5, 13, 18; 16:10; 17:2, 7, 9, 19; 21:12; 22:17; 26:24; 27:28, 29; 28:14; Gal. 3:16). (3) The national promise of an inheritance of the land of Canaan, which was given to the patriarchs and their descendants forever (Gen. 12:1, 7; 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:2, 3; 28:13; 49:8–12). (4) The royal promise (“kings will come forth from you”), which finds fulfillment in Israel's kings and ultimately in the Messianic King. (5) The universal promise of worldwide blessing, i.e., a heritage, “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

The ratification of this covenant indicates it was unconditional in nature. Animals were sacrificed, and normally two covenant makers would walk together between the pieces. In this case, however, the covenant was unilateral, i.e., the Lord went alone between the pieces as Abraham slept (15:9–21). While there may be conditions for the enjoyment of the covenant, the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant depends on the faithfulness of God to His Word. Abraham died without fully receiving the promises, but they will be his in the day of resurrection (Mt. 22:31–32; Heb. 11:13–16).

THE COVENANT AT SINAI (MOSAIC COVENANT), Exodus 19:5—24:8

The Mosaic covenant or Sinaitic covenant was made with the people of Israel after their Exodus out of Egypt. As a document this covenant served as the instrument which constituted Israel as a nation. It contained commandments, ceremonies, and civil and political laws (613 commands, according to the rabbis). Unlike the Abrahamic Covenant this was an obligatory or

³³ If one accepts the covenant of works or creation covenant, then the Noahic Covenant is one of two universal biblical covenants.

³⁴ M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90 (1970): 184–203; idem., “*Berith*,” *TDOT*, 2:270.

³⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1959), 140–43; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 154–55.

legal type of covenant, a conditional covenant. For its success it depended not only on God's instruction but upon Israel's obedience of the law.

The promises of God were threefold (Ex. 19:1–6): First, Israel would be God's own possession (lit., "special treasure"). Second, it would be "a kingdom of priests" or a royal priesthood. Finally, it would be a "holy nation," i.e., a nation set apart from the other nations. All of this depended upon the nation's obedience, "if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant."

The account of the ratification of the covenant illustrates its conditional nature (Ex. 24:6–8). There were offerings and sacrifices during the solemn occasion, and the blood was sprinkled on both the people and the altar, representing God. In short, both God and the people were responsible to keep the covenant. Israel in its countless sins and idolatries demonstrated it was unable and unwilling to fulfill its side of the bargain. Jeremiah says the nation "broke the covenant," making a new covenant necessary (Jer. 31:31–32). The Mosaic Covenant ended at Calvary, and believers are now under a New Covenant (Rom. 6:14; 10:4–5; Gal. 3:10; Heb. 7:11–12).

THE PALESTINIAN COVENANT, Deuteronomy 29—30

Some evangelical scholars of an earlier generation argued there was an additional covenant made with Israel, which is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. This covenant has been traditionally called "the Palestinian covenant,"³⁶ but it has also occasionally been called "the Deuteronomic covenant" or "the land covenant."

A number of commentators today argue that Deuteronomy 29:1 (28:69 in Hebrew text) is a subscript that concludes the section of the book that began with chapter 1, verse 1.³⁷ They argue that the covenant mentioned in Deuteronomy 29:1 is a renewal covenant, that is, a renewal of the covenant made at Sinai. The consensus of opinion, however, is that Deuteronomy 29:1 is a superscription of what follows (chapters 29—30).³⁸ This covenant, which is a renewal, confirmation, and enlargement of the promise made to the patriarchs ("fathers," 30:5), that is, the Abrahamic Covenant, is to be distinguished from the Mosaic Covenant. That it is to be distinguished from the Mosaic covenant is stated clearly in verse 1.³⁹ That it is a true covenant is indicated by the instructions of the Lord. Moses was "to make a covenant" (lit., "cut a covenant") with the sons of Israel.

³⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:317–323; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham, 1958), 95–99. My discussion follows, in the main, that of Pentecost.

³⁷ S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, ICC (New York: Scribner, 1916), 319; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann, 1976), 353.

³⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, trans., Dorothea Barton, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1966), 178. The consensus von Rad speaks of concerns the grammar. There is no consensus on the precise nature of the covenant. Older dispensationalists adopt the view I have explained above; covenant theologians argue that the covenant is actually a renewal of the Sinai Covenant. In either case one must take seriously the promise of the land in this passage.

³⁹ Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 319.

The people of Israel were now in Moab, not at Horeb /Sinai. They were about to enter the land promised to them in days of old (Gen. 12:7; 13:12; 17:7–8). This covenant was made, no doubt, to answer important questions that faced the Israelites: (1) Would a new, unproven leader (Joshua) be able to take the land? (2) Could they defeat the inhabitants of the land who have shown themselves to be implacable foes? (3) Was the land of Canaan still their possession? (4) Did the conditional Mosaic Covenant set aside the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant? (5) Would Israel’s past or future disobedience annul the land promises?

The Palestinian covenant is important for three reasons: First, it reaffirmed Israel’s title deed to the land of promise. Second, the introduction of the conditional covenant did not set aside God’s gracious promise of the land. Third, the Palestinian Covenant actually confirmed and enlarged the original Abrahamic Covenant.

Deuteronomy 30:1–10 sets forth six main features of the Palestinian Covenant:

(1) Looking on to the future, Moses warns Israel that the Lord will banish it from the land for disobedience (v. 1; cf. 28:63–68; 30:15–20).

(2) The problem of how Israel will be deported and yet enjoy God’s land promises is resolved by the future repentance of Israel (v. 2)].

(3) Israel will be regathered from the nations to which it was scattered and restored to the land of promise (vv. 3–5). “While repossession of the land can be said to some extent to have been fulfilled by the return of the Jews following the Babylonian exile (cf. Jer. 29:10–14; 30:3), the greater prosperity and population was not achieved in Old Testament times. In fact, it still awaits realization in any literal sense (cf. Hag. 2:6–9; Zech. 8:1–8; 10:8–12).

(4) Israel will be converted to genuine faith (v. 6). The circumcision of the heart spoken of here (cf. Dt. 10:16; Jer. 4:4) is an allusion to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that will accompany the application of the New Covenant to Israel (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–27; cf. Rom. 11:26–27 [see below on “new covenant”]).⁴⁰

(5) Israel’s enemies will be defeated (v. 7).

(6) Israel will then be blessed abundantly (vv. 8–10).

The Palestinian covenant is an unconditional one. “The grammatical pattern [in verse 1] suggests a lack of any true conditionality here. When the exile came to pass, so would these acts of repentance and restoration.”⁴¹ “In fact, our text can no longer be called an exhortation; it contains no admonitions, but, with regard to Israel’s future, simple affirmative propositions, that is, it is clothed altogether in the style of prophetic predictions.”⁴²

One caveat is in order. While it is true that God’s promise of Israel’s future possession of the land is unconditional, it is also true that Israel’s present enjoyment of the land is conditioned

⁴⁰ Today this renewal of the heart is common to all believers in Christ—Jews and Gentiles alike. “But in terms of Israel as a elect people in a collective, national sense, the circumcision described here ... lies in the future” (Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC [Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994], 388).

⁴¹ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 387.

⁴² Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 183.

upon its obedience and fidelity to the Lord (cf. 30:15–20). To illustrate: a father gives his son a new car as a graduation present. He tells him, “The car is yours, but if you get a speeding ticket I will put it in the garage, and you will not be able to use it for a month.” Some time later the young man gets a speeding ticket, and his father takes his keys and puts the car in the garage. The son owns the car, but he is no longer able to drive it until his father feels he has learned his lesson. Israel owns the land; she will not have complete enjoyment of the land until she comes in repentance and faith to her God. This will take place when Jesus returns, and the nation embraces Him in faith as its Messiah.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT, 2 Samuel 7:12–17; Psalm 89:3–4

King David desired to build a temple for God, but the Lord revealed to Nathan the prophet that this was not to be; instead David’s descendant (lit., “seed”) would build the temple (2 Sam. 7:1–17; cf. 1 Chron. 17:3–15; 2 Chron. 6:14–16). Although David was not permitted to build a house for the Lord, God did make a covenant with him to establish his kingdom and throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12–17; cf. Psalm 89:3–4 where God’s promise is called a “covenant”). The full enjoyment of the covenant depended on the obedience of David’s descendants (Ps. 89:30–32), yet the covenant itself was unconditional; God promised to never violate it (Ps. 89:33–37); it was a permanent covenant.

Even after Israel’s great apostasy and captivities, the Davidic Covenant remained inviolate. When Gabriel foretold the birth of Jesus, he told Mary her son would reign over Israel from David’s throne (Lk. 1:31–33). When asked about His disciples’ reward, Jesus assured them that when He sat on His glorious (Davidic) throne, they would serve as His associates, occupying a judicial function over the nation of Israel (Mt. 19:28). In His debate with the Pharisees Jesus claims to be David’s son who will one day rule over His enemies (Mt. 22:41–46). In Acts 1:6 the apostles ask Jesus a question which assumes He will rule, i.e., as Davidic king, over Israel. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36) Peter, “referring to the covenant promise that Jesus Christ would sit on David’s throne, correctly argues that the performance of this requires the resurrection of Jesus, which David also foretold as a prerequisite. He then informs the Jews that he did thus arise, that he ascended to heaven where he is exalted as Lord and Christ, waiting for the time when His foes shall be made his footstool, ‘whom [Acts 3:12–26] the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things’ (keeping in mind the Jewish idea of restitution as always associated with the restored Davidic kingdom) shall come and then ‘He [God] shall send Jesus Christ’ through whom this is effected.”⁴³ At the Jerusalem council, James spoke briefly alluding to the day when the Davidic dynasty would be restored (Acts 15:13–18; cf. Amos 9:11–12). In the letter to Laodicea the risen and ascended Christ promises believers that in the future they will sit with Him on his (Davidic) throne just as He now sits on His Father’s throne in heaven (Rev. 3:21). Elsewhere in the book of Revelation Jesus is called “the root and descendant of David” (5:5; 22:16), and John writes that when Christ returns He will reign for 1,000 years (20:4–6). That this reign will be on Earth is certainly implied in Revelation 5:10.

Covenant theologians argue that the Davidic covenant was fulfilled when Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. The biblical texts just cited do not justify such a spiritualized reign of Jesus.

⁴³ George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1972), 1:317.

THE NEW COVENANT

“How,” a believing Jew might ask as he viewed the great promises in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, “will these things be fulfilled in light of the sinfulness of Israel?” The answer has two elements to it: (1) There is the character of the Lord who promised these things. He cannot violate His own character and break His promises (Ps. 89:1–6, 30–37). Thus, “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:30). (2) There is the provision for the forgiveness of sins in the death of Jesus Christ. His death is the foundation stone of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is the final promissory (and unconditional) covenant. The parties to the covenant are God and “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31–34). The promise of the New Covenant was given through Jeremiah as the people faced exile in Babylon. This New Covenant would be superior to the old (Mosaic) covenant in four ways:

An internal inclination to obey. It would be an internal rather than an external covenant. While the old covenant was engraved on tablets of stone, the New Covenant would be inscribed on their hearts. In the parallel promise of Ezekiel 36:25–27 God’s people are promised a new heart and spirit as well as the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God. What is described is more than just the committing of the instruction of God to memory since that was an integral part of the old economy (cf. Dt. 6:6–9; 10:12; 30:6). It is the impartation of a new nature which knows and loves God’s will as well as the enablement to do that will provided by the indwelling Spirit of God. The transaction implies the new birth or regeneration as provided by the gospel (Jn. 1:10–13; 3:1–16; Ti. 3:5) as well as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

An unconditional relationship to God. The old covenant was a covenant of works, that is, blessing was conditioned on the obedience of the people. But Israel did not abide in the covenant; it broke it by failing to meet its demands. The New Covenant is different; it is an unconditional covenant of grace. The emphasis throughout is upon the divine initiative: “I will make” (vv. 31, 33), “I will put,” “I will write,” “I will be” (v. 33), “I will forgive,” “I will remember their sin no more” (v. 34). All will be accomplished by God. There is no mention at all of any conditions upon man.

A personal knowledge of God. Another superior feature of the new covenant is that “they will all know me” (v. 34). Under the old covenant only the educated scribe knew the details of the Law. Access to the Lord, furthermore, was denied to individuals, and His grace was obtained through the faulty mediation of the Levitical priesthood (Ex. 20:15, 19). Under the New Covenant, however, there will be no privileged class of mediators between God and man. Each believer will have an absolute, inborn, direct acquaintance with God which is not dependent on any kind of external instruction. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told this access to God for all believers is through Christ, their faultless and perfect High Priest (Heb. 4:16; 10:19–22).

A merciful forgiveness of sins. In the sacrifices of the old covenant there was a remembrance of sins year by year (Heb. 10:3). It was impossible for such sacrifices to effect the forgiveness of sins (10:4). Because of the sacrifice of the New Covenant, however, God will no longer remember sins, that is, in mercy He will forgive them (Jer. 31:34). Here Jeremiah uses the Old Testament theology of “remembering.” If sin is remembered then God takes action against it; if it is not remembered then grace has forgiven it.

In the original context of the New Covenant there is the promise of Israel's restoration to the land (Jer. 31:16–25; 33:1–13). This is confirmed in the parallel passage in Ezekiel 36:28. No sooner does the Lord promise to give them a new heart and the Holy Spirit than He adds, "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be my people, and I will be your God."

The New Testament makes it clear the New Covenant has been inaugurated (Heb. 8:6; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6). At the Last Supper Jesus broke the bread and gave it and the cup to the disciples. The bread and wine symbolized His body broken and blood shed at Golgotha. At the cross the sacrifice of Jesus ratified the New Covenant (Mt. 26:26–29; Lk. 22:17–20). Here the words of 19th century American theologian Charles Hodge are apropos, "The plan of salvation is presented under the form of a covenant."⁴⁴

With whom was the New Covenant made? It was made with same people to whom it was promised, the people of Israel (Jer. 31:31–33; Heb. 8:8). The nation as a whole rejected Christ, but, as the apostle Paul said, there is a remnant of believing Jews in this age (Rom. 11:5). It was with that believing remnant of Israel and Judah, namely the disciples and other believing Jews, who formed the nucleus of the Christian church, that the New Covenant was originally ratified. Gentile believers, by virtue of the New Covenant are grafted into the stock of Abraham (Rom. 11:16–24) and made fellow heirs with Israel of covenantal blessing (Eph. 1:11–13; 2:12–15; 3:6).

There is one aspect of the New Covenant that has not yet been implemented. A redeemed Israel has not yet been restored to the land. The author of Hebrews was mindful of the promise given to Abraham (Heb. 6:13–18), including the promise of the land (11:9). The author understood that promise to involve an eternal inheritance in the city of God and heavenly country (11:10, 13–16). He recognized, however, that Moses and the Sinaitic covenant failed to bring God's people into rest (4:1–11), so that this millennial rest remains yet future for them (4:9). The promised eternal inheritance was secured for the people of God by the death of Christ, the "mediator of the new covenant" (9:15). The enjoyment of this future inheritance is yet a promise, however, and awaits the return of Christ when He will bring His people salvation (1:14; 9:28). At that time the New Covenant will reach full flowering in the world to come (2:5).

BY DAVID J. MACLEOD

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⁴⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:354.

The Millennial Question: Must Christ Literally Reign on the Earth?

Sean Lillis

Introduction

Must Jesus Christ literally reign on Earth? The answer is yes for a number of textual and theological reasons, but for the purposes of this article I want to answer the question by tracing an often overlooked motif of Scripture and demonstrate that Christ must indeed literally reign over this earth because God's assignment for man as revealed in Genesis 1:26–28 strongly supports such a conclusion.

The biblical story requires that, at the culmination, all the pieces be put in their proper order so that a pronouncement of good can once again be made. The beginning demands an appropriate ending. The story of the Bible is not complete if the assignment God gave to man is not accomplished. Something is missing. God's command to subdue and rule must be realized, and it must be realized here on Earth, for it is here on Earth it was given and was intended to be accomplished. If this does not occur, then there is a question that remains unanswered about God Himself. The narrative of the Bible leads to a shocking inference: If man does not literally reign, then the purpose of God, it would seem, has failed, and if His purpose has failed, can God truly be God?

How are these two interrelated problems, the unfulfilled assignment given to man and the question of God's sovereignty, to be satisfied? As we wrestle with these questions in the light of progressive revelation, it becomes apparent that 1) it is necessary for man to one day *literally* subdue and rule creation if God's words are to be fulfilled and 2) that fulfillment will be accomplished through the literal, earthly reign of Jesus Christ. Therefore it is not only important to recognize the Bible teaches Christ will reign physically on Earth, it is essential. In short, Christ must literally reign on Earth because in doing so He accomplishes the divine assignment given to God's image-bearers, and to this day, that purpose stands unfulfilled.

God's Purpose for Man Revealed

Genesis 1:26–28 reveals it has always been God's purpose for man to exercise dominion over the earth, to bring it into subjection. Man was created by the royal God to be royal himself—king of the earth,⁴⁵ vice-regent with God. ““Be fruitful and increase yourselves, people the earth and subjugate and rule it’ (Gen. 1:28). In these words the royal appointment of the human race is plainly declared.”⁴⁶ “Man, created in God's image, is the channel and agent chosen by God to mediate His revealed will and to implement His sovereign purposes.”⁴⁷ Reflecting on this appointment and assignment, the psalmist incredulously exclaims,

⁴⁵ The phrase "king of the earth" is borrowed from Erich Sauer's book of the same title (Erich Sauer, *King of the Earth: The High Calling of Man According to the Bible and Science* [Palm Springs, CA: Haynes, 1959, 1981]).

⁴⁶ Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, trans. G. H. Lang (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951, repr. 1960), 43.

⁴⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 647.

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas (Ps.8:4-8 ESV).

In this act of dominion, the created was to reflect the Creator in whose image and likeness he was created. Traditional interpretations of the *imago Dei* have often focused on drawing comparisons to shared characteristics between God and man, that is, both share the elements of personhood: intellect, emotion, and will. Comparisons are also drawn to shared moral attributes: righteousness, justice, holiness, love, etc.⁴⁸ However, due to the vast differences that exist between God and mortal man, a better explanation of the *imago Dei* is necessary, “one that focuses not so much on ontological equivalence as on functional comparisons.”⁴⁹

Thus, the image of God is revealed not primarily in what man is constitutionally (although this is a part of the picture), but in the actual activity of man functioning as he was created to function. These shared characteristics between God and man were to be displayed through the function of man's appointment as vice regent. They were to be expressed and demonstrated as he exercised his divinely appointed charge over the earth. To be in the image and likeness of God is to reflect the perfections of the original from which the image was based, to make visible the invisible, as it were, and thus as man fulfilled his purpose as God's representative on Earth, all of creation would sing the glory and honor to the Creator, the sovereign Lord of the universe, perfect in all His attributes.⁵⁰

From the beginning, then, the earth has always craved a king. A human king. Man was created with a bright future indeed, possessing a certain quality and uniqueness not conveyed on any other created being. In ability and appointment man stood much superior to the rest of creation. Man was created to be king, that by his being and through his function he might serve to glorify the King.

God's Purpose for Man Repressed

As Bible readers know, however, the narrative moves quickly from the heights of the creation story of Genesis 1—2 into the depths of the Fall in Genesis 3. With one act of disobedience, Adam damned all of mankind to follow in his footsteps, not as representatives of God on Earth, but as vessels of depravity. No longer king of the earth, now man was enslaved to sin, a transaction that could never be undone by human will or deed.

What is sometimes forgotten, however, is that in addition to introducing the physical and spiritual effects of sin into humanity, Adam also abdicated the authority God gave him to function as king of the earth. The decision to break God's commandment resulted in banishment from Paradise, a stripping of royal authority, and a daily struggle with the very earth he was originally to have dominion over. Furthermore, the earth itself experienced a curse. Created to be an ideal kingdom, since the Fall all of creation has been in open rebellion against man's attempts

⁴⁸ See Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson, 1907, repr. 1958), 514; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:146-47.

⁴⁹ Merrill, 170.

⁵⁰ As he functions appropriately as God's image, man is a living, breathing doxology to the triune God.

to exercise dominion over it (Rom. 8:19). No longer is creation a willing participant; now man must exert his dominion by force. Created with the express purpose of benefiting from the benevolent rule of God's representative, as a result of sin creation itself now groans under the weight of the act and consequence of its fallen monarch (Rom.8:19-22).

And so the earliest chapters of the Bible lead readers to a question: Has the purpose of God failed? Because if man never reigns over the earth that God created and originally subjected to man's authority, then must it not be concluded that God's purpose *has* failed, and He is, in fact, not the one true God after all? Adam's sin and its consequences seem to call into question God's sovereignty. Without the ability and authority to accomplish His own will, if His purposes can so easily be thwarted by a crafty serpent, a foolish woman, and an apathetic man, then what kind of God are we left with?

Yet this question, prompted by the sad narrative of Genesis 3, finds its answer as the rest of Scripture unpacks God's plan of redemption. Redemption accomplishes many wonderful things—God's wrath is satisfied, sinful man is reconciled to God, restoration between the created and the Creator is made possible; the list goes on and on and the heavens and the earth will never tire of praising the triune God for all the magnificent facets reflected in the doctrine of redemption. But it should also be remembered that God's plan for dealing with the problem of sin and its consequences soundly puts to rest any and all questions concerning God's sovereignty because redemption is also eschatological. It is about putting things back in their proper place, restoring all things back to the state in which they were once pronounced “very good.” There is a future sense to the doctrine of redemption and it is in the realization of this future sense that it will become evident God has vindicated Himself and demonstrated Himself to be the one true God, sovereign over all.

God's Purpose for Man Restored

The Old Testament

Moving through the Old Testament, there are glimpses that God's divine appointment for man is still graciously in play: the choice of Abraham and God's covenantal promises to him; the election of the nation of Israel to be a kingdom of priests who reveal God to the nations; the anointing of David and the promise of an eternal throne through his lineage. In these and more the theocratic kingdom of God functioned, mediated by men God elected to serve as His representatives. Yet, the effects of sin still clearly coursed through each reign. Creation still rebelled and the human mediator failed, often catastrophically.

But are these attempts at ruling to be understood as the fulfillment of the divine appointment for men to rule and bring all of creation into subjection? Certainly not. Scattered throughout the Old Testament are hints and revelations of a time to come when the divine intent will be restored and executed. Yet from the perspective of these kings and psalmists and prophets, this restoration remained still future. And so as the Old Testament closes, the question of the fulfillment of the decree remains, as does the charge against God's sovereignty.

The New Testament

The New Testament opens with a declaration which hints at the fulfillment of these Old Testament promises. One is coming who is truly the King, not just of Israel, but of the whole

earth. Yet as the Gospels unfold the life of Jesus, it becomes clear that His purpose in this coming is not to reign as King. And so the life of Jesus in His First Coming follows the trajectory laid out in the Old Testament, a course that is not destined for exultation, but rather humiliation, a fulfillment not of the decree to reign, but the decree to die.⁵¹

Yet this humiliation has a related purpose: the redemption of man and his restoration to his intended position and function. In His substitutionary death and subsequent resurrection, Jesus Christ accomplished what fallen man could not: the reconciliation of the created with the Creator. The curse is defeated and now man, made alive by faith, can be restored to the relationship and fellowship with God that was originally intended. Where the first Adam had failed and brought death to all men, the last Adam stands victorious and brings life to those who believe. And so the Gospels close with the ascension of the risen Lord into heaven, to His rightful place at His Father's side, His atoning work complete.

But still the issue of man's purpose and God's sovereignty remains, demonstrated in the opening of Acts as the disciples continue to stare into the sky as Jesus departs. The story is not finished, and it is committed to two angels to remind the disciples that there is more to be done: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). There is hope, for though the cross was the goal of the Lord's First Coming and although His redemptive work is complete, the full purpose of His incarnation is not yet complete. He leaves His disciples with the promise He will return and it is as we consider the nature of that return that we find the language of dominion and kingship and authority over all the earth, language reminiscent of Genesis 1:26–28.

God's Purpose for Man Realized

When the Lord Jesus returns, He does not do so in order to deal with the problem of sin as it relates to reconciling man to God. He already accomplished that at His First Coming. Rather, as the Scriptures make clear, His Second Coming is for the purpose of ushering in His Kingdom and all the characteristics that flow out of that Kingdom. His coming will be for the purpose of judgment (Rev. 19:15) and to rule in righteousness and justice (Isa. 11:3–5). He will make an end of sin and usher in everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24). By His authority Satan will be deposed from his current position as prince of this world and usurper of man's rightful position and function (Rev. 20:1–3) and He will be given a Kingdom that can never be destroyed (Dan. 7:14). His name will be King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16) and His Kingdom will be visible, judicial, and earthly, marked by everlasting dominion over a restored creation (Isa. 35:1–2).

In other words, the Lord Jesus' First Coming dealt with man's sin; His Second Coming will accomplish God's purpose for man. Keeping these two different purposes clearly in view guards us from forgetting the centrality of the cross in this restorative process or from becoming anthropocentric in our understanding of the Bible, as though the Bible is all about us. The Bible, first and foremost, is about Jesus Christ and the revelation of God's eternal purposes and His plan of redemption. It is Christocentric and theocentric.

⁵¹ See Genesis 2:17 where God declares the judgment for disobeying His command will be death.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the Bible does present a high view of man. However, this high view of man can only be properly understood when viewed through the lens of man's relation to God. Man is fearfully and wonderfully made and is the possessor of a tremendous calling, but this is only so because he is created in the image and likeness of God. In that we are reminded again and again that we are not central, but rather we are created to serve as reflections of the perfect majesty of God Himself. Our value and worth comes not from ourselves, but from the simple delight that God has chosen to shower upon us in creating us in His image and bestowing upon us the honor of representing Him on Earth, an honor we have besmirched through our sin.

And so the cross is always central. The Lord Jesus' destiny has always ultimately been to reign (Lk. 1:32), but the path to that destiny required He must die on a cross before He could sit on a throne.⁵² Why? Because like Adam, Jesus stood as man's representative, and just as Adam's one act condemned all mankind and stripped him from his purpose (Rom. 5:12), so Jesus' one act lifted that condemnation and will ultimately restore man to his potential and his intended purpose.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15), is the fulfillment of God's purpose for man to exercise dominion and authority over the earth as all of creation is brought under His submission (1 Cor. 15:23–28). As man's representative, He will one day reign over the earth; as God's image, His reign will accomplish God's purpose for man.⁵³ His Kingdom will be the Edenic ideal laid out in the earliest chapters of the Bible. And because of His representative work on the cross, those He represents will rule with Him as well. And at the end of the thousand years, it can finally be said that God's spoken purpose for man has been fulfilled and any question of the sureness of God's Word or the effectiveness of His sovereignty will be forever put to rest.

It is because this question of the sureness of God's Word is so significant that the question of Christ's millennial reign becomes so significant. Any other answer simply falls short, because no other answer aside from the literal reign of Jesus Christ fulfills God's decree for the purpose and vocation of man Earth and deals with the issue of God's sovereignty. If we are to expect only a spiritual reign of Christ and not a literal earthly reign, or if we are to expect the Kingdom to consist of the slow spread of the gospel rather than the physical lordship of Jesus Christ, then it is difficult to see how the divine assignment of the opening chapter of Genesis has been realized and so the accusation against God's sovereignty stands unanswered. It is only if Christ returns and sets up His Kingdom and redeemed man reigns with Him on this current earth that God's purpose in creating man as His representative can be realized.

Furthermore, creation itself anxiously awaits the fulfillment of God's program as revealed in Genesis 1:26–28, and it is only a literal understanding of millennial passages that can adequately explain the New Testament's portrayal of the relationship between man and creation. When the

⁵² As demonstrated through the temptation narrative in Matthew 4.

⁵³ "The image of the Father is none other than the only begotten Son...In *this* image God created man according to *His* image. Therefore in us the image of the Father reaches its exhibition in the image of the Son" (Sauer, 43, italics original).

apostle Paul writes that “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19) and that when the futility it has been subjected to since the Fall is lifted, “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (8:21), he is speaking in reference to a future relationship between creation itself and man. This relationship between creation and the sons of God seems strange unless we recognize that creation is waiting for the restoration of man as its sovereign ruler and is looking forward to the day when redeemed man is fully restored to his authority and position as king of the earth. During the Millennial Kingdom, creation will once again willingly subjugate itself to man's scepter, not under duress, but joyfully and with a sense of relief.

Conclusion

Our Sunday school teachers were not wrong. God does redeem man because He loves us and created us to enjoy unending communion with Him. But true as this is, it does not express His purpose in its fullest sense. He also redeemed man so that His words spoken to His image-bearers in Genesis 1 would be realized, and therefore, He is sending His Son again for the purpose of reigning over and upon the earth.

We may forget those little sentences in Genesis 1, but we may be sure that God has not. There is a holistic sense in redemption unfolded across the pages of Scripture that must not be missed. Redemption has many facets, each of them important, but ultimately, the goal of redemption is that God would be glorified. In the millennial reign of Christ, God is glorified because Christ's reign will bring God's purpose to completion, and vindicate Him from all charges of failure. The story is complete. The beginning has its ending. When everything has been brought under Christ's dominion, when God's purposes for man have been realized, then He will turn over His Kingdom to the Father, “that God may be all in all” (1 Cor.15:28). The future fulfillment of the promise to David, rooted ultimately in the commandment given to Adam and realized in the biblical covenants, demonstrates that God's perfections stand and His nature is true. Of course, these were never truly in doubt, but the evidence of the fact is seen in the restoration of man to his intended position as king of the earth in Christ.

Christ's reign, then, is the culmination of all of God's work since the Fall, and it is the accomplishment of the divine-authored assignment given to man when he was created. Thus the story of the Bible is a story of redemption, but that story is part of a bigger story, a narrative that focuses on the self-revelation of the sovereign God whose Word will not return to Him void.

Must Christ literally reign on the earth? Indeed He must, for no less than the integrity of God is at stake.

WILL THE CHURCH GO THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

OR, WHEN IS THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH?

BY DR. JACK FISH

THE BLESSED HOPE OF THE CHURCH

THE PROMISE TO RETURN

When Christ spoke to His disciples in the upper room on the night before His crucifixion, they were frightened and discouraged. He told them one of them would betray Him and He was going to suffer and die. But He also said something that would stay with them and give them great hope and encouragement for the rest of their lives: **“I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also”** (Jn. 14:1–3). He said He would come again. That was the blessed hope of the church—the Second Coming of Christ to take believers to be with Himself.

THE PROMISE OF THE RAPTURE AND THE RESURRECTION

The details of what will happen when Christ returns to take the church to be with Himself are spelled out in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–58. Christ will descend from heaven, believers who have died will rise first, and then living believers will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air (1 Th. 4:16–17). **“And thus we shall always be with the Lord”** (v. 17). This is why it is called the “blessed hope.” Our hope is to be with the Lord for all eternity. The words **“caught up”** were translated in the Latin Vulgate by the word *rapiro*, and it is from a form of this word we get the word “rapture” (Latin, *raptus*). This Rapture of the church involves having our bodies instantaneously changed from our present mortal and corruptible bodies to our incorruptible, resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:51–52). We will no longer have a sin nature; we will no longer be tempted; we will no longer sin; we will be forever in the presence of Christ, and we will be like Him. What a blessed hope and glorious prospect!

A WATCHFUL CHURCH

Because of this wonderful hope, the church in the New Testament was constantly looking for the coming of Christ. The Thessalonians had **“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”** (1 Th. 1:9–10). Paul told the Philippians, **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”** (Phil. 3:20). The verbs in both passages express an eagerness and watchfulness which is also seen in Titus 2:13: **“Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”** This hope was a challenge and an encouragement to godly living.

THE DEBATE ABOUT THE RAPTURE AND END-TIME EVENTS

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

In the Olivet Discourse, the great prophetic message of Christ to His disciples, He taught them that before His coming to the earth in power and glory, there would be a time of great tribulation such as has never occurred before or after (Mt. 24:21, 29–31). This Tribulation is part of a seven-year period of tribulation prophesied by Daniel in his famous prophecy of the “seventy weeks” (Mt. 24:15; cf. Dan. 9:24–27).

THE ISSUE

It is clear in Matthew 24 that Christ will come in power and glory at the end of this period of tribulation. But is this a reference to the time of the Rapture? Is the Second Coming of Christ in one or two stages? Will the church go through the Tribulation or will the church be caught up to

be with Christ by the Rapture before the Tribulation? Christians have differed in the answer to this question. Those who are premillennial—i.e. who believe that Christ will come to reign on Earth for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4–6)—generally agree there will be a future Tribulation of seven years. There is disagreement, however, as to the timing of the Rapture—whether the church will go through the Tribulation.

THE DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

Actually, there are a number of different viewpoints on this issue. PRETRIBULATIONISTS maintain the Rapture will take place *before* the Tribulation. POSTTRIBULATIONISTS say it will take place *after* the Tribulation. There are also MIDTRIBULATIONISTS who place the Rapture in the middle of Daniel’s 70th week. A more recent viewpoint is a combination of the midtribulation and posttribulation positions and is known as the PRE-WRATH Rapture (i.e. almost at the end of the seven years but before the outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth which will last for a very short period). A final viewpoint is the PARTIAL RAPTURE position (a combination of pretribulationism and posttribulationism) which holds that only the godly Christians who are living at the time of Christ’s coming will be raptured, while the rest will be left on Earth to go through the Tribulation. This last viewpoint is hard to reconcile with the specific promise of 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 which says we will all be *instantly* changed (“**in a moment in the twinkling of an eye**”).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE

I am going to argue for the pretribulation position, but let me first stress that this is an important issue and has very practical ramifications. What is your hope? My hope is that the Lord Jesus will come and take me to be with Himself before the period of tribulation begins. This is a wonderful and blessed hope, not only because of the deliverance from the great Tribulation, but also because the coming of Christ may occur at any moment and I will be forever with Him. I am to live in the light of that any-moment coming of Christ. That is an incentive to godly living, so that I will not be caught unaware and “**be ashamed before Him at His coming**” (1 Jn. 2:28).

What is the hope of the posttribulationist? For the posttribulationist Christ cannot come today. The awful events of the Tribulation must take place first. I cannot be looking for the coming of Christ today because it must be at least seven years off. In fact the posttribulation view has become an incentive for some not to live as salt and light in the midst of an ungodly world but to withdraw from the world, buy a farm, build a shelter, and to arm oneself with provisions and weapons with which to endure the great Tribulation. What is the blessed hope of the posttribulationist? Instead of the blessed hope of the any-moment coming of Christ, there is the dreaded prospect of persecution, suffering, and death for many Christians before Christ comes.

WHY THE CHURCH WILL NOT GO THROUGH THE TRIBULATION

Let me give four reasons why I believe the New Testament teaches the Second Coming of Christ is going to be in two stages and the Rapture is going to be before the Tribulation.

CHRIST’S PROMISE TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth (Rev. 3:10).

Revelation 2—3 consists of seven letters of the risen Christ communicated through the apostle John to seven first-century churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The church in Philadelphia is given a promise of deliverance from the hour of trial which is going to come upon the whole world.

The Hour of Trial—The Great Tribulation

The reference to the hour of trial is a reference to the specific Tribulation of Daniel's 70th week, not the general tribulation believers will endure during the entire church age (Jn. 16:33). This hour of trial is said to be worldwide: **“the whole world.”** It is specifically to test **“those who dwell on the earth.”** The word *dwell* is a strong term describing those who settle down on the earth and make it their home. In the book of Revelation the phrase is found seven times and refers to those who oppose God and follow the Antichrist (the beast) during the period of end-time judgments described in Revelation 6—19 (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8). The definite article (**“the hour of trial”**) indicates this is a specific period.

A Promise for the Whole Church

This promise was not just for a single church in the first century. What was written to the seven individual churches was a message for the whole church. This is seen in the statement that ends each of the seven letters: **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”** (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). These churches represent different kinds of churches that existed in the first century and have existed throughout the church. The warnings and the promises are for us. That is, of course, the way we read our whole New Testament. When we read a command, a warning, an exhortation, or a promise in Philippians or 1 Corinthians, we take that as applying to us, unless it is something which is obviously restricted to the specific historical situation (e.g. 2 Tim. 4:13, **“When you come, bring with you the cloak I left in Troas with Carpas and the scrolls, especially the parchments”**). The promise to the church at Philadelphia was a promise of deliverance from a trial which would take place long after that particular church ceased to exist. It is a promise for us today.

The Issue: What is the Nature of the Promised Deliverance?

What is clear is the promise to the church of deliverance from the **“hour of trial,”** the Tribulation that is going to come at the end of this age before the Second Coming of Christ. The question that relates to the issue of whether the church will go through the Tribulation is the nature of that promise. Is it a promise that the church will completely escape the hour of trial by being removed first through the Rapture or is it a promise that the church will be delivered by being preserved safe through the trial? We may use OT illustrations to pose the question. Will the church be delivered as Lot was delivered from the judgment on Sodom by being removed from the city before its destruction (Gen. 19), or will the deliverance be like that of the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as they were kept safe in the fiery furnace (Dan. 4)?

The Specific Promise: “I Will Keep You Out of the Hour of Trial”

It is important to look carefully at the specific promise. There is a verb and a preposition which are rendered in many of our English translations “keep from.” A literal translation is “keep out of.” It is the combination of the verb and the preposition *together* which give us the promise. Some have tried to isolate the preposition and argue that the word “out of” implies that something is first “inside.” Therefore the church first must be inside the Tribulation before it can be delivered out of it. That is not the way language works. The verb and the preposition must be considered together.

Notice that the Lord did not use the verb “take.” He did not say, “I will take you out of the hour of trial.” That would clearly indicate the church would experience the Tribulation. He could have used a different preposition if He wanted to indicate the protection of the church in the Tribulation. He could have said, “I will keep you *through* the hour of trial,” or “I will keep you

in the midst of the hour of trial.” Any of these would express the idea that the posttribulationists hold to—that the church must go through the Tribulation but will experience God’s protection.

The expression “keep out of” indicates complete immunity from the hour of trial. For instance, if a coach told one of his players before the game “I will take you out of the game,” the player would know that he would get into the game at some time. But if the coach said “I will keep you out of the game,” the player would know that he wasn’t going to get into the game at all.

This particular combination of verb and preposition (Greek, *teureou ek*) is found only one other place in the Bible, John 17:15. We determine the meaning of words and phrases by their usage. Determining the meaning of this phrase in John 17:15 can help us in our understanding of its meaning in Revelation 3:10. Speaking in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus prays for His disciples, “**I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them** (*teureou ek*) **from the evil one**” (Jn. 17:15). Some posttribulationists have used this verse to say that just as the disciples remain in the world but are protected from the temptations of the evil one, so the saints will be in the Tribulation but safeguarded through it. That interpretation ignores the context of John 17. The subject of the prayer is not protection from temptation but rather eternal destiny. In verse 11 Jesus prays that the Father would keep His disciples after His departure from the world. In verse 12 He says that while He was with them, He “**was keeping** (*teureou*) **them**” and “**none of them perished.**” Keeping them from the evil one means keeping them from perishing, keeping them from apostasy and from being lost. The prayer in verse 15 to “**keep them from the evil one**” means total exclusion from the evil one. So the promise in Revelation 3:10 to keep them from the hour of trial involves total exclusion from that period.

We should not overlook the word *hour*. The promise is not just to be kept from the trial, but the very time period itself.

The posttribulationist has great difficulty in showing how Revelation 3:10 is a meaningful promise in the light of the sufferings endured by the saints during the Tribulation. In Revelation 6:9–11 there is a description of the martyrs who were slain during the Tribulation. How were they protected? Their tribulation sufferings are described in 7:15–17. The Antichrist will make war with the saints and “**shall persecute the saints of the Most High**” (Dan. 7:21, 25). How then will they be protected according to the promise of Revelation 3:10? The Tribulation is the great day of God’s wrath (Rev. 6:16), but the church is not destined for wrath but is delivered by Jesus from the wrath to come (1 Th. 1:10; 5:9).

THE RAPTURE MUST OCCUR BEFORE CHRIST’S COMING TO THE EARTH IN POWER AND GLORY
An Interval Is Required Because of the Separation That Takes Place at the Rapture

Matthew 24—25 (the Olivet Discourse) clearly describes Christ’s Second Coming after the Tribulation. When we compare what takes place at the Rapture with what takes place at this posttribulational coming, we must conclude that these events do not take place at the same time. There must be an interval of time between the Rapture and Christ’s coming at the end of the Tribulation. In the judgment of the sheep and the goats which takes place “**when the Son of Man comes in His glory**” (Mt. 25:31), the nations will be gathered before Christ’s throne and He will separate the sheep, who represent believers, from the goats, who represent unbelievers (25:32). The sheep will enter the Kingdom (25:34), and the goats will suffer eternal punishment (25:41, 46).

Where do these sheep (believers) come from? 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says that at the time of the Rapture all living believers “**will be caught up...to meet the Lord in the air.**” Ten seconds after the Rapture there will be no believers left on the earth. There must be an interval of time

after the Rapture during which the gospel is preached and unbelievers are converted who will be the sheep of Matthew 25. This argument does not specify how long that interval will be, but it does indicate that there will be two stages to Christ's Second Advent.

An Interval is Required Because of the Resurrection That Takes Place at the Second Advent

We have seen from the judgment of the sheep and the goats that only believers will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34, 41, 46). Some will have their resurrected, glorified bodies (Rev. 20:4), and some will still have their mortal bodies. This latter point can be seen from two lines of evidence. First, there will be some who die during the Millennium. Isaiah describes the longevity of those who live during this period by saying, **"The child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed"** (65:20).

Second, there will be reproduction during the Millennium. John describes in Revelation 20:7-9 those who will follow Satan after he is released for a short while from the bottomless pit in rebellion against God. Who are these unbelievers who rebel against Christ? They must be the children or descendants of some of the believers who entered into the Kingdom. They cannot be the children of the resurrected believers, since resurrected believers will not reproduce (Mt. 22:30). At the beginning of Christ's Millennial Kingdom there will be unresurrected believers on Earth.

But where do these unresurrected believers come from? At the Rapture **"those who are Christ's at His coming"** will be raised (1 Cor. 15:23). **"We will all be changed"** (15:51). **"This mortal will have put on immortality"** and death will be swallowed up in victory (15:54). Immediately after the Rapture there will be no unresurrected believers left on the earth. There must be an interval of time before the establishment of the Kingdom for the gospel to be preached and the men and women converted who will be the unresurrected believers who enter the Kingdom. This will take place during the period of the Tribulation.

THE IMMINENCY OF CHRIST'S COMING

Our previous argument does not say how long the interval between the Rapture and the Second Coming must be, but if the Tribulation is future and if Christ's return for the church is imminent, then the Rapture must be before the Tribulation. Imminency means that Christ could return at any moment. It could be today. It also means that we don't know when He will come and there is nothing predicted in Scripture which must take place before He can come.

The NT church was looking for the coming of Christ. There was a sense of expectancy, eagerness, and watchfulness. This is seen in the passages quoted above under the heading of "a watchful church." The Thessalonians were **"waiting for his Son"** (1 Th. 1:10). The Philippians were **"eagerly waiting for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"** (Phil 3:20). The church was **"looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"** (Ti. 2:13). If the events of the Tribulation had to take place first, the church could not have been looking for the coming of Christ Himself.

The coming of Christ *after* the Tribulation is not imminent. In the Olivet Discourse Christ describes His Second Coming after the great Tribulation during which there will be a number of signs of the end of the age, including the abomination of desolation (Mt. 24:3-31). It is striking that after a description of these signs, He says, **"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door"** (Mt 24:32-33). The coming of Christ is not near until after these events of the Tribulation. They are to look for the signs *before* they look for the coming of the Lord.

The expectant watchfulness of the early church in looking for the coming of Christ shows they believed in imminency. The posttribulationist cannot be looking for the coming of Christ Himself. They should be looking for the events of the Tribulation. They should be looking for the abomination of desolation. They should be looking for the coming of the Antichrist, not the coming of Christ. In their view the Antichrist must come first.

THE ABSENCE OF ANY MENTION OF THE CHURCH IN TRIBULATIONAL PASSAGES

It is significant that there is no mention of the church in any passage which specifically refers to the Tribulation. This is not to say that there will not be any believers during the tribulation. There are general terms like “saints” and the “elect” which are used to describe believers during the time of the Tribulation. But the term “church” or descriptions distinctive of the church such as “the body of Christ” or “the bride of Christ” are not found in any tribulational passage (e.g. Mt. 24-25; Rev. 6-19).

I leave this argument until last because it is an argument from silence, and sometimes an argument from silence is a weak argument. But sometimes an argument from silence can be very eloquent. If my wife were to ask me, “Do you love me?” and I were to respond with silence, I guarantee that silence would be considered significant.

In Revelation 1—3 the church is mentioned frequently. The word for church, *ekkleusia*, occurs 19 times in these three chapters. Revelation 22:16 also mentions the church. Yet in chapters 6—19 which describe the Tribulation period, there is no mention of the church. In fact, after each of the seven letters to the churches of the first century in chapters 2—3, we have the statement: **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** But in 13:9 which relates to the Antichrist and the worship of him during the Tribulation, it simply says: **“If anyone has an ear, let him hear.”**

CONCLUSION

I have been arguing that Rapture of the church is going to be before the Tribulation of Daniel’s 70th week and that the church will not be on Earth during this period. Not only do we have the specific promise that the church will be kept out of that period of trial (Rev. 3:10), we also see that the Rapture and the Second Coming to Earth cannot occur at the same time. The any-moment nature of His coming requires the Rapture to be before any of the events predicted to take place during the Tribulation, and the absence of any mention of the church during the Tribulation is an “eloquent silence.”

A church that is looking for the coming of Christ to occur at any moment will be a healthy church, a godly church, a militant church. John looked forward to that day when Christ shall appear and says, **“Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”** (1 Jn. 3:3). We will be eagerly anticipating and filled with the hope of His coming if we love Him and desire to be with Him, if we hate our own sin and long to be like Christ, and if we desire to see Him receive the honor that is His due as King of kings and Lord of lords, when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). May the cry of our hearts be, **“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”** (Rev. 22:20).

Jack Fish

PRETERISM
WHAT IN THE WORLD IS IT?

BY
DAVE HARPER

INTRODUCTION

Preterism is not a disease for which we need to find an antidote. Most readers of *Journey* magazine will approach eschatology (the study of the last things of Scripture) from a premillennial viewpoint. Many in our churches can live a life of meaning and spiritual maturity and never hear the word “preterist” in their lifetime. Today there is a distinct minority of very vocal, evangelical Christians who do call themselves preterists when it comes to eschatology. They are represented by some well-known authors and preachers, so it is prudent for us to understand this position.

This article will define our terms, consider why some have taken this view, and demonstrate from Scripture the flaws and weaknesses of this system of eschatology.

THE PRETERIST VIEWPOINT

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM IN A.D. 70

The word *preterit* is a grammatical term for a past tense. A theological preterist is one who understands that events most Christians believe are yet future have actually been fulfilled in the past—particularly at A.D. 70 when Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem. There are preterists who believe that while some future prophecy in the Bible (especially in the New Testament) was fulfilled in A.D. 70, some prophecy is yet future today. These are known as PARTIAL PRETERISTS; e.g. R. C. Sproul, Ken Gentry, Doug Wilson, and others. Other preterists hold that all prophecies of the Bible have been fulfilled before A.D. 70. That’s right; there is no future prophecy at all! These are known as FULL PRETERISTS or PANTELISTS; e.g., Daniel Hardent, John Noe, and Ed Stevens. To be sure, many partial preterists consider the full preterists to be heretics and false teachers. That may be going a bit far, but then again, maybe not!

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE AND THE PRETERIST VIEWPOINT

A very important text for all believers is certainly the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25. Not every detail of the prophecy is equally clear, so one should not be dogmatic when claiming to know the true interpretation. However, the partial preterists and full preterists also assert that all of this discourse has taken place in A.D. 70.

Jesus is answering three questions the disciples asked Him: When is the destruction of the Temple; What is the sign of His coming; and the consummation of the age—not just when is the destruction of the Temple.

Jesus tells His disciples that when the Son of Man comes, it will not be secret (Mt. 24:27) and it will be in power and great glory (Mt. 24:30–31). Since this is so, how is it that no one in the early church recorded this anywhere as having taken place, and all of the church in the first two centuries kept looking for the Lord to return and establish His Kingdom on the earth? A

fulfillment in A.D. 70 would be such a stealth return of our Lord that no one's radar detected it. Many other details in this discourse strain credulity when it is assumed that they were fulfilled before A.D. 70. Due to space constraints, we cannot deal with them point by point.

There is no doubt that Jesus does refer to the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 because He most specifically states it would happen in judgment on the nation for their rejection of Him as their Messiah. But is that all to which He referred? There are many examples of more than one fulfillment to specific prophecies. For example, Isaiah 6:9-10 is fulfilled in Isaiah's day, in Matthew 13:14, several years later in John 12:40, and finally in Acts 28:26-27 by Paul. That is four distinct fulfillments at four different times. Therefore, when Jesus says that all these things must be fulfilled (Mt. 24:34), we should expect that they will happen. Since all these things could not have happened in A.D. 70 (there is absolutely no record of such stupendous things occurring), we should look for a future fulfillment.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The interpretation of the book of Revelation is important for our understanding of prophecy. The preterist understands that most, if not all, of Revelation was fulfilled by A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in judgment on the nation of Israel for rejecting Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Now if this is true, then it is obvious that John must have written Revelation before A.D. 70.

It would seem the preterist dates the writing of Revelation early because it is necessary for his position. The preponderate amount of evidence is for a later date of writing. The external evidence from the early church is that John wrote the book of Revelation around A.D. 90-95. The preterist's assumptions drive his conclusion of an early date in spite of the evidence. If you are interested in this subject, look at Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice's book, *The End Times Controversy*.

INFLUENCES THAT HAVE GIVEN RISE TO PRETERISM

There has been much debate in the area of eschatology. Many books have been written from different perspectives, and it would be a daunting task to read them and digest all the information pro and con. Let me suggest several reasons that give rise to this minority view of preterism. They will be general in nature and have developed from discussions with some of my siblings who have become preterists in their doctrinal position concerning last things.

The Delay of the Lord's Return

Historian and lawyer John W. Montgomery has demonstrated that the early church fathers were thoroughly and consistently premillennial for the first three centuries A.D. They were looking for Jesus Christ to return and to establish His Kingdom *on the earth* (Rev. 5:10). They all looked for Jesus to return at any time. But after 300 years, the Kingdom still had not come. Doubts began to arise, and some began to consider that perhaps the Kingdom was not literal but spiritual. The thousand-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20 ceased to be considered as literal and was rather seen to be figurative. This was the beginning of amillennial thinking with Augustine as its chief proponent.

Replacement Theology

The allegorical method of interpretation which had been developed by Origen (d. 254) and the Alexandrian school was used to interpret future prophecies in a figurative manner. If the Kingdom was spiritual and not literal then what would be a good model for the church? We need look no further than in the Old Testament and the nation of Israel. The result was that the church gradually started bringing Old Testament elements into church polity—things like infant baptism (circumcision), cathedrals (the Temple), tithes, clergy (the priesthood), clergy vestments (priestly clothing), and other such things. It was not a large leap to then see the church as a continuation of the nation of Israel. Somehow the blessings promised to Israel are now fulfilled in the church, while the curses promised to Israel for disobedience are all Israel's.

This belief that the church has replaced Israel has many subtle and not-so-subtle implications. One certainly is that there is no future for Israel in God's plans.

But how can this be? Aren't the covenants made to Abraham, David, and Israel (in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31) unconditional? They do not rely on the obedience of the Israelites for their ultimate fulfillment. It seems that in this Replacement Theology the promises made by God to His people were in some way invalidated by their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. If God can break His Word to His people Israel, how can we be sure of promises made to us, His church?

Are the promises made to Israel now transferred to the church? For example, in 2 Samuel 7:8–17 God promised a place for His people to live free from their enemies forever and have peace. Since that has not happened yet, the preterist and others also understand this to be fulfilled in the church in a spiritual way. A prophecy in Zechariah 12:8–9 says God will deliver Jerusalem from all the nations that have come against it. In no way can this be said of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. So when have the prophecies in Zechariah 12–14 ever been fulfilled? In some way this must be spiritualized to be applied to the church, and this makes no sense.

The Optimism of Postmillennialism

Part of the background of postmillennialism, sometimes known as reconstructionism or Dominion Theology—which is the home of the preterists—comes out of the Renaissance. The Renaissance saw the world becoming better and better as a result of the benefits of the applied sciences as well as the rejection of the superstitions of medieval Europe. While these ideas were taking place in the political and social worlds, theologically they produced the idea that as the gospel spread to all the world, it would make the world a better place. This most assuredly was and is the view of most liberals. Conservatives who were postmillennial held that the influence of the gospel would be like leaven in a loaf of bread. It would permeate the world so that the world becomes better and better. When this is finally accomplished, some believe the Lord will return and we will continue to live like this forever in His eternal Kingdom. The postmillennial view of the future is very optimistic, while we premillennialists have a negative or depressing view of the future. We see wars, rumors of wars, the Antichrist, the Tribulation, and persecutions before the Lord returns. In the late 19th century a good number of excellent theologians like Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, W. G. T. Shedd, and others were postmillennial and thought the world was getting better. Missionaries were travelling all over the globe and Christianity seemed to be expanding. The two world wars in the 20th century with all their carnage and resultant suffering tended to drive away thoughts of a "Golden Age." Only in the last 20 years or so has there been a resurgence of this "optimistic" eschatology.

HOW TO RESPOND TO PRETERISTS

I am familiar with an assembly where a very intelligent college professor moved into the area and came into fellowship with this group of believers. He was very winsome, gifted, and contributed well to the assembly. He then started speaking on the subject of eschatology, and lo and behold, he was a preterist! After much hand wringing, confused thinking, and emergency Bible study, it was mutually decided to agree to disagree. Thankfully it ended in a peaceable and loving outcome. Put yourself in the congregation of that church and consider how you would respond. Let me suggest a few things to help you think in a biblical manner so that you can rightly divide the word of truth on this potentially divisive subject of preterism.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

The first and most basic consideration is your hermeneutic—that is the principles that guide you in interpreting God’s Word. I adhere to the “grammatical–historical method” of interpretation. This simply means that we pay attention to the grammar and the meaning of words in sentences and paragraphs as the author intended them to be understood. We then work hard to understand these words and sentences in the historical context when they were written. When we say we look for the literal meaning we do not exclude the figures of metaphorical language that all language groups use. The question is always what did these words mean to the author and to the original reader? We take words in their normal meaning.

DISTINGUISH ISRAEL FROM THE CHURCH

Eschatology, the study of last things, uses many apocalyptic words, figures, and ideas. This makes it difficult to speak with assurance when stating what a text means. So we should be charitable when others disagree with us in this area. However, prophecies addressed to Israel in the Old Testament having to do with a future Kingdom and future blessings should not be taken away from Israel and given to the church without good cause. Nor should prophecies with clear meaning be spiritualized so that we can transfer them in some way to the church. Zechariah 14:2 states that the Lord will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle. That did not happen in A.D. 70 (it was only the Roman army). When did it happen? Zechariah 14:3 says the Lord is going to fight against the nations and deliver Jerusalem. Again, we cannot fit this into A.D. 70 because Jerusalem was destroyed. This is just one text of many that the preterist has grave difficulties in interpreting. R. C. Sproul in his book *The Last Days According to Jesus* said this: “We can interpret the time-frame references literally and the events surrounding the *parousia* figuratively.” With this method he can place all of the Olivet Discourse between the discourse itself and A.D. 70. Such a method is not only unwarranted but can be dangerous and troublesome as well.

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any intimation that the church replaces Israel. Everywhere the noun *Israel* is used it refers to a physical, literal, national Jew. Sixty-nine of 70 occurrences of the term *Israel* in the New Testament clearly refer to literal, national Jews. The only disputed passage is Galatians 6:16, but usage would lead us to presume that “the Israel of God” also refers to the church unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, and there isn’t. It makes perfectly good sense for Israel to refer to literal Jews who have believed in Jesus as Savior. Even though the church and Israel overlap in time, they are very much distinct in purpose and essence. When Jesus said in Matthew 16, “I will build My church,” the term *ekklesia*, like

the term *presbuteros*, has a general usage and a specific usage. In Acts 7:38 Stephen uses *ekklesia* in the general sense of an assembly and we should not make any issue out of it. The church Jesus would build was a specific group of future believers.

DISTINGUISH LEVELS OF DOCTRINE

When reacting and relating to fellow believers who disagree with us about the doctrine of last things, it is helpful to discern three levels of doctrine.

The First Level of Doctrine

The first level is that which is essential to be a believer in Jesus Christ. Doctrines such as the authority of God's Word, the deity of Christ, miracles, and the resurrection are examples of this level. Our attitude to fellowship with folks who do not believe these doctrines is to treat them as heretics and nonbelievers.

The Second Level of Doctrine

The second level consists of various doctrines about which true believers can disagree but still have a good healthy spiritual relationship. We should each one study carefully what Scripture teaches and be convinced in our own minds but yet allow others to disagree with us without damaging our relationship as believers. Our attitude in these areas should be tolerant, non-judgmental, and yet confident, recognizing that we could be wrong. Some of these doctrines could be dispensationalism, Bible translations, authorship of Hebrews, young earth/old earth, head coverings, and yes, eschatology.

The Third Level of Doctrine

The third level would be all those areas that are simply pragmatic—neither true nor false, but just useful. These involve things like the time of the Lord's supper, grape juice or wine, Sunday school, color of the carpet, a capella singing or with instruments, and such like. In these areas we should be democratic and do whatever the group wants to do.

CONCLUSION

It is clear to me that the preterist view of the Olivet Discourse, Hebrews and Revelation should be in the second level. We should, therefore, be tolerant and somewhat magnanimous in our relationships with each other.

However, to let these issues become divisive and disruptive in a local church would be unfortunate and should be dealt with by the elders. Ideally, having differences of interpretation can and should drive us to the Scriptures and result in a greater understanding of God's Word as a whole and eschatology in particular. Since we all are fallen sinners saved by grace, not a whole lot is ideal. May we be biblically informed and yet loving with those who disagree with us. Hopefully we can disagree without being disagreeable. As Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 4:3, "Let us be diligent to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

DAVE HARPER

The Tenets of Progressive Dispensationalism **by Ken Daughters**

Dispensationalism is a conservative, evangelical system of theology that interprets the Bible literally, observing that God has dealt with His people differently at different times through the epochs. It maintains a distinction between Israel and the church, believing the Old Testament promises to Israel will be literally fulfilled in a future, political, earthly reign of Christ from David's throne in Jerusalem for a thousand years. Dispensationalism was popularized by J. N. Darby, The Niagara Bible Conferences, James H. Brookes, A. J. Gordon, Moody Bible Institute, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, C. I. Scofield and his reference Bible, Lewis Sperry Chafer and the Dallas Theological Seminary, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, and Charles Ryrie. Recently, a popular variation has formed that has split dispensationalists into two camps: normative and progressive. Some of these initial authors were Robert L. Saucy, Craig A. Blaising, and Darrell L. Bock. Though progressives would like to view their approach as the natural outcome of further revision in the system, those left behind consider the changes radical and dangerous. The tenets of the new form of Dispensationalism are as follows:

1. In summary, progressive Dispensationalism is a mediating position between non-Dispensationalism (usually identified with Covenant Theology and Amillennialism) and traditional Dispensationalism. It seeks to retain a natural understanding of the prophetic Scriptures that appear to assign a significant role to the nation of Israel in the future, in accordance with a dispensational system. But it also sees the program of God as unified *within* history, in agreement with nondispensationalists, and denies a radical discontinuity between the present Church Age and the Messianic Kingdom promises.

2. Normative dispensationalists (essentialists?) such as Ryrie would describe Dispensationalism in terms of a *sine qua non* with three essential tenets: (1) Israel and the church are distinct in the sense that God is pursuing two distinct purposes, one related to the earth with the earthly people Israel, the other related to heaven with the heavenly people the church; (2) the Israel/church distinction is born out of a literal hermeneutic (not a spiritualizing one like the Covenant theologians); and (3) the underlying purpose of God in the world is His glory, a much broader purpose than merely the redemption of man, as the Covenant theologians would say. In contrast, progressive dispensationalists would not accept any of these tenets as they are stated. They agree that God is bringing glory to Himself. Since both Covenant theologians and progressive dispensationalists would agree, traditionalists should not claim that tenet as a distinction. They believe all sides are using the same hermeneutics, so that also does not serve well as a distinction. And although they agree the church is distinct from Israel, they would not speak of two separate plans or two separate eternal destinies.

3. A classical dispensationalist such as C. I. Scofield defined a dispensation as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." Each dispensation would include a distinct revelation, a test, a failure, and a judgment. Progressive dispensationalists do not speak of such criteria. Instead they see progressive stages in the history of Christ's fulfillment of holistic redemption, with much more continuity between the stages.

4. Traditionalist distinctions between law and grace and accusations of multiple ways of salvation, including the possibility of legal obedience as being the condition of salvation under the Mosaic economy, are passé.

5. Traditionalist distinctions between the terms “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God” are gone. No distinction is seen between these expressions.

6. Whereas traditional Dispensationalism made primary application of the Sermon on the Mount to the future Millennial Kingdom, progressive dispensationalists understand the Lord’s directives as expressions of Kingdom righteousness to be lived in the world before its actual establishment.

7. Whereas traditional dispensationalists claim an exclusive literal hermeneutic and accuse Covenant theologians of spiritualizing prophecy, progressive dispensationalists believe both groups use the same hermeneutics, but come to different conclusions.

8. Progressive dispensationalists appreciate the influence that “biblical theology” has had in helping them interpret passages of Scripture more according to authorial intent in the historical context and in a less forced systematic manner.

9. Progressive dispensationalists appreciate the progress of revelation, recognizing a thematic approach which includes the study of related concepts, not just individual terms.

10. Progressive dispensationalists understand differences in theological methodology, are consciously aware of the role of tradition in interpretation, and are cognizant of the interplay of preunderstanding, text, and community in the hermeneutical process.

11. Progressive dispensationalists describe the relationship between the old and new in the progress of revelation as “continuity/discontinuity.” Some things continue across the dispensations, yet other aspects change. There is a progress to promissory fulfillment toward the new. Progressives see greater continuity between the stages of the unfolding of God’s plan (i.e., dispensations) than do traditionalists.

12. Whereas traditional dispensationalists kept Israel and the church distinct even to the point of two separate New Covenants, one for each, the progressive dispensationalists see only one new covenant that belongs to Israel, though the church participates partially in it.

13. To the progressive dispensationalists, both the present and future dispensations are fulfillments of the Davidic Covenant; both are aspects of the Messianic reign of Christ.

14. Whereas traditional dispensationalists view this Church Age as a mystery parenthesis, progressive dispensationalists believe the Messianic Kingdom has been inaugurated. The Messiah is now ruling on David’s throne from heaven spiritually. He will come again and rule on an earthly political throne over the nation Israel. The concept of inauguration means that fulfillment has begun, though consummation will not take place until the future earthly reign of Christ. We are now experiencing the first-stage partial fulfillment of the Messianic Kingdom prophecies, and have received some of the promised eschatological blessings already.

15. Far from being a mystery parenthesis, the present dispensation is the basis for the integration of all the covenants in the redemption inaugurated in this dispensation and fulfilled in the future.

16. Progressive dispensationalists describe fulfillment in terms of “already/not yet.” There are already-inaugurated blessings of this dispensation, though there is also not-yet-realized fullness of those blessings.

17. Progressive dispensationalists view redemption as more than just individualistic, seeing it as extending to both individuals and humanity in its wholeness, extending into corporate political and national dimensions. There is continuity between the future age of the Millennium and the present age of the church. Since the Millennium includes social and political redemption, we ought to establish a social and political agenda for the church in this dispensation.

18. Progressive dispensationalists feel that traditional Dispensationalism is too anthropocentric, concentrating on two destinies of two peoples. Progressives prefer a more christocentric view of the purpose of history. They see progress as due to the history of Christ’s fulfilling the plan of holistic redemption in progressive stages (dispensations), not due to a plan for two different kinds of people.

19. Progressives see a greater continuity between the Millennium and the eternal Kingdom than do traditionalists. The difference is one of degree, not kind. The transition is completion of the redemption of the whole created order.

20. Progressives reject the traditionalist distinction between two peoples of God in the sense of two different humanities with parallel, yet distinct eternal destinies: the earth for Israel and heaven for the church.

21. Progressives provide a new definition of the church. It is the union by the Holy Spirit to Christ, through which His fullness of life and righteousness manifests itself in the new humanity. This is not a unity that obliterates all possible distinctions, but harmonizes them in a way never before seen. The church is not merely an association of individuals.

22. Progressive dispensationalists are inclusive in their theological reflection. They are open to discussing their views with those who differ and seek to learn from other’s viewpoints.

If there were a *sine qua non* of progressive Dispensationalism, it would be that the throne on which Christ now rules at the right hand of God spiritually is actually the prophesied Davidic throne, meaning that the Kingdom is inaugurated. Using a movie analogy, the era in which we now live is the “trailer” for the future complete movie which will be experienced in the future Kingdom. Using a food analogy, in this present era we are eating the hors d’ oeuvres awaiting the future full dinner. The New Covenant blessings have been inaugurated and we are experiencing the foretaste of what is to come when they will flow full force in the Millennial Kingdom.

Some dispensationalists have been influenced by the progressive camp without accepting all of its tenets. Common movement can be seen in the relevance of the Sermon on the Mount for today, and the dropping of the “two peoples of God” distinction. Whereas for most of their history dispensationalists were in substantial agreement with each other, this is no longer the

case. Normative dispensationalists accuse progressives of describing a system that is not very different from covenant-Premillennialism and the “already/not yet” hermeneutic of George Eldon Ladd, viewpoints from which their predecessors would have labored to distance themselves.

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Ken Daughters

DR. MACLEOD ASKS

Faculty member Dave MacLeod leads us in a public forum to discuss issues pertinent to contemporary Christian life. Last issue he asked the following question:

A Brethren assembly writer from Glasgow, Scotland pointedly addressed preachers in the United Kingdom, “We hear much devotional ministry and challenging exhortation from the platform, but neither of these will be of any lasting value unless they are seen to be rooted in the text of Scripture. Too often the passage read has little bearing on the message which follows, and it takes little intelligence on the part of the congregation to notice that the speaker lacks divine authority for his pronouncements. A superstructure is only as secure as its foundation, and preaching, however impressive, eloquent, or emotional, is so much rhetorical hot air if divorced from the Word. It is fast becoming a rarity these days to hear exhortation clearly built upon correct exegesis. It is even more of a rarity to hear expository ministry! The reason is not hard to seek. Exposition requires effort. And it is precisely such effort which I would urge upon my readers” (David J. Newell, “The Believer’s Library (3): Some Basic Bible Study Aids (ii),” *Believer’s Magazine* (March, 1999): 73–74).

My question is threefold: (1) What do you think of Mr. Newell’s philosophy of preaching? (2) Does the condition Brother Newell describes have any bearing on conditions in North America? (3) In light of his remarks, how would you describe the preaching in your assembly (anonymous replies will be accepted)?

Michael Bowen Responds

Through the Awana ministry, our family has the privilege frequently to fellowship with believers from across the state, both at New Testament assemblies and at a variety of evangelical denominational churches. Gladly, I can report that the majority of the teaching meetings we attend are firmly grounded in Scripture, and that the messages are expositions of Scripture. Exposition would seem to be the norm in the local churches in Central and Eastern MO. In my experience there appear to be three different kinds of churches: First, I have often noticed that the better the speaking skills of the preacher, the poorer the biblical content of his message. This is a sad reality. Second, there are less frequent occasions when an assembly/local church is truly blessed with a man who has both good communication skills and excellent biblical content in his messages. The third variety of assembly is the one where the congregation is committed to the accurate study of the Scriptures, but they have ignored the need of having gifted men do the preaching. In short, the people know the Bible but don’t seem to realize the need of having good preachers to proclaim it.

- The churches or assemblies where there are good communicators, but there is poor content.
- The churches or assemblies where there are both good speakers and good content.
- The churches or assemblies where there a love of good content but a lack of good communicators to deliver it.

I believe it would be wise for the elders to invest their time and efforts in training the men to this end. As far as denominational churches are concerned, it seems that it is the smaller churches, which have the better expositional preachers. The larger the church, the more the message is

focused on felt needs, current events, holidays, etc. Scripture is included in these topical sermons, but it is not the main focus. Are we so drawn to thematic meetings that we flock to churches where we are fed milk and not solid food?

Michael & Michelle Bowen
St. Louis, MO

Beth Grove Responds

I agree with Mr. Newell to a point, and miss expository preaching in many churches in the UK. Having said that, I am privileged to attend a church with one or two very good teachers of the Word. Their philosophy to preaching is to find the balance between expository preaching and practical application. It is rare to find a preacher who indeed does both. Living in the difficult, God-disdaining society that I do, I find that a good balance of hearing Biblical exposition concluded with devotional, challenging exhortations based on the scriptures just unpacked, extremely helpful. A year of just expository preaching and no practical application or devotional insights, or indeed “challenging exhortations,” aids good Biblical knowledge, but little daily aid. A year of just “devotional ministry” and “challenging exhortation” with little reference or relevance to the passage it is supposed to have alighted from might give me a little Sunday boost, but little perseverance for continued obedience to God’s Word. Therefore, in my opinion, for what it’s worth, a mixture of both is ideal. In the words of my alma mater missions professor, Ken Fleming: “It’s all about balance.”

Beth Grove
London, UK

David MacLeod Comments

I appreciate very much this letter from Beth Grove. I agree with her that we need devotional insights, challenging exhortations, helpful illustrations, and good application from our preachers. I must, however, add a caveat to my appreciation. Good expositional preaching includes all of these ingredients—at least, it should, and I believe Mr. Newell would agree with me. Unlike topical preaching, which may derive its content from a variety of texts, expositional preaching is the communication of the full message of a single section of Scripture (verse, paragraph, or chapter), derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of the passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers (definition adapted from Haddon W. Robinson). An expository sermon is not simply a running commentary on a passage devoid of devotional warmth and application. Yet it is a sermon whose message is derived from the passage and not a sermon where a message is imposed upon a passage. The expositor asks: What does this passage say, what does it mean, and what does it mean to me?

Bonjé Lickteig Responds

Living in Western Michigan has been interesting for the past several years, as Rob Bell and Mars Hill Bible Church (not the church we attend) have come under great scrutiny. Many of our churches need to come under the same scrutiny, so I find Dr. MacLeod's questions to be extremely relevant to much of what is currently taking place in the church (as a whole).

In answer to what I think of Mr. Newell's philosophy of preaching, I would, in my initial reaction, say his philosophy is great. While I have not read his works, I understand that he believes that expository preaching, built upon correct exegesis, is absolutely necessary in order for a speaker to legitimately address the Word. I do not disagree. I would not, however, agree that this is the only type of preaching which is valid or truthful. Many people's stories of how God has worked in their lives can be very compelling in validating God's Word from a life application standpoint. This (story telling) can be dangerous water to tread, however, as it flows from the experiential, as opposed to the theological, realm. This does not mean, however, that such examples are not helpful in pronouncing God's Word. There is more danger in not pronouncing God's Word at all.

It can be added that expository preaching is not being heard, not only because it requires effort, but also because it is not what pastors or teachers believe their congregations want to hear. It delves too deeply into scripture for people who are not ready for it. They are being fed a diet of milk. Many churches are now so seeker-sensitive that they are not properly feeding those who are already believers. In his book, *I Just Wanted More Land – Jabez*, Gary E. Gilley states, “Fed for too long on nothing but the milk of the Word, and persuaded by leaders to believe that this diet is sound, few Christians are going on to maturity in Christ (Hebrews 5:11-14). Having never been taught the simplest methods of Bible study, they are unable to recognize when the Scriptures are being distorted. The result is that they are easy prey for all sorts of unintentional and intentional deceptions that are constantly bombarding the church. My plea is that an increasing number of believers will drop their hot pursuit for ‘Christianity Lite’ and take up the serious study of the Word of God” (pp. 51–52).

The condition Brother Newell describes deeply reflects what is happening in North America. There are several churches I have visited where the Bible is never opened, or even alluded to. There are many ideologies eclipsing the Bible. I fear many churches have hidden the Bible from view.

There are many books one can read in order to learn more about the current trends and movements associated with postmodern evangelicalism and the emergent church. In their book *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)*, Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck address this issue. “Burned-out evangelicals who go emergent and talk squishy about the Bible may still basically treat the Bible as if it were completely true and authoritative. This would be a fortuitous inconsistency. But what happens in the second generation? What happens when an erstwhile church planter with a few [Emergent] books under his belt starts doing church with a radical skepticism about the authority of the Bible and forms a people by musing on about how his community affirms the Bible (in part?), therefore making it ‘welcome’ in their conversation? We can wax eloquent about the beauty of the story and how the Scriptures read us, but unless people are convinced that the Bible is authoritative, true, inspired, and the very words of God, over time they will read it less frequently, know it less fully, and trust it less surely” (p. 78). (p.78)

We currently attend a church, which has “Bible” in its name; however, our concerns are that this church is slowly selling out to the market-driven mentality as are many churches in North America. It is a rarity to hear expository preaching and teaching which is built upon correct

exegesis. We do long for more of that type of preaching and our concerns for our local church include, but are not limited to:

1. Lack of Bible preaching and teaching from the pulpit.
2. Lack of Bible teaching in Sunday school and small groups.
3. Slow, but steadily increasing, absorption of the current trends in our culture which endorse fun and entertainment as a means of attracting “seekers” instead of focusing the services and programs on edifying those who are already believers.

Bonjé Lickteig
Dorr, Michigan

David MacLeod Comments

Again, I very much appreciate this letter from Bonjé Lickteig. My only response is to voice my objection to “story telling” preaching. Certainly a personal experience can be used to illustrate a sermon point, but the preacher whose entire sermon is made up of warm, encouraging stories is not following the apostolic admonition to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Next Issue’s Question:

When Princeton Theological Seminary was founded in 1812, not all Presbyterians welcomed the new school. They believed an older tradition should be followed in which a promising young man would live with a minister’s family for a few years and be mentored by the seasoned pastor. The young man would be given books to read from the pastor’s library and opportunities to serve in the local church. The pastor would examine him regularly on his reading and evaluate his spiritual growth. Then followed opportunities to preach, and eventually he would be assigned to a church of his own (David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994], 1:4, 30).

My question this month is an outgrowth of two things: First, there is my observation that the history of American Presbyterianism and its early rejection of formal biblical studies parallels the history of the Brethren assemblies and their widespread resistance to formal training. Second, there are the answers in this issue to my previous question. I am thinking especially of the letter of “Anonymous.” He asks all of us for advice in motivating his local preachers to prepare well, use good exegesis, and follow good expositional practices.

My question, then, is twofold: (1) What advice would you give “Anonymous?” (2) If you believe, as many of our readers do, that the local assembly is the place for training and preparation, what is being done in your assembly to train young men in the principles of hermeneutics, to introduce them to sound exegetical principles, and to encourage them to study homiletics for the serious task of ministering God’s Word?

A Word Along the Way

“Enraptured”

Once set adrift at birth so long ago,
 By flesh conceived to know the way of flesh,
I roamed in age fast bent on self to please
 A mindset forged by blood and flesh enmeshed.

And who knows where a worldling will end up,
 When cast amid the course of surging life?
A marked decision might success endow,
 Another lead to failure's bitter strife.

So I, in fitful start entered the maze
 In hope abounding, searching for a way
To piece together time's persistent trek
 And chart a course of pleasure, come what may.

But passing years revealed the darker dream
 That chills the heart when trying to deny:
A man will hide the truth that he is lost,
 While outward actions on charade rely.

And left to find my worth in worldly fray,
 I floundered here and there in search of joy;
In fear that what the world would bring my way
 Would leave me destitute with every ploy.

My life, sealed up in hope of future plan,
 A chrysalis prepared to open wide—
Emergent life's unfolding, secret form
 And I, as each, in earth had to abide.

No solid ground in love would ease my pain,
 Though I pursued its faint elusive charm;
I pressed for it but saw it slip away
 And garnered naught but hollow, useless harm.

The cold reality that life relays—
 That happiness and luck will breed success—
Becomes the goad relentless in the heart
 That drags the soul in fear of emptiness.

Conflicted in the midst, I drifted far
 In desperation, craving peace of mind;

But momentary friendship with the world
Is cheapest substitute that one can find.

Resigned to make my way by guts and wit,
My days were superficial at their best—
To drink, to love, to mask the ache within
Became a mantra bound to foolish jest.

The soul's despair remains within the heart
That seeks relief in vane frivolity;
A silent hunter poised one's joy to kill
Though sensate pleasures rich appear to be.

And then upon a day like all the rest,
I chanced to hear a word with new intent:
That God both knew and understood my plight,
That Jesus died for me, from heaven sent.

A brand new life, a change of all I knew
A soul's redemption for eternity?
From wanton destiny to Spirit's seal,
To live forever, cleansed, how can it be?

What foolish rant, I thought, for me to claim,
For me, so schooled in worldly sentiment!
A vapid, pointless leap into the dark
Where all regretful souls voice discontent.

But Christ's redeeming love beguiled my mind,
So desperate to know a truth apart
From mindless ruse and disillusionment
That left me famished, begging in my heart.

My sin had separated me from God
And ruined all His image in me given;
At once I knew my soul in jeopardy
Was doomed to live without Him, heedless, driven.

Yet darker is the irony of sin
That urged me to reject His words of love;
I found myself employing worldly rot,
Absurdist argument toward Him above!

I raged at my resurgent poverty,
Cocooned in faithless night, though living still;
A destitution bred in fruitless search

Without the light of Christ, nor truth, nor will.

But soon my counterintuition cleared
As Spirit opened floodgates of the truth:
At crossroads then, my need I would declare,
For conscience felt its gnawing inward tooth.

How wonderful the joy of Christ became
To be enraptured by redeeming grace!
My soul expanded into Savior's love,
My rapture at the thought of Jesus' face.

Was it concession for a change of pace,
Or just a pruned perspective on life's worth?
Oh no, for fake confession falls apart
And ends far short of promised true new birth.

To leave behind without a backward glance
The womb of worldliness in which I ran—
In Christ's redeeming love renewing me,
I am transformed, a found, forgiven man.

A new man saved from condemnation sure
Before a holy God who judges sin—
New life in Christ, creation once again,
Reborn, His holy Spirit kept within.

And now entranced by godly love for me,
I wait for entrance into heaven's keep;
No longer plagued by dismal hopelessness,
Content in Christ, the spirit's truth to reap.

Once bound by flesh, now weaned and loosed to run,
To know my re-formation through His blood—
I revel in the freedom of His grace
Where once in blinded bondage I had stood.

The vacant, hollow course of earthly plan
Becomes an afterthought of tortured mind;
For life in Christ intends eternal joy
And leaves earth's broken pathway far behind.

Each breaking hour I'm closer to that day,
My cache of time in passing fullness spent;
Within my soul a lightness I embrace
As earth's foul death grip now from me is rent.

What magnitude of joy is mine to hold!
 Anticipation bolsters my sojourn:
I may be willed to walk a darkened veil
 Or rise in rapture and to Him return.

Till then the errant self in me contrives.
 But old has passed away and new has come—
And sin's recurrent contrariety
 Will cease, and I with Christ will become one.

Prelude
By Beth LaBuff

~Come, for everything is now ready. ¹

In the kingdom of God, through a portal I peered
 As the guests began to gather.
 Across the threshold was a banquet hall,
And I was among the blessed, one by God invited.

A voice like a trumpet echoed, "Come inside."

Into the hall, the floor lustered like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.
 Reflected on the floor, stretching on to infinity, was the length of table.
Overtop, a suspended canopy of pristine gossamer swayed in celestial breezes.
 Flanking the table were chairs with lavish cushions and gold filigree backs.

The table linen was exquisitely interwoven with finely twisted threads, gold and scarlet-dyed.

Glassware reflected rainbows on the gossamer canopy.
Plates and bowls at each setting were wrought from precious stones,
 Crafted from sapphire, amethyst, and ruby.
Luxurious foods loaded the table--platters of angelic fare.

At each place setting, a white stone with a new name engraved, lay beside.

The wedding guests assembled, friends of the bride and Bridegroom.
 I was blessed to be among *the ancients*, commended for our faith.
Amidst the throng, I brushed shoulders with those arrayed in white robes,
 Ushered by death out of the great tribulation.

I longed, for just a twinkling-eye moment, to here abide.

When a hush overtook us, our tongues compelled to silence,
There came from the throne a voice with rich timbre, “Praise our God, all you his servants.²”
Then my voice resounded with thousands, and thousands upon thousands,
“Hallelujah! The wedding of the Lamb has come; the bride has made herself ready.³”

Salt tear rivulets trailed down my face; overwhelmed by majesty, I cried.

And there she stood, arrayed in linen bright and clean, righteous and radiant, without stain or wrinkle.

She gazed at her Bridegroom, scarred by eternal wounds.
With the roar of rushing waters and loud peals of thunder,
My “Hallelujah” joined with that of the multitude,

For here was the awaited—The Lamb and His blood-bought bride!

“Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” Revelation 19:9

“For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)”
Revelation 19:7-8

¹ Luke 14:17

² Revelation 19:5

³ Revelation 19:7

(all Scripture quotations from NIV 1984)

Inspiration drawn from select verses from:
Revelation 2, 7, 19, Matthew 22, Ephesians 5, Hebrews 11

By Beth LaBuff
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