

This is based on a series on Dispensationalism I wrote in early 2006, but has been revised in 2008/2009 for accuracy and to remove elements which misrepresented Reformed theology and systematic theology in general. The original will be available for reference here (link to come).

Basic Tenets The basic tenets of dispensationalism are as follows: (1) The Jews are to be saved by repentance; they are to be left here on earth as God's earthly people. (2) The Gentiles are to be saved by faith; they will be taken to heaven in the Rapture. (3) The church is a parenthesis in God's plan and will end in apostasy. (4) The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are sharply differentiated, the first being the Davidic kingdom and the latter being God's universal, world-wide kingdom. (5) God deals with men according to seven dispensations. Now, quite frankly, this is heresy. Let me explain. God's plan has not failed! God's plan never failed and it never will fail! God is omniscient (all-knowing). It is simply not possible that there would be something that occurs that God did not foresee. There are teachers who embellish the third point of dispensationalism to the point that they teach that God didn't see it coming and His plan for His people failed, forcing him to have to temporarily open the door of redemption to the Gentiles. Romans 9:6 puts this heresy to rest: 'But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.' The second part of the verse adds a new topic that I will touch on later. The point here is that God's plan did not fail and it cannot fail because it is infallible. There are no sudden turn of events or parenthetical periods in God's plan. God never changes, never has changed, and never will change! 1 Samuel 15:29: 'Furthermore, the Eternal One of Israel does not lie or change His mind, for He is not man who changes his mind.' Now taking the first and second points of dispensationalism in one: God does not have two plans for salvation. There is but one way of salvation, and all are saved by it. Yet Darby's system established two distinct tracks of salvation -- one for the Jews, and another for the Gentiles. This doctrine is obviously false. Both Jews and Gentiles must repent and both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith. I will discuss the way of salvation under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant later in this post. Since the Fall, there has been one way to be saved: by grace through faith alone in God. The means of man's demonstration of this faith has changed between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, but the plan of salvation has not changed. One example of salvation under the Old Covenant is Abraham. In Galatians 3:6,7, it reads: 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness, so understand that those who have faith are Abraham's sons' And Hebrews 11:1,2 reads: 'Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. For by it our ancestors were approved. ' Hebrews 11:13: 'These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.' Now there are some visible differences between the demonstration of faith under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant, one of the most notable being the emphasis on works, obedience, and sacrifices under the Law. I plan to go into this in greater detail later. The second part of the third tenet of dispensationalism is heretical because it denies God's plan for mankind and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ: 'The church is a parenthesis in God's plan and will end in apostasy.' Based on the above discussion of God's plan, it is clear that God's plan did not fail. I do not believe that the church is a parenthesis, or an afterthought, in God's plan. Instead, the Church IS God's plan. In addition, I do not believe the church will end

in apostasy. The true Church is not going to fail. There may be great opposition in the times ahead, but the Church is not going to end. God's plan will not fail. Matthew 24:14 - 'This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.' Persecution will come, and during persecution those who are 'believers of convenience' will fall away, but the true Church will be refined and polished. Matthew 28:18-20 - 'Then Jesus came near and said to them, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' And now looking at the fourth point: 'The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are sharply differentiated, the first being the Davidic kingdom and the latter being God's universal, world-wide kingdom.' Prove to me how the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are two different things. Where is that written? Scriptural evidence shows that the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are two names describing the same thing -- just different words used in different Gospels. *Matthew 3:2 & 4:17 - 'Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!' **Mark 1:15 - 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news! *Matthew 5:3 - 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.' **Luke 6:20 - 'Blessed are you who are poor, because the kingdom of God is yours.' *Matthew 8:11 - 'I tell you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.' **Luke 13:29 - 'They will come from east and west, from north and south, and recline at the table in the kingdom of God.' These are but a few of many verses that prove that the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are referring to the same thing. However, some infer that the Kingdom of Heaven must be something negative. A quick glance at Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15 shows the fallacy of such views. The Kingdom of Heaven (Kingdom of God) is the Body of Christ, made up of believers from all nations. (Luke 17:20, 21 - 'The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; no one will say 'Look here!' or 'There!' For you see, the kingdom of God is among you.') The Kingdom of Heaven has been established. Colossians 1:13 - 'He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.' The statement that Christ is in a kingdom but is not yet reigning is simply false and contrary to Scripture. And finally, number 5: 'God deals with men according to seven dispensations.' This term, 'dispensations', comes from these four verses in the King James Version: 1Cor. 9:17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. Eph. 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: Eph. 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward: Col. 1:25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God... Other translations, however, use different wording: Holman Christian Standard Bible 1Cor. 9:17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I am entrusted with a stewardship. Eph. 1:10 for the administration of the days of fulfillment, to bring everything together in the Messiah, both things in heaven and things on earth in Him. Eph. 3:2 you have heard, haven't you, about the administration of God's grace that He gave to me for you? Col. 1:25 I have become its minister, according to God's administration that was given to me for you, to make God's message fully known... English Standard Version 1Cor. 9:17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward,

but not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. Eph. 1:10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Eph. 3:2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, Col. 1:25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known...New American Standard Version 1 Cor. 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. Eph. 1:10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him Eph. 3:2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; Col. 1:25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God....As is clear from the above comparison, the terms 'administration' or 'stewardship' do not carry the same connotation as the term 'dispensation' does. The Greek text suggests that 'stewardship' is the intended meaning. Now moving on to an examination of the 'seven dispensations' and the discussion of the 'eight ages' (the extra age supposedly being a time that was unforeseen by God -- see the above discussion on whether the plan of God failed). First, the dispensations: 1. The Dispensation of Innocency. 2. The Dispensation of Conscience and Sacrifice. 3. The Dispensation of Human Government. 4. The Dispensation of Promises. 5. The Dispensation of Law. 6. The Dispensation of Grace Abounding. 7. The Dispensation of The Kingdom. In the preface to the Scofield Reference Bible, Cyrus Scofield wrote that 'the Scriptures divide time...into seven unequal periods, usually called dispensations...these periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with mankind.' In his description of each dispensation, Scofield goes on to demonstrate how the plan of salvation is different under each dispensation. So we are asked to believe that there was not one, not even two, but seven distinct plans of salvation over the course of history! First, Scofield's very definition of a dispensation does not seem to be accurate based on the above discussion on the meaning of 'dispensation'. Scofield stated: 'A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to some specific revelation of the Will of God.' But in the Bible (quoting the KJV), Paul says "a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me" -- meaning that the Gospel had been entrusted to Paul to be 'dispensed' by him. Next, why seven dispensations? Scripture does NOT distinguish these seven dispensations. The naming and classification of these "dispensations" is arbitrary. They may be reasonably accurate summaries of certain periods in history, but to say that these defined periods of time mark times when God dealt differently with man is to take a privilege not granted by Scripture. For example, the second dispensation: conscience. It is interesting to note that the word 'conscience' only appears in the New Testament, many years separate from when the 'dispensation of conscience' supposedly occurred. And the era of conscience is supposed to be confined to this time when the word 'conscience' was not used in Scripture at all and was rarely referred to? The time of 'conscience' cannot be arbitrarily limited to the time between the Fall and the Flood. In conclusion, with regards to this fifth point of dispensationalism, the arbitrary definitions of seven dispensations are man's work -- now tradition -- and must be seen as just that. Two quotes on dispensationalism from prominent dispensationalists: <<<"we must expect a progress of evil... Truly Christendom has become completely corrupted, the dispensation of the Gentiles has been found unfaithful: can it be restored? No! Impossible." - J.N. Darby >>><<<"If Dispensationalism has the answers, then it

is the most helpful tool in Biblical interpretation. If not, it ought to be discarded as worthless." Charles Ryrie (Dispensationalism Today,'65,21)>>>

One Plan for Salvation

In Part 1, I examined the teachings of classic dispensationalism and why it is a false doctrine, especially because of its heretical stance on dividing the people of God into multiple separate groups. In summary, classic dispensationalism teaches that through history there are seven different ways that God dealt/deals/will deal with mankind, and that in the current age there are two distinct plans for salvation -- one for Israel and one for the Gentile Church. In this post, I will not spend much time covering the misinterpretations but instead present a logical view of the doctrine of the plan for salvation through history, tracing the history of God's People through time, and focusing on the redemptive promises God made to man. (Technically, theologians describe these in covenantal terms, but for the sake of dialogue with dispensationalists who oppose covenant theology, I will use less loaded terminology in this particular instance.)

First, a look at one of the first in Scripture: a promise made to Adam: Genesis 2:15-17 - "The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die."

This promise was the difference between life and death, hinging on obedience. Adam violated his part of the promise by his disobedience, when he and his wife Eve chose to obey the serpent rather than God. From this moment on, Adam no longer had the same close fellowship with God and Adam would not live forever on the earth. Furthermore, Adam's sin had brought death not only on himself but on all his descendants. (Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned.) For a time, it was as if the serpent had won a victory. This could have been the end of the story. But God created man for a purpose: fellowship with Him. Satan was not going to be able to cause God's plan to fail. Through His grace, God made a plan for man to be reunited with Him in fellowship. The chosen seed of the woman and the Seed of God were to live in hostility with the seed of the devil. (Genesis 3:15 - "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.") After the Fall, mankind continued to degenerate, becoming more and more evil. God set the limit for man's life at 120 years because of man's wickedness (Gen. 6:3). As the years progressed, mankind grew so evil that God destroyed all the evildoers, preserving His righteous remnant: 8 people, Noah and his family. Noah and his family received grace. The rest of mankind was destroyed in a flood that covered the entire earth. Following the flood, God made a promise of preservation with Noah, promising to never again destroy the whole earth with a flood. (Genesis 9:15). The rainbow was shown as a symbol of this promise. Next, we will look at Abram, later called Abraham. Abram was called

by God to be a part of God's plan for mankind. (Genesis 15:1,4-6) - "After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great...This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then He said to him, 'Your offspring will be that numerous.' Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness. Just as is the case now, so it was then: it is not through works that people are saved. Abraham had faith in what God would do, and God credited it to him as righteousness. Also see: Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-22. Hebrews 11:39-40 is the key to understanding this concept: "All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us." This shows that there are not multiple plans for salvation but rather that the New Covenant perfected and fulfilled the Old Covenant. God made an unconditional covenant with Abram for offspring, land, and blessing. (Gen. 12:2, 15:5,17-21; Gen. 17:1-14). As a sign of this promise, Abram was given a new name: Abraham, meaning "Father of many nations". This was to be an eternal covenant, marked by the physical practice of circumcision (a sign of purification, or ceremonial washing, now represented by baptism). The covenant was to be passed down through Abraham's son Isaac. (Genesis 17:19-21 - But God said, "No. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will confirm My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will certainly bless him; I will make him fruitful and will multiply him greatly. He will father 12 tribal leaders, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will confirm My covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this time next year.") Also in Genesis 21:12 (But God said to Abraham, "Do not be concerned about the boy and your slave. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her, because your offspring will be traced through Isaac.") we see that the promises made to Abraham were realized through Isaac, and not through Ishmael. As a result, the descendants of Isaac were God's chosen people, not the descendants of Ishmael. In Genesis 22 we see the another parallel to things to come. Abraham had been commanded to make a sacrifice -- a sacrifice of his son, who God had promised. At the last moment, when Abraham demonstrated his faith and his trust in God, God provided a ram to be slain in Isaac's place, sparing Abraham's son. Because of Abraham's faith, God restated the covenant with Abraham, promising to bless the whole world through Abraham. (Genesis 22:16-18 - "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son, I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the gates of their enemies. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed My command." This same promise was also confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-5) and to Jacob, Abraham's grandson (Gen. 28:13). Jacob struggled with God and with men and prevailed (Gen. 32:28). God blessed Jacob, changing his name to Israel (from the Hebrew "Isra El", meaning "He struggled with God"). The descendants of Israel's twelve sons became known as the twelve tribes of Israel. Each son (and his descendants) received blessing from God. Jacob's descendants lived in Egypt for about 400 years, as had been revealed to Abraham, until God called His people out of Egypt. God called Moses and Aaron, from the descendants of Jacob's son Levi, as his spokespeople and as the leaders of the people. God spoke to Moses, reminding him of the covenant and revealing His Name to Moses. (Exodus 6:2-5 - "Then God spoke to Moses, telling him, "I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob as God Almighty, but I did not make My name Yahweh known to them. I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land they lived in as foreigners. Furthermore, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are forcing to work as slaves, and I have remembered My covenant.") At this time, God was ready to fulfill the promise of land that He made to Abraham. Led by Moses and Aaron, the people left Israel and traveled into the wilderness (to Midian, most likely in what is modern-day northern Saudi Arabia). At the Mountain of God (called Sinai), God revealed to Moses a series of laws for the people to follow as they established a nation and lived in the land that had been promised to them. (Exodus 19:3-6 - Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain: "This is what you must say to the house of Jacob, and explain to the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now if you will listen to Me and carefully keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although all the earth is Mine, and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation." The Law of Moses was a continuation (an augmentation) of the promise given to Abraham. It is not the end of one time period and the beginning of another, nor is there a tension between promise and law. The Law is the combination of the spiritual covenant and the physical commandments. The Law centered around the Ten Commandments. It was a summary of God's will for His people. (Exodus 34:28 - "He wrote down on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments.") The Law did not interrupt the promise, it did not annul the promise, and it did not parallel the promise. The Law continued the promise, expanding it and giving further revelation. Furthermore, and contrary to some popular teaching, Israel did not do wrong by accepting the Law! The Law is the written record of the standard of God's righteousness. It did not suddenly come in to being at this time -- the principles of the Law can be seen throughout the Book of Genesis, prior to the "giving of the Law". The Law revealed the will of God, was a written charter of laws for the nation of Israel, laid the foundation for the priesthood (as Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests -- Exodus 19:5-6), and laid the foundation for the coming Messiah. The Law is one of the key components of God's plan for salvation, grace, and redemption. Next, a look at the promises made to David. After David was crowned as king of Israel, God spoke to David through the prophet Nathan. (2 Samuel 7:8-16 - "Now this is what you are to say to My servant David: 'This is what the LORD of Hosts says: I took you from the pasture and from following the sheep to be ruler over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. I will make a name for you like that of the greatest in the land. I will establish a place for My people Israel and plant them, so that they may live there and not be disturbed again. Evildoers will not afflict them as they have done ever since the day I ordered judges to be over My people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you: The LORD Himself will make a house for you. When your time comes and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me. When he does wrong, I will discipline him with a human rod and with blows from others. But My faithful love will never leave him as I removed it from Saul; I removed him from your way. Your house and kingdom will endure before Me forever, and your throne will be established forever.'" The promise made to David was a promise of an everlasting kingdom and throne. Verse 13 is a promise to David's son Solomon but also a Messianic prophecy. Solomon and Jesus are both called

"Son of David". Just as Solomon was chastened for his sin, Jesus was pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5). The promise of faithful love and an everlasting kingdom are applied to Jesus. David's throne was established forever through Jesus. After the death of David's son Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two parts. After many generations, both kingdoms were taken into captivity and the [earthly] kingdoms were ended. (Prophecies and promises made during this time, such as the prophecies of Daniel, will be examined in "Part Four".) It is important to note at this time that these various eras and covenants (including some not mentioned such as the time of the judges, Israel asking for a king, the divided kingdom, captivity, etc.) do not mark separate dispensations (incorrectly used to refer to 'times when God dealt differently with man') but rather components of a progression. Remember: one plan for mankind, not seven plans for mankind. Note also that this is not an advocacy of "progressive dispensationalism". (Progressive dispensationalism is a modification of classic dispensationalism; P. D. correctly recognizes the single plan of salvation but still emphasizes the seven dispensations.) I see the Old Testament and the history of Israel as a parallel to the progression of a child growing up. Prior to the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel was still in its infancy as a nation. Few laws had been given (aside from the knowledge of good and evil) and the relationship between God and man was emphasized. The Mosaic Covenant and the Law, which I will again point out was a positive thing, not a negative thing, was the full measure of what was expected in order to maintain a good relationship with God. This can be equated to the rules given to a child as the child approaches his teenage years. As the child reaches adulthood, the rules are not impractical but the person is not bound by the rules in the same manner. Such it is with God's people in the New Testament. The law did not cease to have a purpose; it was not removed or repealed, but instead, its application was different. The Law was also used to demonstrate to God's People their need for grace -- in a sense, it was the sign of greater things to come, fulfilled at the coming of the Messiah. This brings us now to the New Testament. The time had come for prophecies dating back to Genesis to be fulfilled. The time had come for the promised Savior to crush the head of the serpent and break the power of death. God's grace had reached out to man, but justice had to be met. Man had sinned -- Adam and all descendants -- and, as stated in the Law, sin must be covered for by the blood of a lamb free from blemishes. The daily sacrifice of lambs covered for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 9:22 - "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." The sacrifice of lambs, however, could not really take sin away -- it was a symbol of the things to come. At the proper time, God did the only thing possible to restore man to the relationship He created man for: sending his Son to be the ultimate sacrificial Lamb, to take all the sin that had ever been committed and ever would be committed on Himself, and to be sacrificed for the sin of many. Thus, for a time, death would even seem to have its hold on God. But when Christ arose, He claimed victory over death. Death had been swallowed up in victory. The plan for redemption had been fulfilled. Sin had been atoned for and justice had been met, reconciling God and man. Satan was overpowered and bound. (see Luke 11:21,22; Revelation 20) Throughout the history of man, God has not had different plans for redemption nor has He changed to deal with man in different ways. His plan never changed nor failed. Every promise made was fulfilled at the appropriate time, and every component of His plan played an important role in the redemption of man. Although the specific nature of man's relationship with God has undergone change throughout the course of history, it is important to note that the changes were stages in the progression of one plan, and not the beginning and end of many different

plans. The Mosaic Covenant never failed -- instead, it was made clear that the Law and the sacrificial system were the precursors to something greater, a shadow of the good things to come. The Law demonstrated the need for God's gift -- his grace (Greek: charisma) -- to man, and the need for an ultimate sacrifice to forgive and wipe away sin. The earthly duties of the priests, one of the core components of the Law, were fulfilled in Christ. This is summed up in Hebrews 9:7, 11-14 - "But the high priest alone enters the second room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. Now the Messiah has appeared, high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), He entered the holy of holies once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of the Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God?" God's promise to Abraham that all nations of the world would be blessed through him (Genesis 18:18 - Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him.) was fulfilled in the New Testament when the Gentiles were grafted in to Israel. Through Abraham, and Abraham's descendants, salvation was made available to the whole world -- all elect from every nation. (Gal. 3:29) God also promised Abraham's descendants land -- which was given to the nation of Israel after they were brought out of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 1:8 - "See, I have set the land before you. Enter and take possession of the land the LORD swore to give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants after them.") Yet this promise of land was only a small part of God's promise to Abraham and his Seed! The ultimate promise was of the whole world -- and ultimately, the new heavens and the new earth! According to Galatians 3:29, those who are Christ's are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. (The discussion of physical Israel and spiritual Israel will be continued in "Part 3".) God's covenant with Abraham never failed or was ended; instead, through Abraham all believers have been blessed. This is a very important point that is missed by the Dispensational teachers: the Church is not a parenthesis in God's plan, inserted because His plan for Israel failed, but rather, the Church is and always was part of God's plan, promised in His covenant with Abraham! God also promised David that from his descendants would come one who would rule forever -- Jesus. (Isaiah 9:7 - "The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will accomplish this.") Because of Solomon's sin, the earthly kingdom of David came to a close -- but the heavenly kingdom, the Throne of David, will continue for eternity. (1 Kings 11:13 - "Yet, I will not tear the entire kingdom away from him. I will give one tribe to your son because of my servant David and because of Jerusalem that I chose.") The Throne of David is Throne of God. (1 Chr. 29:23). Also see: (Acts 2:29-36 -- "Brothers, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing this in advance, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah: "He was not left in Hades, and His flesh did not experience decay." God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this. Therefore, since He has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, He has

poured out what you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!") Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, the Everlasting King! Some closing observations...Did the New Covenant replace the Old Covenant? Yes. (Jer. 31:31, Heb. 8:13)The same principles are involved in both covenants... but under the New Covenant the laws are written on the heart rather than on stone. (2 Cor. 3:2-3)God did not find fault with the old law, because it was perfect (Psalm 19:7).The New Covenant is between God and "Spiritual Israel" while the Old Covenant was [primarily] between God and "Physical Israel". Again, the similarities and distinctions will be discussed further in "Part 3".

Physical Israel and Spiritual Israel

In this section, "Physical Israel vs. Spiritual Israel", I will be looking at various references to Israel in the Old and New Testaments in order to determine whether it can still be said that there is a modern-day distinction between Israel and the Church. This topic is one of the major issues of division between Dispensationalists and others -- a disagreement on if the Church is one body or if there remains a distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

The concept of a "clear distinction between God's program for Israel and God's program for the Church" is considered by most dispensationalists to be the primary principle of the theological viewpoint. But is it Scripturally sound?

In Part 1 and Part 2 I pointed out that most Dispensationalists believe that the Church is a parenthesis in God's plan, and at some point in the future the Church will be taken out and the temple/sacrificial system of the Old Testament will be restored to supremacy. Having already established that God's plan cannot and will not fail (and thus, the Church must not be a "parenthesis" because God's ultimate plan for Israel failed or was set aside), I am going to move on to take a look at some of the different instances in Scripture where Israel is referred to, in order to point out the relationship between "Physical Israel" and "Spiritual Israel".

However, first I am going to take some time to point out a false doctrine that has achieved some degree of prominence. This is known as British Israelism (Anglo-Israelism), so called because it originated with the view that the English and Anglo-Saxon people, as a race, had become "God's Chosen People". The term "British Israelism" is often loosely used to apply to any race, country, or organization that believes that it is an elect people and has inherited a special blessing from God. British Israelism has become a subtle force in quite a few modern movements, most of which result in promoting undying nationalism in the name of religion. Many modern historians believe that British Israelism played a major role in the "Manifest Destiny" movement in the United States in the 19th century.

Somewhat related to British Israelism are certain branches of Christian Reconstructionism. These forms of Christian Reconstructionist doctrine teach that one nation (often considered to be the United States) has become God's chosen people and must return to God in order to receive His blessings and become the foundation for God's earthly kingdom. (Note: This view is not held by all Christian Reconstructionists, but rather, as I said, certain branches of Christian Reconstructionists.)

My point in bringing up the above views is to show that neither extreme (Dispensationalism or Reconstructionism) can be adequately reckoned with the truth of Scripture. But what does Scripture teach about Israel and the Church?

The first clue can be seen in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 12:3

"I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 18:8

"Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him."

Genesis 22:18

"And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed My command."

These three verses teach that through Abraham and his descendants, national/physical Israel, all nations of the earth will be blessed.

In what way would all nations of the earth be blessed? Look ahead to Galatians chapter 3:6-9 -- "Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness, so understand that those who have faith are Abraham's sons. Now the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and foretold the good news to Abraham, saying, All the nations will be blessed in you. So those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith."

From this passage, it becomes clear that salvation -- the blessing of God -- was promised to all people all the way back in the book of Genesis (certainly nullifying the teaching that salvation to the Gentiles was brought about as a change of plans because the first plan had failed). But also notice where the blessing to the Gentiles came from -- through Abraham. Paul expounds on this further:

(Galatians 3:14-18) "The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brothers, I'm using a human illustration. No one sets aside even a human covenant that has been ratified, or makes additions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say "and to seeds," as though referring to many, but and to your seed,

referring to one, who is Christ. And I say this: the law, which came 430 years later, does not revoke a covenant that was previously ratified by God, so as to cancel the promise."

(Gal. 3:27-29) "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise."

Through Abraham's Seed, Christ, the promise was extended to all. Through Christ, those who are "true Israel" become partakers in the promise. This is further expounded in Paul's letter to the Church in Rome (the book of Romans).

Romans 9:4-13: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of this call— she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

The Israelites -- physical Israel -- possesses "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises." Yet Paul makes it clear that not all of "physical Israel" are "Israel". In other words, Paul is saying that "Israel", which we can call "Spiritual Israel", is a separate entity from "physical Israel".

Reading on, later in Romans 9:22-33: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah." What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is

written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

In order to see how physical Israel and spiritual Israel fit together in God's plan, we need not look further than Romans 11.

Starting at the beginning: (Rom. 11:1-12) "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written,

"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

And David says,

"Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."

So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!"

It was always God's plan that the Gentiles be a part of His people. It was always God's plan that during the First Century A.D. the Gospel went out in full force to the Gentile nations for the first time in history -- the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham. But God did not permanently cut off physical Israel. Read on -- (Rom. 11:13-24).

"Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted,

contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree."

This passage further amplifies the teaching of Israel and the Church, or physical Israel and spiritual Israel. The Church does not become "spiritual Israel" by replacing Israel, but rather by joining Israel, by being "grafted in". By being grafted in, the Church inherited the blessings and the promises made to Israel -- but by joining Israel, not by replacing Israel. The Gentile church may rejoice in being counted as Israel, but must not become arrogant toward physical Israel, because it is through physical Israel that the promise and blessing came. Reading on in Romans 11...

Romans 11:25-28 -- "Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

I do not claim to have the answer for the meaning of the "fullness of the Gentiles" or "all Israel will be saved". There are many different interpretations of this passage. I do not see this as referring to a time when the Gentiles are "cut off" and the sacrificial system is reinstated, however. For one possible explanation, I will defer to Matthew Henry, the 18th-century commentator:

{{1. How this conversion of the Jews is here described. (1.) It is said to be their fulness (v. 12), that is, the addition of them to the church, the filling up again of that place which became vacant by their rejection. This would be the enriching of the world (that is, the church in the world) with a great deal of light and strength and beauty. (2.) It is called the receiving of them. The conversion of a soul is the receiving of that soul, so the conversion of a nation. They shall be received into favour, into the church, into the love of Christ, whose arms are stretched out for the receiving of all those that will come to him. And this will be as life from the dead—so strange and surprising, and yet withal so welcome and acceptable. The conversion of the Jews will bring great joy to the church. See Luke xv. 32, He was dead, and is alive; and therefore it was meet we should make merry and be glad. (3.) It is called the grafting of them in again (v. 23), into the church, from which they had been broken off. That which is grafted in receives sap and virtue from the root; so does a soul that is truly grafted into the church receive life, and strength, and grace from Christ the quickening root. They shall be grafted into their own olive-tree (v. 24); that is, into the church of which they had formerly been the most eminent and conspicuous members, to retrieve those privileges of visible church-membership which they had so long enjoyed, but have now sinned away and forfeited by their unbelief. (4.) It is called the saving of all Israel, v. 26. True conversion may well be called salvation; it is salvation begun. See Acts ii. 47. The adding of them to the church is the saving of them: tous sozomenous, in the present tense, are saved. When conversion-work goes on, salvation-work goes on.}}

It is possible that, at the Second Coming, physical Israel will recognize her victorious Messiah and believe. Regardless of when or how this takes place, it is important to note that physical

Israel and spiritual Israel somehow co-exist, but with one plan of salvation. The Church has joined Israel, becoming "spiritual Israel", but has not replaced Israel.

Continuing in Romans 11...

(Romans 11:28-32) "As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all."

The important thing to see through all this -- God's plan for His people, both Jew and Gentile - - is that God's way is supreme and perfect. We may not understand all the details of the relationship between physical Israel and spiritual Israel; we must trust in God and know that His way is right. All who are "elect" are the chosen people of God -- because 'elect' = 'chosen'. (Also see: Romans 8:28-30 -- "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.")

Also in Romans 8 we see how the "elect" have been adopted as children of God. Now the "elect" -- God's chosen people, whether Jew or Gentile -- are called "sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). We have been adopted as children of God. When one adopts a child, that child should not be considered lesser than the natural-born children. All children are equal, whether natural-born or adopted. And in just the same way, the physical seed of Abraham and the spiritual seed of Abraham are equal; neither should claim supremacy over the other, because both are special in God's eyes.

Paul's conclusion to Romans 11 will serve as my conclusion.

(Romans 11:33-36) "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

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Dispensational Eschatology

In Parts 1-3 I examined various aspects of popular dispensational theology and have attempted to point out why these certain aspects are contrary to the overall teaching of Scripture. In this final section, I will review the main points of the previous sections and attempt to tie everything together with a look at teaching on fulfilled and future prophecy. I do not claim to have any answers on what is to occur in the future, and in places where the

meaning seems to be unclear, I will present multiple sides to the issue in order to allow the readers to draw their own conclusions. This topic, prophecy and eschatology, has been the center of debate for many centuries. It will continue to be a much-debated issue until, after everything is completed, we see from the New Heaven and New Earth how everything fit together in God's master plan.

In Part 1, I introduced the topic of traditional dispensational teaching, as taught by teachers such as Darby, Scofield, and Ryrie. Traditional dispensational teaching emphasizes a solid line of distinction between Israel and the new covenant Gentile church. As stated in Part 1, the basic tenets of dispensationalism are as follows: (1) The Jews are to be saved by repentance; they are to be left here on earth as God's earthly people. (2) The Gentiles are to be saved by faith; they will be taken to heaven in the Rapture. (3) The church is a parenthesis in God's plan and will end in apostasy. (4) The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are sharply differentiated, the first being the Davidic kingdom and the latter being God's universal, world-wide kingdom. (5) God deals with men according to seven dispensations. The conclusion I drew from looking at dispensational teaching is that because it results in the conclusion that God's plan for mankind failed or was put on hold, and that the Jews and Gentiles remain two separate entities in God's eyes (despite New Testament evidence to the contrary), it is not an accurate theological platform. Traditional dispensationalism also teaches that the Church will end in apostasy and provides definitions for multiple Kingdoms (Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven, Kingdom of David) while to me it seems pretty clear that all three refer to the same thing.

Some other instances where dispensationalism seems to take excessive liberty with Scripture is the doctrine of two second comings (to be discussed shortly), the breakdown of the event of Christ's judgment of the world into multiple events (i.e. an awards ceremony and a judgment of the wicked), the need for gaps and parenthesis in order to justify a position, the very questionable use of the term "dispensation" (which actually refers to stewardship), and man-made divisions arbitrarily placed in Scripture.

Part 2 traced the plan for salvation and redemption of man back to the Fall, looking at promises God made with His people during the course of Old Testament history. It seems clear to me that God has one plan for the redemption and salvation of mankind, and from the Fall to the Resurrection, the plan was brought to completion through God's sovereignty and foreknowledge. Many of the components of the Old Testament system, such as temple sacrifices, were realized in Christ, the Passover Lamb and once-for-all Sacrifice. Part 2 also examined prophecy made to David about his everlasting throne, showing how the everlasting Davidic throne is fulfilled in Christ. Although the earthly kingdom of David came to a close, the heavenly kingdom, the Throne of David, will continue for eternity.

Part 3 discussed the Jews and Gentiles in greater detail, analyzing "Spiritual Israel" (the Church, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles), and "Physical Israel" (the physical descendants of Abraham). Part 3 also dealt with extreme responses to this teaching, such as replacement theology. The general theme of Part 3 is that the Church has inherited the promises made to Abraham's seed; not by replacing Israel or becoming God's "new" Chosen People, but rather, by being grafted in to Israel.

A look at Dispensational Premillennialism

Now it is time to tie everything together. The evidence has been weighed and evaluated, and my conclusion is that the system of traditional dispensational theology has too many fallacies to stand as a viable theological system. But without the foundation of dispensationalism, most popular views on prophecy are then shaken too. In this final component of this essay on dispensational teaching, I will look at prophecies made in the Biblical books of Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Matthew, Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Revelation, among others. I intend to refrain from adamantly promoting any one position, because I do not believe that any one position can be firmly held to. There are, however, some positions that do not stand up to strong examination. One of these is traditional dispensational premillennialism.

Why do I believe that dispensational premillennialism cannot stand against strong examination?

Dispensational premillennialism is rooted in the traditional dispensational teaching of the sharp distinction between Jews and Gentiles. All of the primary tenets of dispensational premillennialism rely on this distinction to be made. If this sharp distinction is proven to be false (as I believe is the case, as I discussed in Part II and Part III), all of the timelines and everything associated with dispensational premillennialism crumbles.

Dispensational premillennialism also requires that certain unwritten assumptions be placed on Scripture. These assumptions include, but are not limited to: placing an indefinite gap between the 69th and 70th week in Daniel 7, declaring that the 1,000 year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20 is both literal and on the current physical earth, placing the date of writing of the Book of Revelation as being after the Fall of Jerusalem, and teaching that the Second Coming actually occurs in two stages separated by a span of seven years. Now there is nothing wrong with these assumptions except that they are just that: assumptions. It is dangerous to take unwritten assumptions and believe them as fact, and this seems to be what is happening in many aspects of theology in the modern era.

Let's take a closer look at dispensational premillennialism.

Dispensational premillennialism (actually, dispensationalism, since dispensationalism is inherently premillennial) teaches that the current era, known as the Church Age, is a parenthesis in God's dealings with Israel. As I pointed out in Parts I-III, traditional dispensationalists believe that Israel (and Israel only) is God's chosen people, but because of Israel's rejection of Christ salvation was extended to the Gentiles (although not part of God's original plan). They believe that the Church age will end suddenly; the Church will be taken to Heaven and God's wrath will be poured out on the earth. Israel restored to prominence; the temple will be rebuilt and the daily sacrifice will resume (until stopped by Antichrist), and after Armageddon there will be a literal 1,000-year earthly reign of Christ in which he fulfills the prophecies of sitting on the Throne of David. There are numerous problems with this view, which will be discussed in greater detail over the next few pages.

The Temple and Sacrifices

The first, and most noticeable, problem with the dispensational eschatological view is that there are not two separate peoples of God. The Gentile Church has been grafted in to Israel, sharing in the promises and blessings promised to Israel. Christ's death was the ultimate sacrifice, ending the need for daily sacrifices in the temple. I have come to the conclusion that

renewed sacrifices in a rebuilt temple would be an ultimate outward demonstration of ultimate rejection of Christ's death and resurrection. The Book of Hebrews makes it clear that Christ's death put an end to sacrifices. Yet the rebuilt temple and reinstated sacrificial system is central to dispensational eschatology. Something is clearly wrong with this picture.

Look at Hebrews 9:11-14 -- "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (NASB)

This passage is but one of many that, in my opinion, make it perfectly clear that Christ was the fulfillment of the sacrificial system -- which was but an imperfect type, used to demonstrate the need for an ultimate, once-for-all sacrifice. First, Christ entered through the "greater and more perfect tabernacle". The temple is essentially a tabernacle; in the Old Testament, the tabernacle and (later) the temple were the dwelling place of God. This "greater and more perfect tabernacle" is one not made with hands (not a physical, man-made tabernacle/temple). Second, He entered the holy place once for all. Read that again. Once for all. Is all not all? Does it mean "once for all, but only until the Rapture, since after that, sacrifices are the proper system"? Or does it mean a literal "once for all"? The choice seems clear.

Put on your imagination and imagine that the Rapture has taken place, the believing Church is gone, the temple is rebuilt, and the Jews are sacrificing unblemished lambs and heifers in the temple (as Antichrist has not put a stop to it yet). You're reading the Bible, seeking the truth, and you come across this and other passages in Hebrews that describe how Jesus' death put an end to the need for sacrifices. Yet the daily sacrifice has been reinstated in Jerusalem. You realize that there must be portions of the New Testament that lost their full meaning when the Rapture took place. But how do you know which parts of the Bible are still applicable, then? It makes it next to impossible to know what really can be believed.

This isn't going to work, is it? Yet statistics show that over 70% of modern American evangelical and fundamental Christians firmly believe that this is what will happen in the future. And even worse, many well-meaning Christians are sending money to Israel to finance the construction of this new Temple. First, since Christ's sacrifice was the ultimate once-for-all sacrifice, a rebuilt temple and reinstated sacrificial system would be the utmost outward sign of the rejection of Christ's work! And many Christians are committing their financial support to this project! This seems to me to be a great deception; in thinking that they are helping to bring about Christ's return, people are actually contributing to what would be an ultimate sign of rejection. Second, many dispensationalists have strong words against postmillennialists, who they believe are trying to bring about God's return by Christianizing nations -- thus manipulating God. Since most traditional dispensationalists believe that a rebuilt temple is necessary for the return of Christ, is not providing the resources necessary to begin such a process similar manipulation?

Before I continue examining the temple (as there are many Scriptures that describe a new temple), there are a couple issues regarding the study of Scripture that need to be addressed. First, I believe that we should read Scripture as literature and understand it in context of the time in which it was written. Thus determining how the original audience would have viewed it is paramount. Second, it is a common hermeneutical practice to interpret the unclear by the clear. A passage that is clearly understood is the reference point to study less clear passages by. The Bible will not contradict itself. If it seems there is contradiction, further study is needed. Third, most visions and dreams are highly figurative or symbolic. It is important to understand visions and dreams in line with established sound doctrine, rather than formulating a doctrine based on the visions and then having to explain other doctrine to make it fit with the vision or dream.

With this in mind, I will point out some Scriptures that describe a rebuilt temple. The most detailed account of the new Temple is in the book of Ezekiel, in chapters 40-48. These chapters provide detailed figures on a rebuilt Temple, God's glory returning to the Temple, God dwelling on earth with men in the Temple, a restored Promised Land, and the River of Life flowing from the Temple. These passages are highly literal and detailed, giving the impression that this is, in fact, a rebuilt Temple.

Quoting a small section of this passage: "As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan. If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them. This is the law of the house: its entire area on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house. And these are the measurements of the altar by cubits (the cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth): the base shall be a cubit and the width a cubit, and its border on its edge round about one span; and this shall be the height of the base of the altar. From the base on the ground to the lower ledge shall be two cubits and the width one cubit; and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge shall be four cubits and the width one cubit. The altar hearth shall be four cubits; and from the altar hearth shall extend upwards four horns. Now the altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve wide, square in its four sides. The ledge shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen wide in its four sides, the border around it shall be half a cubit and its base shall be a cubit round about; and its steps shall face the east." And He said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'These are the statutes for the altar on the day it is built, to offer burnt offerings on it and to sprinkle blood on it. You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,' declares the Lord GOD, 'a young bull for a sin offering. 'You shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it. 'You shall also take the bull for the sin offering, and it shall be burned in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary. 'On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering, and they shall cleanse the altar as they cleansed it with the bull. 'When you have finished cleansing it, you shall present a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. 'You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD. 'For seven days you shall prepare daily a goat for a sin offering; also a young bull and a ram from the flock,

without blemish, shall be prepared. 'For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. 'When they have completed the days, it shall be that on the eighth day and onward, the priests shall offer your burnt offerings on the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you,' declares the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 43:10-26)

Some try to reconcile this passage by stating that the prophecy of a rebuilt temple occurred with the rebuilding of the temple under Herod. However, there are a number of reasons why this view is inadequate; the most noticeable being that temple was destroyed. A literal reading of this section of the Book of Ezekiel results in the interpretation that there will be a permanently restored temple and that the Jews will return to sacrificing unblemished animals to God. But that would stand contrary to New Testament teaching, would it not? This is a very difficult passage to interpret. The only interpretation that seems to satisfy the teaching of the New Testament is to view this temple figuratively.

Let's see if a figurative view of the rebuilt temple can stand.

1. What purpose did the temple, and the tabernacle before it, serve?

The temple was the place where God dwelled with His people. God's people worshiped Him in the temple. The temple was, essentially, God's dwelling place on earth. What is God's dwelling place on earth under the New Covenant?

Let's take a look at a few passages from the New Testament, seeking insight on this particular issue:

The first passage is Acts 7:44-50, in Stephen's sermon prior to his stoning.

"Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the desert, just as He who spoke to Moses commanded him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. Our forefathers in turn received it and with Joshua brought it in when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers, until the days of David. He found favor in God's sight and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands, as the prophet says: "Heaven is My throne, and earth My footstool. What sort of house will you build for Me? says the Lord, or what is My resting place? Did not My hand make all these things?"

1 Cor. 6:19 -- "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (NASB)

2 Cor. 6:16 -- "For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (NASB)

Ephesians 3:16-19 -- "I pray that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, and that the Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and width, height and depth, and to know the Messiah's love that surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

1 Peter 2:4-5 -- "And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a

spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (NASB)

According to these and other passages in the New Testament, God's dwelling place among men is in the body (the heart) of those who believe in Him and have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

2. What were the duties of the priests in the temple?

The priests offered sacrifices in the temple and served as the intercessor between God and man. Christ, living in us, is our High Priest and Intercessor.

Hebrews 5:1-10 -- "For every high priest taken from men is appointed in service to God for the people, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this, he must make a sin offering for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honor on himself; instead, a person is called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, the Messiah did not exalt Himself to become a high priest, but the One who said to Him, You are My Son; today I have become Your Father, also said in another passage, You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. During His earthly life, a He offered prayers and appeals, with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. Though a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. After He was perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, and He was declared by God a high priest "in the order of Melchizedek."

Hebrews 7:23-28 -- "Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. But because He remains forever, He holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is always able to save those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them. For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all when He offered Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever."

Hebrews 10:19-22 -- "Therefore, brothers, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He has inaugurated for us, through the curtain (that is, His flesh); and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water."

1 Timothy 2:5-6 -- "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, a man, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself—a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time."

There is enough information available and enough room for debate on both sides of the issue that volumes of hundreds of pages could be written about this topic. The conclusion I draw from this is that the rebuilt temple discussed in the Old Testament is a figurative type for the

Church under the New Covenant, based on the above NT verses. This is my opinion on the subject, and it is far from an authoritative answer, but I believe that this interpretation on the temple prophecies in the Old Testament is best supported by the New Testament teaching. There is definitely room for debate on this issue and I am not trying to settle any debate but rather introduce another viewpoint.

Daniel's Vision of 70 Weeks

Daniel 9:20-27 -- "While I was speaking, praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my petition before Yahweh my God concerning the holy mountain of my God—while I was praying, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the first vision, came to me in my extreme weariness, about the time of the evening offering. He gave me this explanation: 'Daniel, I've come now to give you understanding. At the beginning of your petitions an answer went out, and I have come to give it, for you are treasured by God. So consider the message and understand the vision:

Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city— to bring the rebellion to an end, to put a stop to sin, to wipe away injustice, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.

Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince will be seven weeks and 62 weeks. It will be rebuilt with a plaza and a moat, but in difficult times. After those 62 weeks the Messiah will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the coming prince will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come with a flood, and until the end there will be war; desolations are decreed. He will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. And the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator."

There are many competing views on this passage, with most of the differences involving the nature of the final week and whether the 70 weeks are continuous or if there is a gap between weeks 69 and 70. The first 69 weeks seem obvious: there would be 69 weeks (69x7 years, or 483 years) from the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah. Historically, this fits in the timeline, as it was about 483 years between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (under Artaxerxes -- see Nehemiah 2) to when Jesus began His public ministry at the approximate age of 30. It is generally interpreted that "After those 62 weeks the Messiah will be cut off and will have nothing" refers to the Crucifixion, based on a line present in certain translations. In fact, much of the debate over this passage comes from a wide variation in translations. The King James Version, for example, adds the clause "but not for himself" in verse 26. (And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself.) It is uncertain precisely what is meant by saying the Messiah will have nothing. Commentators suggest that it refers to His lack of earthly things (companionship, possessions, favor) at the time of His crucifixion. This view is certainly possible; in fact, it is the most likely interpretation, but it remains far from proven.

"The people and the coming prince" is believed by many to be the Roman armies under Nero Caesar, and "the city and the sanctuary" is believed to be Jerusalem and the Temple. Some, however, believe that there is a huge, unwritten gap of over 2,000 years placed at this point,

with the city and sanctuary being described here as being not the temple destroyed in A.D. 70, but rather, another temple that has yet to be built. While still a possible interpretation, it seems highly unlikely that there would be a long, indefinite period of time placed between the 69th and 70th weeks. This is never inferred in the text but rather added by modern commentators who need the gap to be there in order to justify their views. Because the text never indicates the presence of a gap, I believe it is highly dangerous to infer a gap between the 69th and 70th weeks, as this is akin to adding to Scripture. If this is the case, this passage is both a Messianic prophecy and a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. This view also seems to be supported by Matthew 24:15, which is in Jesus' discussion on the destruction of the temple. ("So when you see the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place" (let the reader understand), "then those in Judea must flee to the mountains!")

Those who believe in the "gap theory" in this prophecy interpret the 70th week as being the prophesied Great Tribulation. In fact, without the 70th week being a future event, there is no Biblical support for the Great Tribulation being a 7-year period. Dispensationalists say that the difficulty with viewing verse 27 as having been fulfilled by Caesar Nero and General Titus is that there is no proof that an abomination of desolation occurred. This is true, but it is known that the temple sacrifices ended when the temple was destroyed, and a Gentile entering the temple and destroying it would certainly be considered an abomination of desolation. However, there is also a problem with believing that the 70th week occurred around A.D. 70 -- this still seems to require a small gap of about 40 years between the 69th and 70th weeks. 40 years or over 2,000 years really do not make much of a difference, because either way there is still a gap. The final alternative is to state that the 70th week does immediately follow the 69th week (a logical conclusion), but then there is the problem of the identity of "he" in verse 27. "He" seems quite obviously to be an evil person, not Christ, based on the "abomination of desolation". Some have attempted to prove that "he" does refer to Christ, stating that the end of sacrifices occurred at the death of Christ (which has merit, as at that point the need for sacrifices ended) and that the abomination occurred when the veil in the temple was torn. Those who hold to this view state that the 70th Week began at the beginning of Christ's public ministry (as soon as the 69th Week ended); the death and resurrection of Christ occurred at the mid-point of the "week", and the "week" ended with the stoning of Stephen. The problem with this view is that the phrase "and the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator" strongly indicates that the desolator is an evil person, which would certainly not be Christ.

There is no easy answer to the meaning of this prophecy. Unlike dispensationalists, I am not going to be adamant on saying that this passage definitely refers to the Great Tribulation. My personal view is that the prophecy was most likely fulfilled in the 1st Century A.D., but the evidence is not strong enough to settle the argument.

The Destruction of Jerusalem... or the Great Tribulation?

Matthew 24 contains Jesus' teaching on a time of great tribulation and destruction.

Dispensational teachers typically state that this event will occur prior to the final judgment, but in Matthew 24:34 Jesus clearly says "I assure you: This generation will certainly not pass

away until all these things take place." This indicates that what occurred in Matthew 24 occurred within the lifespan of the generation alive in approximately A.D. 30.

The events of Matthew 24 are generally believed (except by traditional dispensationalists) to be a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Many books and websites are devoted to this topic. A discussion on this topic is far beyond the scope of this work, but there are some things worth noting. First, the two extreme views on this topic tend to be dangerous and heretical. On one side you have the full preterist view. This view states that everything predicted in Matthew 24 (actually, all New Testament prophecy) has already taken place. On the other side you have the full futurist view. As applied to Matthew 24, the full futurist (traditional dispensational) view states that none of it is fulfilled yet and that this passage only applies to a future Great Tribulation and nothing else.

Most likely, a now/not-view view is best. It is quite possible that Matthew 24 was first fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, but it will be fulfilled a second time on a global scale immediately prior to the Second Coming. Most theologians, including John Calvin and Matthew Henry, have supported the view that the prophecy was partially fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem, but it will not be completely fulfilled until the Second Coming. I feel more comfortable with this view than with either of the "extremes". However, the view does not initially seem to answer all questions.

For example, after verses 29-31 (which describe signs in the heavens and a picture of judgment), verse 34 states "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place." Either this judgment (29-31) took place at the destruction of Jerusalem and is only a representation of the greater judgment that is still to come, or else a component of this passage is exclusively futurist. Some try to fix the problem by saying that "generation" (Greek: *genea* - vs. 34) does not mean generation but rather "race". The problems with this are both countless and obvious. The Greek word "*genea*" refers to a generation, not a tribe, nation, or race. To apply "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place" to a span of 2,000 years is a gross distortion of a statement that Jesus made clear.

Two Judgment Seats?

Popular traditional dispensational teaching has taken the teaching of the judgment seat of Christ and turned it into two separate events occurring for two separate groups of people. One judgment, known as the Bema Seat, is described as an awards ceremony where believers receive crowns for works done during their lives on earth. The other judgment, known as the Great White Throne Judgment, is where the wicked are sentenced to the Lake of Fire. The problem with this view, as with much of the rest of traditional dispensational interpretation, is that it imposes unnecessary divisions on Scripture.

The Greek Word "*bema*", simply means "seat". It typically refers to a raised seating area, such as a throne in a palace or the judge's seat in a courtroom. A "*bema*" seat is simply a seat that is raised up from its surroundings. So, essentially, the Great White Throne... is a "*bema*" seat.

The false distinction between the two judgments is the product of a works-based gospel entering Christian doctrine. Many traditional dispensationalists, and those influenced by traditional dispensationalist teaching, believe that there will be a separate judgment for believers where rewards will be handed out. (This seems to come from a misapplication of 1

Cor. 3:12-15.) Unfortunately, this separate awards ceremony is not a Biblical concept, and the use of the Greek word "bema" for this purpose is simply a misapplication -- the word is used to represent something that it does not mean.

Here are some instances where the Greek word "bema" is used in the New Testament. Decide for yourself if these refer to an awards ceremony or to a trial.

John 19:13 -- "When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside. He sat down on the judge's bench in a place called the Stone Pavement (but in Hebrew Gabbatha)."

Acts 25:6 -- "When he (Festus) had spent not more than eight or 10 days among them, he went down to Caesarea. The next day, seated at the judge's bench, he commanded Paul to be brought in."

Rom. 14:10 -- "But you, why do you criticize your brother? Or you, why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."

2 Cor. 5:10 -- "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or bad."

None of these judgments are an awards ceremony. A very simple examination of the Greek text proves false the doctrine of the "bema seat" being an awards ceremony. Furthermore, the doctrine that Christians can do certain works to receive an additional reward is a form of legalism. We are saved by grace -- not by works. We are drawn to God by His grace -- not by our own will (works). We are sanctified by God's truth (John 17:17) -- not by our own actions. We can do nothing in and of ourselves to please God. To think that we have the capability to please God is pride. This is the kind of subtle deception that is the most damaging to Christians. We can only please God by faith in him and obedience by grace. We are called to good works -- for faith without works is dead -- but these good works are not done by ourselves but rather by Christ working through us.

Ephesians 2:8-10 -- "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them."

Hebrews 13:20-21 -- "Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus—the great Shepherd of the sheep—with the blood of the everlasting covenant, equip you with all that is good to do His will, working in us what is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ."

If we look at the situation with humility we see that we cannot take credit for our good works. The credit belongs to Christ. In our sinful nature we would not be capable of doing anything to please God. It simply does not fit with the teaching of the Bible to make the claim that there are additional personal rewards for good -- or loss of rewards for imperfection (aside the judgment for sin). We can only appear before Christ as perfect and blameless because of Christ's redemptive work completed on the Cross.

With this in mind, it should be pointed out that there are passages in the Bible that do deal with laying up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19, for example). However, those who emphasize these verses as a command to pursue meritorious rewards are missing the point - these verses, when read in context, apply to laying up treasure in heaven as opposed to treasure on the earth. If this treasure is evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, it is for Christ's glory, not ours.

It is also true that the New Testament epistles refer to certain crowns. Here are five crowns mentioned in the New Testament:

1 Cor. 9:25 -- "Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one."

James 1:12 -- "Blessed is a man who endures trials, because when he passes the test he will receive the crown of life that He has promised to those who love Him."

1 Thess. 2:19 -- "For who is our hope, or joy, or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you?"

2 Tim. 4:8 -- "In the future, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing."

1 Pet. 5:4 -- "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Rev. 2:10 -- "Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Traditional dispensational theology takes these six verses and charts up a system of who receives which crown and why it is awarded. This seems to be reading a lot of extra material into these verses. From these verses, it is unclear whether the crowns are specific rewards for certain things done in life, or if the crowns are representative of the reward of heaven. It is also unclear if only some receive crowns, or if the crowns are awarded to all believers. It is understandable how this could be interpreted as it typically is interpreted in popular dispensational theology, although one should evaluate it in light of the rest of Scripture before coming to a conclusion.

Finally, one more very important thing to remember is that there is one final judgment -- not two or three. All men, both the saved and the unsaved, will appear at this judgment (Rom. 14:10 & 2 Cor. 5:10) This judgment will take place on the Day of the Lord, which is the time of His second coming. Those found righteous -- those who were washed clean in the death and resurrection of Jesus -- will enter into eternal fellowship with Christ. Those who are wicked -- those not in the Lamb's Book of Life -- will be cast into eternal separation.

The day of judgment is described in Revelation 20:11-15 -- "Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."

This is the same event that is described in Matthew 25:31-46 -- "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or without clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit You?'

"And the King will answer them, 'I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you didn't take Me in; I was naked and you didn't clothe Me, sick and in prison and you didn't take care of Me.'

"Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help You?'

"Then He will answer them, 'I assure you: Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me either.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Those found in the Lamb's Book of Life enter eternal fellowship... those not found in the Lamb's Book of Life enter eternal punishment. This occurs in one event -- the Day of the Lord, also known as the Judgment Day of Christ, the Bema Seat Judgment, and the Great White Throne Judgment.

Two or More 'Second Comings'?

If you were to survey many American Christians (and unbelievers who are familiar with certain elements of Christian teaching) on their views of the "end times", you would find that the majority believes that there will be a sudden rapture of the believing Church, leaving behind the unsaved for seven years of tribulation, where some receive a second chance, believe, and (if they survive) begin counting down the time until the second phase of the Second Coming. Most people do not know any other viewpoint. Yet prior to 1830 (coincidentally, the approximate time of the rise of dispensational theology) this view was largely unheard-of, and was discarded as heresy when it did surface. The term "rapture" was not used in a theological sense prior to this time. Is the pre-trib rapture, then, supported by Scripture? This issue is perhaps the most often-debated topic in Scripture in recent years.

(Personal note) A couple of years ago, when I was still firmly entrenched in dispensational theology, I set out to try to prove the pre-trib rapture is found in Scripture. I foolishly hoped to find something that would prove other views (that I regarded as heretical) wrong. As it turned out, I couldn't prove the pre-trib rapture at all. At first I had to wonder if these might just be deep spiritual truths that only great scholars could uncover -- the same went for the topics of the temple and bema seat. Eventually, I realized that Scripture has to be the ultimate authority

-- not a preconceived idea that is fallible. I looked at the same passages again, this time trying to see what the Scriptures say rather than trying to prove an idea created by fallen man. The results were not at all what I originally expected to find.

First, we have the dilemma of two Second Comings, or else a Second Coming that is split into two phases. Most people believe that the Second Coming begins with this event:

1 Thess. 4:14-17 -- "Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For we say this to you by a revelation from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord."

Popular modern theology then states that there will be a 7-year period of wrath upon the earth; after it is completed, then there is the second part of the Second Coming. However, when taking this literally, the second part would really have to be viewed as a third coming. If Christ comes to the clouds, takes the Church with Him, returns to Heaven, and then comes to the earth again, would not that next coming be a Third Coming? According to Scripture, Christ's judgment occurs at the time of the Second Coming. Yet dispensational theology first splits the judgment into multiple events and then places one of the judgments after the second part of the Second Coming. The New Testament always refers to the Second Coming as one event. I am not necessarily saying that the Second Coming cannot be in two phases, but Scripture certainly indicates that the Second Coming is one single event.

Here are some verses dealing with the Second Coming. Note that these verses never indicate that the Second Coming occurs in multiple installments.

1 Cor. 15:51-52 -- "We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed."

One observation is that this event occurs at the last trumpet. In other words, this verse, which is often used as evidence for a pre-trib rapture, actually seems to indicate a post-trib rapture.

Hebrews 9:27-28 -- "And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—so also the Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him."

1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:2 -- "For we say this to you by a revelation from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. About the times and the seasons: brothers, you do not need anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." This passage describes both the Second Coming and Day of the Lord, but also seems to unify them into one event. This passage is used as a foundational passage for the pre-trib

view, but in reality, it does not mention anything in relation to the Tribulation. There is no reason why it would be a problem if, after being caught up to meet the LORD in the air, the believers then returned to the earth with Christ for the judgment and defeat of Satan. In addition, the air is a logical meeting place for all the believers from across the whole world. While this is certainly reading things into Scripture that are not expressly stated in Scripture -- and thus, is anything but a definite answer, my point is that this passage from 1 Thessalonians should not be used as proof of a pre-trib rapture. There are verses that can certainly be interpreted as supporting a pre-trib rapture, but whenever a chronology is given that relates the Second Coming to the Tribulation, the chronology indicates that the Second Coming is after the tribulation.

There are many more pages that could be written about this, and many more verses that could be examined, but the depth of study on the Second Coming is limited by the scope of this document.

Concluding this section, take note that the doctrine of the pre-trib rapture was not widely known until the 19th Century. Since the 19th Century, it is the predominant eschatological (last-days) viewpoint. Would we have doctrinal truth now that was not known to the Early Church and to the Church for almost two millennia? Do we have revealed knowledge that they were not privy to? Or should this recent doctrine be examined in light of the Scriptures to see whether or not it is true?

Corrie Ten Boom had the following to say about the end times and the rapture/Second Coming: "There are some among us teaching there will be no tribulation, that the Christians will be able to escape all this. These are the false teachers that Jesus was warning us to expect in the latter days. Most of them have little knowledge of what is already going on across the world. I have been in countries where the saints are already suffering terrible persecution.

In China, the Christians were told, "Don't worry, before the tribulation comes you will be translated – raptured." Then came a terrible persecution. Millions of Christians were tortured to death. Later I heard a Bishop from China say, sadly,

"We have failed.

We should have made the people strong for persecution rather than telling them Jesus would come first.

Tell the people how to be strong in times of persecution,
how to stand when the tribulation comes,
– to stand and not faint."

I feel I have a divine mandate to go and tell the people of this world that it is possible to be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in training for the tribulation, but more than sixty percent of the Body of Christ across the world has already entered into the tribulation. There is no way to escape it.

We are next."

(1974, <http://www.tedmontgomery.com/bblovrvw/Rapture/corrie.html>)

John 17:15 -- "I am not praying that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one."

The passages in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Peter that are often interpreted as referring to a pre-trib rapture actually refer to the Day of the Lord:

1 Thess. 5:1-2 -- "About the times and the seasons: brothers, you do not need anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."

2 Peter 3:10 -- "But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed."

The Day of the Lord is prophesied in many Old Testament and New Testament books. It is a time when God's wrath is poured out on the earth and all mankind is judged -- some found righteous, and the rest found guilty. The Day of the Lord is described in Joel 2:11 and 2:32 -- "The LORD raises His voice in the presence of His army. His camp is very large; those who carry out His command are powerful. Indeed, the Day of the LORD is terrible and dreadful— who can endure it? ... The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awe-inspiring Day of the LORD comes."

It should also be pointed out that the 7-year timeline for a future tribulation only applies if one holds to a futurist view of the 70th week of Daniel 9 (in other words, if one believes that there is an unwritten but present indefinite gap between the 69th and 70th weeks. The discussion and implications of this are far beyond the limited scope of this document, but it is certainly an issue worth examining.

The Millennium of Revelation 20 -- Present or Future?

This issue is one of the most divisive issues in eschatology. Proponents of each viewpoint tend to be thoroughly convinced that their viewpoint is the correct, Scriptural view, and strive to point out the fallacies of each view. Almost all proponents of dispensational theology firmly hold to the dispensational premillennial view. As mentioned above, dispensational premillennialism is firmly anchored in the view that the Jews and Gentiles remain two distinct entities in the eyes of God, and that from the pre-trib Rapture onward God's earthly plan is for the Old Testament system to be reinstated.

Proponents of dispensational premillennialism argue for a very literal interpretation of prophecy. However, in many cases, this literal view turns out to be very non-literal -- many examples can be found in Revelation, such as stating that the "giant locusts" of Rev. 9 are really helicopters, or that "Gog and Magog" really refers to the (defunct) army of the Soviet Union. One of the major flaws of dispensational premillennialism is how it often struggles to discern between that which is literal and that which is figurative.

Dispensational premillennialists also argue that the sealed 144,000 in Revelation 7 are most certainly natural-born Jews and that the "vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language" includes almost every nation, except Israel, since they were already mentioned.

Now if the point I am making about the 144,000 is new to you, look closely -- 12,000 are sealed from "Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar,

Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin." Dan is not mentioned, and Joseph is effectively counted twice, as anyone who is of the tribe of Manasseh must also be of the tribe of Joseph. In other words, this is not an accurate census. This leads me to think that the 144,000 are symbolic rather than literal; however, that is simply my opinion and not anywhere near a proven fact.

To a dispensationalist, eschatological viewpoints are limited to opinions on the tribulation, as dispensationalism is inherently premillennial. However, views on the millennium seem to have more of an impact on one's worldview than views on the tribulation do. Still, it is important that people not become so caught up in views on eschatology that they form divisions and distract away from the fundamentals of Christianity, such as knowing and teaching of Christ and His redemption and grace.

Revelation 20 -- the only place in Scripture where the millennium is mentioned:

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven with the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for 1,000 years. He threw him into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the 1,000 years were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of God's word, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and who had not accepted the mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with the Messiah for 1,000 years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1,000 years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over these, but they will be priests of God and the Messiah, and they will reign with Him for 1,000 years. When the 1,000 years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle. Their number is like the sand of the sea. They came up over the surface of the earth and surrounded the encampment of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed them. The Devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."

Another premillennial view is "historic premillennialism", called "historic" because it was the popular premillennial doctrine prior to the 19th Century. Historic premillennialism differs from dispensational premillennialism in that historic premillennialism is solidly post-trib and views the millennium as a time of restoration between Christ and His people, as opposed to a time of renewed Judaism. The primary foundation for premillennialism (both varieties) comes from a literal interpretation of the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20. Historic

premillennialism, however, still errs (in my opinion) by inferring that the millennium is earthly when the passage does not state that. It also separates the Day of the Lord into parts separated by 1,000 years, when Scripture seems clear it is a "day".

Other views on the millennium include amillennialism and postmillennialism. "Amillennialism" is a misnomer, since the "a-" prefix means "no", and proponents of amillennialism do still believe in a "millennium" (just not an even, literal, earthly 1,000 years). With that aside, the amillennial view teaches that the millennium began at the resurrection of Christ (or Pentecost -- there are varying opinions on this) and will end at the Second Coming (the Day of the Lord, the day of judgment, the day of the Great White Throne judgment). Revelation 20 does certainly seem to support this view, since if one interprets this passage chronologically the judgment is clearly placed after the millennium. This is the view most consistent with what the church has historically believed.

Postmillennialism strongly emphasizes the Great Commission by stating that the spread of the Gospel to all ends of the earth brings about the (non-literal) millennium, and that the return of Christ occurs at the end of the millennium (hence the term 'post-millennial'). The optimism of postmillennialism stands at a sharp contrast to the overall pessimism of dispensational premillennialism (which alleges that the Church will decrease in influence leading up to the rapture and tribulation). Postmillennial doctrine is very strong on missions and evangelism, but can tend to place an undue emphasis on the earthly aspects of the kingdom at the expense of the spiritual.

At this point, I need to point out that I am not trying to defend or promote any one view on the millennium. There is definitely room for debate on this issue; and most non-dispensational theologians find value in certain aspects of historic premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. I already evaluated dispensational premillennialism above; historic premillennialism is very similar but without the foundation of dispensational theology. Each of these three viewpoints has things that seem to be backed by Scripture, and each viewpoint has apparent problems where something does not line up with the rest of Scripture (or at least appears not to).

Without taking much time to go into great detail, here are what I consider to be the strong points and weak points of each of the three.

The strongest point in favor of historic premillennialism is that it takes Revelation 20 to refer to a literal 1,000 years and a literal binding of Satan. Looking at current events, one would almost have to say that Satan is not bound. However, by separating the Second Coming of Christ and the Day of the Lord (judgment) by a span of 1,000 years, this view creates a problem for lining it up with other teaching in Scripture.

The strongest point in favor of amillennialism is that it seems to best support Biblical teachings on the Day of the Lord: Christ returns at an unexpected time, all people are judged, Christ takes His people to live with Him forever, and a new heaven and new earth are

inaugurated. The millennial kingdom is the Kingdom of God, with God ruling from heaven and His people being his ambassadors on earth. Amillennialism is the view promoted by most Reformed theologians. Amillennialism does not require a literal earthly kingdom because it sees all the prophecies of a future temple and Christ's reign on David's throne as being fulfilled in the Church and Christ on the Heavenly Throne, respectively.

Amillennialism, however, requires a very figurative view of the prophecy of Revelation 20. Amillennialists are required to explain the meaning of the binding of Satan, because it is obvious that Satan still exercises authority in his dominion.

The strongest point in favor of postmillennialism is its emphasis on the Great Commission. Like amillennialism, postmillennialism teaches that the Second Coming and judgment occur at the same time, and that Christ does not return until the millennium is over. Unlike amillennialism, however, postmillennialism teaches that the Kingdom of God does not begin until the Great Commission has gone out to the whole world and the world is predominantly Christian. Like premillennialism, postmillennialism teaches that there is a literal millennium marked by peace and prosperity. The greatest weakness of postmillennialism is that the world, in general, does not seem to be growing more "Christian".

Now some Scriptures that seem to lend credence to particular views:

Postmillennialism: Matthew 24:14 -- "This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come."

Amillennialism: Jude 5-6 -- "Now I want to remind you, though you know all these things: the Lord, having first of all saved a people out of Egypt, later destroyed those who did not believe; and He has kept, with eternal chains in darkness for the judgment of the great day, angels who did not keep their own position but deserted their proper dwelling." 2 Thess. 1:7-10 -- "This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, taking vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of everlasting destruction, away from the Lord's presence and from His glorious strength, in that day when He comes to be glorified by His saints and to be admired by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed." Hebrews 1:2-4 -- "In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the universe. He is the radiance of His glory, the exact expression of His nature, and He sustains all things by His powerful word. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. So He became higher in rank than the angels, just as the name He inherited is superior to theirs."

Premillennialism: Rev. 20:2,3 -- "He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for 1,000 years. He threw him into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the 1,000 years were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time."

There is certainly enough material on these these views that a work much longer than this could be written for the sole purpose of examining these views. My purpose for this written work is not to examine the various eschatological viewpoints but rather to point out to those who may only be familiar with dispensationalism that the amillennial and postmillennial viewpoints do have some Scriptural foundation.

Because of its close ties and reliance on classical dispensational theology, discussed in depth over the course of this series, I do not believe that dispensational premillennialism is a steady eschatological viewpoint. Because its core foundation -- the premise that the Jews and the believing Gentiles are two separate and distinct people in the eyes of God -- does not stand up to examination, anything built on that foundation will be shaky at best. Therefore, because dispensational premillennialism requires that there be two distinct peoples of God and two distinct plans, in my opinion it fails to be a viable system. Non-dispensational theologians regard historic premillennialism (also known to some as reformed premillennialism), amillennialism (despite its misleading name), and postmillennialism as viable eschatological systems.

The final thing I want to point out about the millennium is the answer to a question raised by many people coming out from dispensational premillennialism: "doesn't Scripture state that there will be a reign of Christ upon the earth?" The last study of this series on dispensationalism will cover what the Bible has to say about what some believe to be clear depictions of the millennial kingdom.

First, we'll look once more at Revelation 20:4-6 -- "Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of God's word, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and who had not accepted the mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with the Messiah for 1,000 years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1,000 years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over these, but they will be priests of God and the Messiah, and they will reign with Him for 1,000 years."

Observations from this passage:

1. It never says that Christ is reigning on the physical earth.
2. Those who reign with Christ are the ones who die for their faith -- not all believers.
3. The passage says that John saw the souls of those who had been beheaded -- not their physical or glorified bodies.

Conclusion: Based on this passage, it seems that the reign may occur in heaven.

Isaiah 11:1-9 -- "Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him—a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight will be in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what He sees with His eyes, He will not execute justice by what He hears with His ears, but He will judge the poor righteously and execute justice for the oppressed of the land. He will strike the land with discipline from His mouth, and He will kill the wicked with a command from His lips. Righteousness and faithfulness will be a belt around His waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf, the young lion, and the fatling will be together, and a child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young ones will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like an ox. An infant will play beside the cobra's pit, and a toddler will put

his hand into a snake's den. No one will harm or destroy on My entire holy mountain, for the land will be as full of the knowledge of the LORD as the sea is filled with water."

Observation/comment: Think about this for a minute... why does this have to refer to the "millennial kingdom"? Why can't this refer to the New Earth (Rev. 21:1)? Look at the parallel passage later in Isaiah...

Isaiah 65:17-18, 24-25 -- "For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind. Then be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I will create Jerusalem to be a joy, and its people to be a delight. . . Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but the serpent's food will be dust! They will not do what is evil or destroy on My entire holy mountain," says the LORD."

Another observation, which counters some of what is taught about the need for a reign of Christ on the earth, is that Christ does not need to reign in Jerusalem to fulfill the prophecy of Him sitting on the throne of David. This stands contrary to the teaching of some 20th Century writers, who said that there must be an earthly reign of Christ in order to fulfill the prophecies. In effect, these writers are saying that Jesus is not currently King.

Isaiah 9:6 -- "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

Luke 1:31-33 -- "Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name JESUS. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Matthew 2:2 -- "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

Luke 23:3 -- "So Pilate asked Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'You have said it.'"

Matthew 28:18-20 -- "Then Jesus came near and said to them, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Acts 2:30-36 -- "Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing this in advance, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah:

He was not left in Hades, and His flesh did not experience decay.

God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this. Therefore, since He has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, He has poured out what you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says:

The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'

Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!"

1 Cor. 15:25 -- "For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet."

Hebrews 1:3-9,13 -- "He is the radiance of His glory, the exact expression of His nature, and He sustains all things by His powerful word. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. So He became higher in rank than the angels, just as the name He inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did He ever say, You are My Son; today I have become Your Father, or again, I will be His Father, and He will be My Son? When He again brings His firstborn into the world, He says, And all God's angels must worship Him. And about the angels He says:

He makes His angels winds, and His servants a fiery flame; but about the Son:

'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of justice. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; this is why God, Your God, has anointed You, rather than Your companions, with the oil of joy'.

. . . Now to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool'?"

John 18:36 -- "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.'" (NASB)

Colossians 1:13 -- "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."

These verses indicate that Christ is currently reigning as King, and He was recognized as King even when He took on flesh and was born as a baby. The Kingdom of God was inaugurated when Christ returned from the dead. When Christ ascended to Heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, He fulfilled the prophecy made to David in 2 Samuel 7:16 ("Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.") He currently rules and reigns in Heaven. He is both our reigning King and our High Priest!

Therefore, whether or not there is a future kingdom of Christ on earth, one must be aware that such a kingdom is not necessary to fulfill prophecy, because Christ has already fulfilled the prophecy. We must be careful to not put so much focus on a future kingdom that we lose sight of the fact that the Kingdom is present, and those of us who believe on Him and have been adopted as His sons are His ambassadors, representing His Kingdom.

Mark 1:15 -- "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news!"

Luke 17:20-21 -- "The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; no one will say, 'Look here!' or 'There!' For you see, the kingdom of God is among you."

Philippians 3:20 -- "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Finally, it is important to note that while Satan's kingdom is not entirely annihilated (see Rev. 20), the power of Satan has been greatly limited (bound) since Christ's resurrection.

Matthew 4:10-11,13-17 -- "Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. . . Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.' From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'"

Matthew 12:25-29 -- "Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.'"

Luke 10:17-20 -- "The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'"

John 12:31 -- "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out."

John 16:11 -- "...The ruler of this world has been judged."

Hebrews 2:14 -- "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil."

1 John 3:8 -- "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."

So, concluding this section on the Millennium of Revelation 20, whether or not you believe Satan is "bound" (Rev. 20:1-3), it is clear from Scripture that his power has been greatly limited since Christ's first coming. Regardless of whether the historic premillennial, amillennial, or postmillennial view is correct, one must remember that (a) the views are all a matter of interpretation and (b) God is in control and has planned everything out in advance.

The Book of Revelation

One final thing to point out in conclusion: much time is spent reading through Revelation trying to gain insight into things to come in the future. However, there is one small phrase that is often overlooked, right at the beginning of the Book of Revelation -- "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". This book is a revelation of things that "must soon take place", but as the revelation of Jesus Christ, it also gives a picture of Christ's glory, majesty, and power in heaven. In addition, the title is singular -- some refer to the book as the Book of Revelations, but that "s", in making the word plural, changes the meaning. It is one revelation, not multiple. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is Christ revealed to His servants. In this book we see the past, the present, and the future, in a depiction of Christ, His power over Satan's domain, and His plan to bring His people to live with Him forever.

There are many opinions on the Book of Revelation. In Protestant circles, the most common viewpoints are the Preterist viewpoint, the Historicist viewpoint, and the Futurist viewpoint. Preterists see the book as having been fulfilled in A.D. 70. Historicists believe the book covers the full span of new covenant church history, from the beginning until the Second Coming. Futurists believe that Revelation only applies to a future time. However, while historicists typically view the letters to the seven churches as epistles to actual churches, many futurists (which are often dispensational premillennials) adopt a historic view of the letters to the seven churches, stating that the letters are figurative and refer to seven time periods in church history. The futurist view quickly grew from obscurity to prominence during the 20th century, as it was promoted by theologians and writers such as Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey. The historicist view was the most common view in Protestant churches until recently, when the majority of Protestant churches adopted the futurist view. The historicist view remains popular in Reformed churches. However, since the 1960's, futurist thought has dominated evangelical Christian teaching such that most Christians and non-Christians are not aware of any other viewpoint. The historicist view was promoted by teachers and commentators such as Wycliffe, Knox, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, and Henry, but is rarely taught now.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that many cults have originated from the practice of taking a passage or a verse from Revelation and forming a doctrine based on that one passage. Revelation is a book that is considered somewhat unclear because of its use of symbolic language. As a result, it is considered a wise hermeneutical practice to interpret the unclear by the clear, or to interpret the Revelation by the clear, established doctrine of the rest of Scripture. Also we should interpret Revelation primarily by asking, "How would the original audience have read this?"

Conclusion

There are many cases involving Bible prophecy where there is room for discussion because a correct viewpoint is not clear. However, the core teachings of classical dispensationalism, with its dependence on the doctrine of two peoples of God, two plans for salvation, various unwritten gaps and parenthesis, and statements that God's plans failed or were put on hold, cannot stand up under close examinations with Scriptural teaching.

It is dangerous to adhere to a system that contradicts sound Biblical doctrine and teaches a theological and eschatological system that is not presented in Scripture. While there are certain verses and passages that support classical dispensational teachings when not read in context, it is crucial that one examine everything in light of the rest of Scripture. A teaching that denies the redemptive work of Christ on the cross by looking ahead to a time when animal sacrifices are reinstated, or a teaching that attempts to state that God did not foresee the New Testament and modern-era Church, stands contrary to God's Word. If forced to decide, will the reader maintain close ties to such a theological system, or will the reader read Scripture without such a paradigm in order to discover what the Word really has to say. We can not fully be open to God's Word if we read it through interpretive filters, assuming that a passage has to take a certain meaning in order to still fit into a man-made system. We need to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:10-13 -- "The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with

great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men." (NASB)

We must be as the Bereans were, examining the Scriptures to verify whether a doctrine is true. We need to be extremely careful that we do not accept a new teaching without verifying it, as otherwise a heresy may become a stronghold that distorts everything else we read in Scripture.

1 John 4:1 -- "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

We must be attentive to the Holy Spirit, and be firmly rooted in sound doctrine, so that we will not be swayed when false teachings come disguised as truth.

Hebrews 2:1 -- "We must therefore pay even more attention to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away."

Ephesians 4:11-16 -- "And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part."

This concludes the four-part series on dispensational theology.

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APPENDIX A -- Viewpoints

TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY
PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY
COVENANT THEOLOGY

While there are many subdivisions of each of these theological camps, these three are the primary categories of Protestant theology.

Traditional Dispensational Theology, at the far left of the diagram, is the topic discussed in the four preceding chapters. It is a relatively new theological discipline, having been introduced

less than two centuries ago. It is the most prevalent theological viewpoint in the United States today. While none of the major denominations are fully dispensational, traditional dispensational theology is most commonly found in the Baptist and Pentecostal denominations. Many independent “community” churches are also dispensational. Traditional dispensational theology is also typically associated with the Fundamental movement and many Evangelical mega-churches. Traditional dispensational theology can be identified by its very strange interpretation of the King James translation of 2 Timothy 2:15 -- “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” The phrase “rightly dividing the word of truth” is interpreted to mean imposing divisions such as seven dispensations, hard breaks between Gentiles and Jews, firm differences between the Old and New Covenants, and other divisions that break apart Scripture. This interpretation of “rightly dividing the word of truth” was introduced in 1896 by C. I. Scofield, in a book by the same name. Other translations (i.e. NIV, NASB, ESV, HCSB) render 2 Timothy 2:15 in this fashion: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.” In other words, Scripture commands us to correctly teach the word of truth; it does not command us to divide Scripture up into different categories and make up hundreds of charts and graphs that eventually become on equal terms with Scripture. In fact, this “dividing” of the Bible seems contrary to “correctly teaching the word of truth”!

Traditional dispensational theology is most associated with the names Darby, Scofield, Ryrie, and Larkin. Modern seminaries teaching traditional dispensational theology include Dallas Theological Seminary, and, to some extent, Moody Bible Institute.

Traditional dispensational theology also has a major impact on Christian literature, with writers such as Tim LaHaye (Left Behind) and Hal Lindsey (The Late Great Planet Earth) being just two of many popular dispensational authors. As I stated in Part 4, many Christians and non-Christians are probably very familiar with traditional dispensational theology without even being aware of what its label is, or that it is not the universally-accepted viewpoint. In the 1960’s, traditional dispensational theology experienced some changes as the “Revised Dispensational Theology” movement began to grow. Revised dispensational theology ignores some of the original teachings of Darby, instead focusing more on Scofield, Ryrie, and Larkin. Revised dispensationalists will not teach the hard-line break between Israel and the Gentile Church, instead teaching that the Gentile Church was been grafted in to Israel. Revised dispensationalists, however, still believe in a pre-trib rapture, seven dispensations, a future Jewish Temple, and a strict futurist view on prophecy.

Progressive Dispensational Theology is a recent (circa 1990) modification of dispensational theology that adopts the Reformed viewpoint on the Church and Israel (that the Gentile Church has been grafted into Israel, but Israel must believe and accept Christ in order to be saved) while still loosely holding on to the seven dispensations. Although progressive dispensational theology is a new term and a new movement, its eschatological foundation is historic premillennialism, which dates back to the second century A.D. Progressive dispensational theology teaches the union of the Church and the Jews and the post-tribulational rapture (synonymous with the Second Coming), both concepts not typically associated with dispensationalism. However, it is still inherently premillennial and futurist

(placing a gap between the 69th and 70th Weeks of Daniel, and seeing most New Testament prophecy as unfulfilled). Progressive dispensational theology has its origins in the Revised Dispensational Theology movement of the 1960's; however, it has adopted a significant portion of Reformed/Calvinistic teaching, such that traditional and revised dispensationalists (i.e. Dallas Theological Seminary) have said that progressive dispensational theology is not dispensational theology at all.

Some who identify themselves as progressive dispensationalists choose to label three dispensations rather than seven -- Perfection (Garden of Eden), Old Covenant, and New Covenant. This, actually, is not dispensational theology at all but rather covenant theology without some of the "extreme" aspects of covenant theology, such as what is called "replacement theology".

Progressive dispensational theology is, essentially, a middle-of-the-road compromise position between classical dispensational theology and covenant theology. It is, however, still very much "dispensational" in nature.

Covenant Theology is at the right end of the spectrum. Covenant theology presents a system of covenants as the framework for interpreting God's plan for mankind.

Covenant theology teaches that the Church (made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers) is God's chosen people, and that Old Testament promises made to Israel are realized in the Church.

Most covenant theologians take the amillennial viewpoint on the millennium of Rev. 20; however, there are also quite a few that take the postmillennial or historic premillennial viewpoint. It is wrong to say that all covenant theologians are amillennial, an assertion made by many dispensationalists.

Contrary to popular dispensational thought, covenant theologians do not "spiritualize" the Old Testament. The Old Testament, however, is interpreted in light of the New Testament rather than vice versa. For example, to Covenant Theology there is no need for a physical temple in the future as those promises have been fulfilled in Christ.

As far as the presence of covenant theology in denominations, covenant theology is most common in Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Overall, more Protestant denominations teach traditional or revised dispensational theology. In America, covenant theology is a minority position.

Historically, some well-known covenant theologians include John Calvin, John Knox, William Tyndale, and Samuel Rutherford. Covenant theology, as it is taught today, originated in the Reformation in the 16th century, although its origins can be traced back to the Early Church. Typically modern covenant theology is traced back to the Reformation doctrines, distinguished from the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

Other viewpoints

There are other doctrinal positions and frameworks for understanding Scripture; however, most Fundamental and Evangelical Protestants in the United States will consider themselves to be associated one of these categories described above, or a derivative thereof.

APPENDIX B -- Background information on the last four chapters (2006)

When writing the sections of the series on traditional dispensational theology, I attempted to refrain from writing from any particular viewpoint in order to take a balanced approach to the subject. The information given on traditional dispensationalism was written from experience and backed up with Internet research on pro-dispensational websites. These were the teachings I was most familiar with for most of my life. However, there were numerous things that did not make sense when viewed from a dispensational background. When I studied them in Scripture, trying to look at these topics free from any preconceived bias, my conclusions were more in line with what I later learned is considered the “Reformed” viewpoint. When reading the chapters on dispensational theology, the reader may have observed what seemed to be a strong bias toward Reformed theology. Any perceived bias is unintentional; I made it a priority to write from how I interpreted the Scripture passages and not from any already-predetermined doctrinal background. Although my theological views can now be described as predominantly Reformed, it is because that view aligns with the conclusions I came to independently, not because I aligned my views with an “established tradition”. *(Edit 2/14/09, again, note this was written in 2006. Now, I make no effort to hide that I affiliate with Reformed theology!)*

When quoting Scripture, I chose to use the recent Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). The HCSB is a 21st Century translation written in the style of the New American Standard Bible (NASB). The publishers of the HCSB, Broadman-Holman, had previously published editions of the Lockman Foundation’s NASB. As a result, the HCSB and NASB have somewhat of a shared heritage. The HCSB is a literal translation, but it is translated in such a way that it employs more natural English sentence structure than the NASB. I chose to use the HCSB because of its readability and accuracy. The NASB was used for some passages where it seemed to better capture the meaning of a passage.

The Holman Christian Standard Bible does appear to be translated from a slightly dispensational background, as is evident in some of the word choices and in the notes written in the margin. However, since the nature of the previous chapters is critical of dispensationalism, a text that seems somewhat favorable of dispensationalism helps for balance.

I chose to not use the more popular translations, such as the King James Version and the New International Version, because of translation issues with these two versions. The KJV has certain places where verses are not translated the same as the majority of other translations (due to different manuscripts used in 1611), and is more difficult to read because of the difference in the English word usage and sentence structure. The NIV was not used because it is a “dynamic-equivalence” translation rather than a literal translation, meaning that it does not always accurately preserve the full meaning of the original text.

Comments and feedback on the last four chapters are appreciated; if reading this on a weblog, feel free to leave a comment.

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