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The purpose of this study is that Christians who hold either to the dispensational doctrine or to the covenant doctrine will understand one another better.

Dispensationalism is occupied with:

- The distinction between *natural Israel* and *the spiritual Church* in the Bible
- *Chronology*: the interpolation of a Church period between two Israel periods
- *Literalistic interpretation* of the Bible that leads to a multiplication of end-time events

Because arguments of dispensationalism have been rebutted the past fifty years, the modern supporters of dispensationalism tend to hold to a moderate view of dispensationalism.

***If you really want to study this topic, study also the Bible references in brackets!***

## **PART 1. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL EXPECTATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS**

This is a summary of the expectation of the prophets about the coming kingdom of God (Ezekiel).<sup>1</sup>

Ezekiel chapters 33 to 39 prophesy the future salvation of Israel. The book of Ezekiel prophesied between 593 – 571 B.C. the return of Israel from exile, the restoration of the land to Israel, the renewal of the people of Israel and the final defeat of their enemies.

### **1. Ezekiel 33 records the turning point in Ezekiel's ministry**

As long as the first temple stood, Ezekiel's task was to proclaim the coming destruction of Israel. After the temple had been destroyed (586 B.C.), his task was to proclaim the rebuilding of Israel. The Lord's mercy would triumph over his judgement (James 2:13)! Because the Lord's absolute condition for rebuilding and renewal is conversion, Ezekiel's task was to proclaim that everyone must turn from his sin and do what is just and right (Ezekiel 33:10-20).

### **2. Ezekiel 34 is a prophecy concerning the Lord as the Shepherd of Israel**

Ezekiel prophesied against the evil *shepherds* of Israel during the period of the kings (1050-586 B.C.) (Ezekiel 34:1-10). They included the kings, princes, officials, tribal elders and family heads, who had not taken care of God's flock, but had ruled harshly and brutally over God's sheep. Ezekiel prophesied that through the coming Messiah (called the Lord's servant) the Lord himself would be their Shepherd (Ezekiel 34:11-16). He would care for the weak, but judge *the rams and goats* ( a symbol of the evil leaders of Israel) that **oppress** the sheep through their violence and injustice (Ezekiel 34:17-22).

### **3. Ezekiel 35 and 36 are prophecies concerning renewal of God's people and restoration of the land**

Ezekiel prophesied that the land of Israel would be replanted and rebuilt *before* the exiles in Babylon returned to Israel. Never again would they be deprived from their inheritance (Ezekiel 36:1-15). He prophesied that the former profaned land and its people would be cleansed, not because of anything Israel was or did, but only as a result of God vindicating his own holy name. The restoration and renewal of Israel would be based only on God's sovereign purpose and grace! That is why Israel is reminded of their sins, how they profaned God's holy name among the nations. The Lord would nevertheless accomplish his purpose through deeds that neither the nations nor the masses of Jews believed he would do: He would bring them back to the land Israel (Ezekiel 36:24), cleanse them so that they might again come into his presence (Ezekiel 36:25), give them a new heart and cause the Holy Spirit to live in their spirit (Ezekiel 36:26), so that they would willingly follow God's will (Ezekiel 36:27). Only when this renewal has happened, - and *only then* (Ezekiel 36:33; 37:13-14) - would *the new Israel* be fit to live *in the new land* and would God's original purpose be realised, namely that Israel would be the Lord's people and the Lord would be Israel's God (Ezekiel 36:28; cf. Exodus 6:7). Then the former ruins would be rebuilt and the former desolate land would be cultivated and the land would become like the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 36:33-35)! And the people of Israel would again be numerous (Ezekiel 36:37-38).

In Ezekiel 36 the prophet Ezekiel proclaims in one prophecy the coming kingdom of God as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the Messiah's first coming and as the new earth at the Messiah's second coming! 'The new Israel' *symbolises* the New Testament Community that would eventually fill the new earth (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:1-2).

### **4. Ezekiel 37 is a prophecy concerning the people of Israel renewed by the Lord**

In Ezekiel 37:1-14 the prophet Ezekiel does not give an Old Testament teaching about the physical resurrection from the dead, but proclaims the good news, showing how God would renew his people Israel. The valley full of dead bones *symbolise* the whole house of Israel, destroyed and scattered among the nations, without life or hope (Ezekiel 37:11). The graves are not literal graves, but *symbolise* the places to which Israel had been scattered and where they were living in exile, just as dead bodies were living in the graves (Ezekiel 37:12-13). If Israel would realise her hopeless condition that God had left her, God would

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<sup>1</sup> Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift, Ezechiël, Dr. A. Noordtzi

again reveal his grace to his people (Ezekiel 37:11-12). God says that he himself would open their graves and bring them up from their graves, e.g. bring them out of the countries to which they had been exiled. He would put his Holy Spirit in them and resettle them in their own land. *Only a born-again Israel would live in a born-again land* (cf. Ezekiel 36:33). Ezekiel prophesied that the exiles from the former northern kingdom of Israel and former southern kingdom of Judah would be re-united in the restored land (Ezekiel 37:15-22). He prophesied that the glorious future of Israel would be under the rule of the true king David, a *symbol* of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ (Ezekiel 37:23-28; cf. 1 Chronicles 17:11-14). In Ezekiel 37 the prophet proclaims in one prophecy the return from exile in Babylon, the coming Messiah, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant as an eternal covenant (cf. Hebrews 8:6-13). This prophecy was fulfilled at Christ's first coming and as a result of his first coming.

## **5. Ezekiel 38 and 39 is a prophecy of the final defeat of the enemies of God's people**

### **a. From early times Israel was waylaid by the surrounding nations.**

Israel's recreation and simultaneous return would not be complete without answering the question concerning the opposing nations. From early times, Israel has been harassed by the nations from all sides. First by the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites, then by the Philistines and Canaanites, after that by the Arameans and finally by the Assyrians and Babylonians, who attacked Israel from the north. More and more Israel began to regard 'the nations' as the inimical powers against God. 'The nations' thus *symbolise* all the people on earth who oppose the living God and his people. Ezekiel prophesied that the last trial of Israel would be that the opposing nations would attack Israel in order to try to rob it of its peace and riches. But God would protect his people and destroy the opposing nations!

### **b. The other prophets also prophesied about the leader of the nations, Gog, and his hordes.**

Ezekiel says that the other Old Testament prophets also prophesied about Gog and his hordes which God would bring against Israel (Ezekiel 38:17; cf. 39:8). The inimical powers against God's people was expected to come from the north, which had always been the great unknown to Israel (Isaiah 14:31; Jeremiah 1:15; 6:1,22). In the book of Ezekiel, these northern nations were great hordes of horsemen. Israel knew them as *Scythians*, who since 630 B.C. were notorious in the whole of western Asia and also devastated the fruitful Plain of Sharon and Philistia. Although the names of the attacking nations change and sometimes was Assur, and sometimes was Babel, there would come a time when the opposing nations together would attack Jerusalem (Joel 3:1-16; Jeremiah 6:22-23; 25:15-33; 30:23-24; Zephaniah 1:14-18; 3:8-9; Zechariah 12:2-9; 14:1-21). Although the name 'Gog' is not mentioned by the other prophets, they all refer to the same end-time event (cf. Revelation 21:8).

### **c. The leader of the attacking nations is Gog.**

The leader of the attacking hordes, called 'Gog', was a historical person, but became the *personification* or incarnation of the inimical powers opposed to God and his people. Ezekiel did not need to explain to the Israelites who Gog was and where the land of Magog was, because these were known facts to the exiles. Gog is described as the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, which was located in the north in Asia Minor. He was most probably the known Gyges of the Lydians, who was a fierce king in Asia Minor in about 660 B.C. Most likely Ezekiel took this Gog or Gyges from Asia Minor as representative of the alliance of nations attacking Israel from the north. 'Gog' becomes a *symbol* of the Old Testament antichrist, the last enemy who must be defeated before the kingdom of God would be completely established in Israel.

### **d. The names of the opposing nations.**

Meshech, Tubal, Magog and Beth-Togarmah were Phrygians and Cappadocians living in Asia Minor in the north. Persia and Gomer were Iranian people originally living in the east. Cush (Ethiopians) and Put were North African people living in the south. It is noteworthy that the traditional enemies of Israel are *not* mentioned among these nations attacking Israel, because in Ezekiel chapter 24-32 they had already come to know the power of the God of the Bible and no longer dared to attack the people of the God of the Bible (36:36)!

e. Ezekiel prophesied that this attack would happen "after many days", "in future years" or "in days to come" (38:8,16; 39:8). With all the prophets, this expression means "the end-time" in the sense of the time when the glory of the Messiah would shine over Israel and God's purpose with Israel would have been fully realised (Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; Hosea 3:5; Daniel 10:14).

It is noteworthy that God would bring Gog and his hordes in a sovereign way out against Israel (Ezekiel 38:3-9). This means that Gog would only be *an instrument* in God's hands (cf. Proverbs 16:4). Although Gog would be fully responsible for his actions, his actions would in a sovereign way be determined and controlled by God (cf. Genesis 45:5,8; Isaiah 5:26; 7:18-20; 10:5; Romans 9:17). This shows that the God who reveals himself through his prophets and his actions in the Bible is the sovereign Ruler of all the nations on earth and of all events that take place in history. No other 'god' of the other religions exists. No other 'god' of the other religions determines what will happen in history and acts in history (cf. Isaiah 41:4,22-29; 43:9-13; 44:8; 45:21). Therefore, this attack by Gog and his hordes would be no surprise to God.

f. Ezekiel prophesies how God in a sovereign way would break the power of these opposing nations (Ezekiel 38:19-23; 39:1-20). Through a mighty earthquake, hailstorms and burning sulphur, probably from volcanic actions, God would destroy these opposing nations (cf. 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:17-21; 20:7-9). The vast armies, their officers and their horses would become a great sacrificial meal, not for the gods, but for the wild animals (cf. Revelation 19:17-21). During this attack and destruction of the opposing nations, Israel would not have to fight, but would only be spectators of God's mighty acts of salvation.

g. Ezekiel states the reason of this last confrontation between God and the opposing nations.

God would vindicate his holy name by displaying his glory (Ezekiel 39:21-24). From that day onwards, Israel would know that the God who reveals himself in the Bible is really God and desires to be their God. And the nations would know the real reason why the God of the Bible had previously punished Israel, Jerusalem and the temple with destruction.

In this passage (Ezekiel 39:21-24) Ezekiel's prophecy returns from the future to the present suffering of Israel (Ezekiel's time). The destroyers are no longer the symbolic Gog and his hordes, but the Babylonians (Ezekiel 39:23). Thus, the picture of the last days serves to comfort Israel in their present situation of exile and assures them of the certainty of their coming deliverance. Israel must learn to live by faith, to believe God's prophetic word, even when it might take a long time before it is fulfilled, and to submit to God's sovereign guidance in their present lives.

h. In Ezekiel 39:25-29, Ezekiel gives a summary of God's end-time events.

He prophesies that a new period in Israel's history was about to begin. The three great end-time events would be the return from the Babylonian exile, the destruction of the opposing nations and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 39:29; cf. Isaiah 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Joel 2:28-32; Zechariah 12:10-14)!

## **6. Ezekiel 40 to 48 is a prophecy of the new temple, the new city and the new land of Israel**

In these chapters the prophet Ezekiel prophesies the final glorious time in which *the kingdom of God* finds its fulfilment in the new Israel. The noteworthy characteristic of the kingdom of God is that there will be *a complete agreement and perfect harmony between the inner renewal and the outward forms.*

a. The agreement between the inner renewal and outer forms.

Ezekiel proclaims that "the display of God's glory" (Ezekiel 39:21) and "the outpouring of God's Spirit" (Ezekiel 39:29) must find expression in the new life in the new land! God's glory is not only exalted above the earth, but descends in the forms of new life on earth. God wants to share his completeness to his new creation! In the prophetic picture of Ezekiel, the new forms of life find expression in the new temple (cf. John 2:19-22; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22), the new temple service (cf. John 4:21-24; Ephesians 4:18-21), the new land (cf. Matthew 28:19; Romans 4:13) and the new city (cf. Hebrews 12:22-24).

b. Not the creation of new forms, but the reformation of the old forms of life in Israel.

It is noteworthy that Ezekiel 40 to 48 does not speak of *the creation of new forms* of life in Israel, but rather of *a reformation of the old forms* of life in Israel! The forms that Moses received in the Law remain the foundation for the new forms of life in the new Israel. But these new forms of life are permeated by the Holy Spirit and will therefore change the old forms of life in several ways. Ezekiel not only prophesied the inner renewal through a new heart and new spirit, but also the necessity that this inner renewal *must be expressed in new outer forms* (cf. Matthew 5:17,20; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 9:6-10; 10:1-25)! His message is that a new body belongs to a new spirit. Only when the whole world becomes the reflection of God's glory, would God's honour be upheld.

Ezekiel prophesied that this future revelation of God's glory would happen *in and through Israel*. By comparing Ezekiel 1 with Ezekiel 40 to 48, we see that the glory of God, which the cherubim represented transcendentally in Ezekiel 1, will go in and through Israel forth into the whole world in Ezekiel 40-48. This is represented by the cherubim going "straight ahead" (Ezekiel 1:9,12) and the new people of Israel likewise going "straight ahead" when they come to worship the Lord on the great festival days (Ezekiel 46:9). *The new Israel will be on earth what the cherubim are in heaven!* Just as the cherubim are the bearers of the divine life, likewise in the new Israel there will be a river of life (Ezekiel 47:1-12; cf. John 4:10,14; 7:37-39). The throne of God, which hovered above the heads of the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:26) will receive its place in the new temple (Ezekiel 43:7; cf. Luke 17:20-21; John 14:16-17).

The new name of the new city will be "the Lord is there" (48:35). Just as the throne vehicle had the form of a square (Ezekiel 1:5-9), likewise the new temple area (Ezekiel 42:15-20), the new city (Ezekiel 48:15-17) and the whole area of the city, priests and Levites (Ezekiel 48:20), which will be the new centre of the new Israel will have the form of squares (cf. Revelation 21:15-16). In this way, *every outward form on earth is filled with new inner life*. The new people, priests and prince come in the new temple to bring the new sacrifices and to celebrate the new festivals. The new city is shared by all the 12 tribes of Israel and each tribe has its own gate (Ezekiel 48:30-34; cf. Revelation 21:12-13). And each tribe has an equal inheritance in the new land. Thus, Ezekiel's vision concerning what he saw of God himself in Ezekiel chapter 1 results in his vision concerning what the new temple, the new city and the new land in Ezekiel chapters 40-48 will look like. Ezekiel shows that the God of the Bible does not concern himself with outward religious forms and practices, but with inward renewal and transformation! He shows that *when God imparts his life in the inner man, then it will find expression in all outer forms in a way that completely agrees with the inner reality!* He shows that *God's method is not from outer conformity to inner conformity, but rather from inner renewal to outer renewal!* The new life and power present in the new people will always press for similar new forms in every aspect of their outward life. When outward religious practices are enforced on people, they may conform because they are threatened, but they will remain slaves of their own sins and slaves of the laws enforced on them.

c. The new society is no longer living under the dominion of sin.

Although the new Israel would be living on earth, Ezekiel describes the new Israel as no longer subject to the destroying power of sin. The rights and duties of the prince are very limited: it is not said that he must maintain justice in the land or defend it against attacks or promote its material welfare, but only that he must provide for the offerings of the great festivals (Ezekiel 45:9-17). The same is true of the people: all they must do is bringing sacrifices (Ezekiel 46:19-24; cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-9; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:4-5). The prince is satisfied with his small task, the Levites accept that they may no longer serve as priests, and the priests teach and judge without anyone resisting. The financial contributions flow without trouble. Lies and deceit no longer exist in merchandise or industry. The poor no longer fear the rich. The festivals are celebrated automatically. There is absolutely no sign of the intervention of a government, whether political or religious! *The picture is of a society no longer living under the domain of sin*. Sin has been robbed of its dominion (cf. Romans 6:6-7).

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## **PART 2. THE ORIGIN OF JEWISH APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE**

Jewish apocalyptic literature began to appear after the return from exile (538 B.C.) when prophecy came to an end in Israel and the fulfilment of the prophets' words did not seem to materialise.

### **1. An apocalypse is a literary form**

An apocalypse is a literary form (genre) that makes use of dreams and visions, symbols and numbers, and terminology based on Old Testament sources. An apocalypse is a presentation of the end of the world and the coming of the kingdom of God. Often the throne in heaven is the centre of the vision.

## **2. The characteristics of Jewish apocalyptic literature in the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament**

- a. After the prophet Malachi no more prophets arose in Israel. The prophetic proclamations had stopped and the interest for the Law grew under the rising influence of the Pharisees. The domination by the Gentile nations (the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek-Syrian Empire) dismayed the Jews. *Jewish apocalyptic literature arose as an attempt to harmonise the promises of the Old Testament prophets with the disastrous events in Israel within God's salvation history and then to project the fulfilment of these promises of the prophets to a future period.*
- b. *Characteristic was the doctrine of two ages. The present age was regarded as dominated by evil and dark forces. The future age would be essentially different than the present age. The future age would have a supernatural origin and would replace the present age. This doctrine struck a responsive chord in the New Testament.*
- c. Characteristic was the shift of the emphasis from the coming Messiah himself to the coming of a Messianic period of peace. The expectation of a coming Messiah in that present age (the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament) was less dominant than in the period before that (the period of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel). In 1 Enoch the perception of the Messiah and of God became more transcendental. The Son of Man was a heavenly being who existed before the creation and who would judge together with God.
- d. Characteristic was the decline of Jewish nationalism and the advance of individualism (the moral life) and universalism (the Gentile nations were incorporated into God's plan).
- e. Characteristic was that Jewish apocalyptic literature formed the antidote against the legalistic life of the Pharisees, who also arose after the exile.

## **3. The form and content of Jewish apocalyptic literature**

The Jewish apocalyptic literature made use of the images and symbols of her non-Jewish environment, but based its contents on Old Testament prophecy. The authors of Jewish apocalyptic literature probably never intended to visualise the End in literal terms. In their attempt to portray the future salvation that would surpass the present historic reality, Jewish apocalyptic literature *made use of the symbols and myths of the Babylonians during the exile, of their Canaanite neighbours and of the Greeks who lived in Palestine.* The Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature shows a close yet critical interaction with the international culture of their time and environment: e.g. the book of Daniel chapters 7 to 12 with the Greek culture of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and the book of Revelation with the Roman culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

## **4. The differentiation between prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature**

The prophetic books among others things proclaimed the future salvation that would take place at the eschatological End. The purpose of apocalyptic literature was to once more proclaim the promises of the Old Testament prophets with regard to the future and to re-affirm their relevancy for the generation of the author and the following generations. The authors of apocalyptic literature themselves were not prophets and they lived in an age in which prophecy had stopped.

## **5. The authors of apocalyptic literature used pseudonyms**

A pseudonym is not the real name of the author, but an assumed or professed name. Because prophecy had stopped the authors of apocalyptic literature probably used as pseudonyms the names of well-known Old Testament saints like Enoch, Ezra or Daniel. We do not need to regard this as deliberate fraud in which they wished to have their literature listed among the prophetic books. We should rather regard the apocalyptic literature as *a literary style (genre) in which the authors desired to explain the revelations of the Old Testament prophets.*

## **6. The authors of apocalyptic literature took their stand in the past**

Because apocalyptic literature was not predictive prophecy the authors of apocalyptic literature *took their stand on an invented point of departure in the past history and then gave a retrospective view of history until their own lifetime in the form of predictive prophecy*. They do as though they write about a distant future (cf. Daniel 8:26).

We also do not need to regard this literary style as a deliberate fraud. We should rather regard apocalyptic literature as the means by which the author of the apocalyptic literature attempts to grasp God's plan with regard to human history and to explain the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets that were made in the past. He does this by rewriting the Old Testament prophecies of the past in the light of their fulfilment in his own lifetime in order to show how these prophecies were fulfilled in history and to point out what still needs to be fulfilled. See *quasi-prophecy* in the introduction to the book of Daniel in supplement 7.

## **7. The authors of apocalyptic literature supplies an explanation of prophetic revelations in the past**

The two canonical apocalypses are the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation. The authors of apocalyptic literature were thus expositors of prophecies that were made during the Old Testament period (Daniel) or of prophecies that were made during the Old Testament and the New Testament periods (Revelation). Their inspiration to write was not the desire to give new prophetic revelations, but rather to explain the prophetic revelations that had already been given in the past. The authority of the messages of their literature must therefore be derived from the authority of what the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ and the New Testament apostles wrote.

## **8. The Jewish apocalypses form a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament**

The Jewish apocalyptic literature came largely into existence in the period that lies between the Old Testament and the New Testament - thus, after the closing of the Old Testament Canon. The authors of apocalyptic literature explained the Old Testament prophets in a period when prophecy had already stopped, but the fulfilment of these prophecies was still expected. The Jewish apocalypses were excluded from the list of 39 canonical Old Testament books and therefore have no authority with regard to biblical doctrine or life. But that does not mean that they have no value to understand the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament. As a matter of fact, because the Jewish apocalypses maintained and intensified the hope or expectation about the end-time, they played an important role as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

## **9. The Jewish apocalypses laid the emphasis on the sovereignty of God in the history of the world**

Their understanding of 'history' and 'eschatology' developed in the context of the period after the Babylonian exile when Israel lived continually under the dominion of Gentile nations and the promises of the prophets of the Old Testament remained unfulfilled. *In this long period of contradiction between God's prophetic promises and the reality of Israel's experience of history, the authors of apocalyptic literature sought to reassure the faithful believers within God's people that God had not abandoned his people and that salvation for them and judgement for their oppressors would certainly come*. With this purpose in mind, they laid the emphasis on God's sovereignty: God had predetermined the whole outcome of history in the world, both salvation and judgement (cf. Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 14:24-27; 37:26; 45:7; Lamentations 3:38; Romans 9:1,21; Ephesians 1:10-11). Salvation and judgement would come at the end at a moment that God had predetermined. The Gentile empires like Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece would continue with their oppression and domination only as long as God allowed them. This strong deterministic view on history, however, did not degenerate into a fatalistic belief against human freedom and responsibility, because the authors of apocalyptic literature called people to repentance, prayer and a change of life-style. The authors of apocalyptic literature hardly ever set a date for the end-time.

## **10. The Jewish apocalypses and the final future salvation and judgement**

Already the Old Testament prophets prophesied the judgement and salvation of the nations as a figure of the final judgement (cf. Isaiah 24:1-23), the reality of the coming kingdom of God that would never end (Isaiah 9:6-7), the reality of a future physical resurrection from the dead (Job 17:13-16; 19:25-2; Psalm 16:10;

49:15; Hosea 13:14; Isaiah 25:6-8; 26:19) and the coming of a new universe and new earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22-23).

The Jewish apocalypses viewed the great eschatological salvation in transcendental and universal terms. It would be an event that would surpass all other events in the salvation history of God's people in the past. It would be nothing less than a new creation, in which all forms of evil and suffering would be excluded. It is a characteristic of the authors of apocalyptic literature that they believed that even death would be conquered in the form of a physical resurrection of the dead and a spiritual immortality. *The eschatological period would be the kingdom of God that would forever replace all earthly empires.*

The expectation with regard to the fate of the Gentile nations varies. The oppressors of God's people would be condemned. But often the righteous Gentiles would share in the salvation of the righteous in Israel, while the unrighteous in Israel would be condemned together with the unrighteous Gentiles. This *universalism* (inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan) in the end-time expectation was the result of Israel's involvement in the history of the world and the realisation of the authors of apocalyptic literature that the problem of sin and evil is universal.

### **11. The Jewish apocalypse and the later dualism in history**

*The negative experience of sin and evil in the present world history in which the apocalyptic literature came into existence in contrast to the transcendental final future salvation later led to a dualism in history. In this dualism in history the apocalypses differentiated between this present age and the following future age that consisted of the new creation.* This dualism only fully developed later. The terminology used with regard to these two stages or phases only appears in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. when it was also found in the New Testament (Luke 17:20-21 and Luke 13:28-29). The dualism never became an absolute dualism, because in the midst of the dominant world empires God kept exercising his sovereign control over them. The new creation is viewed as a renewal of this present world (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13).

The apocalyptic dualism is most fixed in the apocalyptic books of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra (both 70 - 140 A.D.) in which deep pessimism dominates and the inclination to describe the history of this world in negative terms. The next step towards the cosmic dualism in Gnostic literature was not great.

### **12. The resemblances between the Jewish apocalypses and the New Testament**

The relationship between the Jewish apocalyptic literature and the New Testament has often been debated. The following New Testament passages show a strong resemblance to Jewish apocalyptic literature in form and in content: Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and the book of Revelation. They show that the apocalyptic thought of Jesus and the early Church spoke about the same issues as the Jewish apocalypses, especially concepts as: *the resurrection, the two (present and future) ages, the Son of Man, the tribulation period and the kingdom of God.*

### **13. The differences between the Jewish apocalypses and the New Testament**

The pure orientation of Jewish apocalyptic literature towards the future is changed in the New Testament by the conviction that *the eschatological fulfilment had already begun in the historical event of the first coming of Jesus Christ.* Christians live between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. In this way the inclination of Jewish apocalyptic literature to evaluate the history of the world negatively is superseded by *the conviction that God's salvation history had already begun in the present history of the world!*

Moreover, the apocalyptic thought in the New Testament is concentrated around Jesus Christ. God's decisive act of eschatological salvation had already taken place in the historic event of the first coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the focus of the future hope and expectation of Christians. For the writers of the New Testament books *apocalyptic thought was mainly a means to explain the importance of Jesus Christ for the final destination of this present world.*

In this way the apocalyptic thought in the New Testament became again a new form of prophetic revelation. *The apocalyptic thought of the New Testament is not written under a pseudonym and it also does not take its point of departure somewhere in the past.* While the Jewish apocalypses write under a pseudonym and only

about the far future, the apostle John writes under his own name and about the near future (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:10).

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### **PART 3. A SUMMARY OF JEWISH APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE**

Jewish apocalyptic literature reveals their view of the end of the world and the coming of God's kingdom.

*The division of the eschatological future in two periods: a temporary fixed period (later the millennium) and a permanent eternal period (the eternal kingdom of God) probably has its origin in Jewish apocalyptic literature after the close of the Hebrew Old Testament Canon, but before the beginning of the Christian era (and the New Testament).*

#### ***THE FOLLOWING BOOKS WERE WRITTEN BEFORE THE NEW TESTAMENT***

##### **1. The book of 1 Enoch (Ethiopian Enoch)<sup>2</sup> (end 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.).**

a. In Genesis 5:24 two important things are written about Enoch: "Enoch walked with God"; "then he was no more, because God took him away" (from the earth so that he did not experience death, Hebrews 11:5).

b. In the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament Enoch became a popular figure and several *legends* about him came into existence. It is possible that the legend about Enoch was extended during the Babylonian exile (587-538 B.C.) to counter-balance the Babylonian legends of the period before the flood. This Enoch lived long before the flood and he became the first man who received heavenly revelations about the mysteries of the universe. He became the inventor of mathematics, writing and astrology. And allegedly he recorded his revelations and delivered them to be passed on to later generations.

c. In the early traditions (from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) especially Enoch's scientific knowledge is prominent: teachings in astronomy, cosmology and meteorology. Enoch gained this knowledge by travelling with angels as guides through the universe. Enoch also invented the sun-calendar, which was also used in the Qumran fellowship. Enoch was God's prophet against the fallen angels.

d. Later traditions (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) lay the emphasis on Enoch's ethical teachings and especially on his apocalyptic revelations about the course of the history of the world until the final judgement!

e. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. or in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. these legendary materials were compiled into the book of Enoch. The book of Enoch is very important to understand the views of the Jews at that time. The book has been preserved only in an Ethiopian translation, some parts in Greek and some fragments in Hebrew (Qumran).

f. The book 1 Enoch is actually a compendium of writings that originated between the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and consists of five books:

- First. Book of watchmen (1 Enoch 1-36) (middle 3<sup>rd</sup> century to 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.); (1 Enoch 6-19 is also 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) A vision of Enoch about the future judgement of especially fallen angels.
- Second. Parables (Similitudes) (1 Enoch 37-71) (not earlier than 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. A Jewish product). Three parables about the judgement of the world and assurance of salvation for those who hope in the Messiah. The emphasis lies on the *transcendental, supernatural eschatology* without exclusion of earthly national aspects. Enoch is even identified with the Messianic Son of Man (71:14-17).
- Third. Book of astronomy (1 Enoch 72-82) (perhaps 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)
- Fourth. Book of dreams (1 Enoch 83- 90) (165/164 B.C.)  
A vision about the flood. A second vision about the history of the world up to the Messianic era.
- Fifth. Letter of Enoch (1 Enoch 91-105) (end 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) The most important part is the Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 91,93) in which the history of the world is divided into 10 weeks of which the last 3 weeks are apocalyptic: *the 8<sup>th</sup> week represents the Messianic period; the 9<sup>th</sup> and*

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<sup>2</sup> Christelijke Encyclopaedie, Vol 2, Prof. Dr. G. Ch. Aalders, p 551; New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, p 333, 997

*10<sup>th</sup> week bring the final judgement; and the new creation begins at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> week!*  
- Book of Giants (end 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.), fragments found in Qumran, were probably the original 5<sup>th</sup> book, but were replaced by the Similitudes.

g. The New Testament book of Jude, verse 14-15, is a quotation from 1 Enoch. Many early Christian apocalyptic writings expected that Enoch would return together with Elijah to the earth before the end of history.

## **2. The Book of Jubilees**<sup>3</sup> (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.).

a. A Jewish book from the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The book exists completely in the Ethiopian language, partly in Latin and has fragments in Hebrew. It has been written late in 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in a proto-Essene (Pharisaic, nationalistic) circle with a view to counter the advance of Hellenism (Greek culture). The book was very popular in Qumran, because it glorified the Law and used the sun calendar.

b. The Book of Jubilees is a midrash (explanation in the form of a story) of the book of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus. It provided a chronology to biblical history from creation to the inauguration of the Passover in terms of jubilee years – a jubilee is a period of 49 years – each divided into 7 weeks of years and each year a sun-year of 364 days.

c. The Book of Jubilees claims to be a revelation given to Moses on Mt. Sinai and the intention was to maintain the eternal validity of the Law. The Book of Jubilees adds material to that of the Bible: legends about the patriarchs; eschatological prophecies and juridical material that explain the Law very strictly in opposition to Hellenic influences. The Book of Jubilees demanded obedience to the observance of the Sabbath and circumcision.

d. The Book of Jubilees glorifies the law that Israel had been set apart from the Gentiles. The use of the sun-calendar guaranteed the correct celebration of the Jewish festivals.

e. *Sometimes the elements of the temporary kingdom and eternal kingdom lay irreconcilably next to each other. Sometimes these two visions about the kingdom of God has the semblance of coherence by emphasising one vision while the other vision is obscured without being explicitly refuted.*

## **3. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs**<sup>4</sup> (end 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.)

The writer is a Pharisee in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C. and the writing received several later additions from Jews and Christians. That is why certain parts resemble the New Testament teachings of Jesus (humility, brotherly love, and giving to the poor). The book is probably the best moral teaching from Judaism in the period before Christ.

The book is based on Genesis 49. All twelve sons of Jacob pass their instructions on to their descendents and the teachings have a high moral standard. Besides Joseph and Issachar they all urge their descendents to review their own personal failures.

The emphasis lies on *the transcendental, supernatural eschatology* without exclusion of the earthly national aspects.

## **4. The Testament of Moses and the Ascension of Moses**<sup>5</sup> (165 B.C. or early 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.)

This book was probably written by a supporter of the Essenes. In this testament Moses gives Joshua an apocalyptic overview of Israel's history from the Israel's entrance into Canaan until the End of time. Characteristic is the absence of hope in the coming Messiah. The eschatological drama evolves here on earth under temporary circumstances and is concentrated around Israel.

About the ascension of Moses we have no existing document except for the reference in Jude verse 9.

<sup>3</sup> Christelijke Encyclopaedie, Vol 3, Prof. Dr. F. W. Grosheide, p. 228; New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, p 625, 996

<sup>4</sup> New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, Pseudepigrapha, p 996

<sup>5</sup> New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, Pseudepigrapha, p 997

## **5. The Psalms of Solomon**<sup>6</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.).

The book consists of 18 songs that were originally written in Hebrew and was used in the liturgy of the synagogue. We only know them in the Greek language. They have been added to several biblical texts in the Greek language. They are probably from the time of Pompeus (63-48 B.C.) who toppled the Hasmonean dynasty. The songs give a clear insight into the party strife of those days and are an important source for our knowledge of the Pharisees and their Messianic expectation at that time. The poets belong to the circle of the Pharisees and they conducted their controversy against the Sadducees.

Besides Psalm 17 the Messiah is not mentioned, but the Messianic kingdom is mentioned often. In Psalm 17 and 18 an important differentiation was made between the temporary Messianic kingdom and the final kingdom.

### ***THE FOLLOWING BOOKS WERE WRITTEN AFTER THE NEW TESTAMENT!***

## **6. The book 2 Enoch (Slavonic Enoch or the Secrets of Enoch)**<sup>7</sup> (end 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.)

A late Christian writing that included Jewish material. It contains the journey of Enoch through the 7 heavens, revelations to Enoch about the creation and the history of mankind and his exhortations to his children. It describes the periods of the world, *among other the Messianic kingdom. The transcendental vision dominates. The emphasis is on the transcendental, supernatural eschatology without exclusion of the earthly national aspects. Yet, for the first time the Messianic kingdom is limited to 1000 years!*

## **7. The Apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra or 2 Esdras in the Vulgata)**<sup>8</sup> (70 - 140 A.D)

a. This was originally a Jewish apocalypse. Chapter 4 to 14 exists in Latin. The other chapters are later additions by Christian writers. It contains visions that were given to Ezra in Babylon about the problem of Israel's suffering and especially Israel's suffering after 70 A.D.

b. The original book contained 7 visions.

- First vision (3:1 - 5:19). The seer demands an explanation. Why does Zion suffer if her sins are not greater than those of her oppressor? The angel Uriel answers that the reason cannot be understood, but that soon a period of salvation would commence.
- Second vision (5:20 - 6:34). Why is Israel, God's chosen people, delivered up to the Gentiles? The reply is still that it cannot be understood. *This present age will be preceded by the signs of the end-time, conversion and salvation, and will be followed by the next without any interval.*
- Third vision (6:35 - 9:25). Why do the Jews not possess the earth? The answer is that *the Jews will possess the earth in the coming age!* The number of elect is small. Also other end-time events are treated.
- Fourth vision (9:26 - 10:59). A wailing woman relates her misery and is transformed into a beautiful city - Jerusalem.
- Fifth vision (10:60 - 12:51). The angel explains that the eagle with 3 heads and 12 wings – the symbol of Rome – is the fourth beast of the book of Daniel 7. The Messiah would take the place of this kingdom. This vision is dated in the time of Caesar Domitian (81-96 A.D.)
- Sixth vision (13:1-58). A man rises up out of the sea and destroys an unruly crowd. This is an adaptation of the vision of the Son of Man in Daniel 7.
- Seventh vision (14). Ezra restores the holy books of the Jews, namely, the 24 canonical books of the Old Testament and 70 other esoteric and apocalyptic works.

c. The story is characterised by an awareness of hopelessness softened by a vague belief in a coming golden age. *The Messianic kingdom in which Christ rules would last 400 years. Then Christ and his people would die. This would be followed by the resurrection from the dead and the final judgement (4 Ezra 7:28ff).* But in another place it is said that the rule of the Messiah would last till the end of the world and the day of judgement (*4 Ezra 12:34*).

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<sup>6</sup> Christelijke Encyclopaedie, Vol 4, Prof. Dr. A. Noordzij, p 636; New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, Pseudepigrapha, p 996

<sup>7</sup> New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, Pseudepigrapha, p 997

<sup>8</sup> New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, Pseudepigrapha, p 997

## **8. The Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Baruch or Syrian Baruch)**<sup>9</sup> (70 - 140 A.D)

This apocalypse resembles the Apocalypse of Ezra and is maybe an imitation copy of it. The present time is an unbroken period of despair symbolised by a dark mass of water. But the coming Messiah, symbolised by lightning, would bring comfort. Amidst the pessimism after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. there exists a vague hope until *the Messianic kingdom of peace begins (chapter 29). When the period of the coming Messiah has been completed he would return to heaven (chapter 30:1). That would be the sign for the resurrection of believers who died while they hoped on the Messiah. The Messianic age is temporary and passes by before what is eternal and permanent comes (chapter 74:2).*

But in another place it says that the rule of the Messiah would be for ever (*chapter 41:3*).

## **9. The Jewish Sibylline Oracles**<sup>10</sup> (3-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).

a. This is apocalyptic material in the same form as the Gentile oracles of the Sibylline. A 'sibyl' is an old Greek name for a woman, who according to people had received the gift of prophecy or prediction from the gods. It is thought that there were twelve sibyls who appeared in different periods of time and in different countries. According to the legend the Cumaic Sibyl came from the east to Cumae in Italy and offered for sale nine books with predictions to the Roman king Tarquinius Superbus. Twice the king regarded the price too high and the Sibyl twice burned three books. Then the king paid the full price for the remaining three books. The books were carefully kept by the college of priests in Rome and were only consulted at command of the state. In 83 B.C. the collection was burned. Delegates fetched new books from Asia Minor and after that the collection kept growing for centuries.

b. The fourteen Books Chresmoi Sibylliakoi were probably drawn up by Alexandrian Jews and Christians and were collected by a Christian in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The books contain a mixture of Jewish, Christian and heathen thought that have no historic or literary value. *Some church fathers seem to have regarded them as genuine.*

- Book 3-5 contains Jewish propaganda about the judgement of the Gentile nations.
- Book 3 contains an overview of the history from Solomon (10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) until *Antiochus Epiphanus and his successors (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.). The Jews would draw advantage from the coming of the Messiah.* The Greeks were called to end their idolatry. The Sibyl is actually a descendent of Noah.

c. *The kingdom of the Messiah would be attacked and destroyed by the nations that had gathered together. Then these nations would be destroyed and the kingdom of God would begin (3<sup>rd</sup> book verses 652-660).*

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## **PART 4. A SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF MODERN DISPENSATIONAL DOCTRINE**

*The division of biblical history into different periods has its origin in the Jewish apocalypses of especially the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. That division was adopted by some Christians.*

*The modern dispensational doctrine builds further on the foundation of Jewish apocalyptic literature. Dispensationalism divides God's history of salvation into different 'dispensations' (periods in which God deals with man in completely different ways).*

### **1. The book 1 Enoch (Ethiopian Enoch)** (end 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.).

This is a Jewish apocalypse. In the Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 91,93) *the history of the world is divided into ten weeks.* The last three weeks are apocalyptic. The 8<sup>th</sup> week represents the Messianic period. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> week bring the final judgement. The end of the 10<sup>th</sup> week relates *the beginning of the new creation!*

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<sup>9</sup> New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, Pseudepigrapha, p 997

<sup>10</sup> Christelijke Encyclopaedie, Vol 5, Ds. C. Lindeboom, p. 170; New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press, 1994, Pseudepigrapha, p 998

## **2. The Apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra or 2 Esdras in the Vulgate)** (70 - 140 A.D)

This is a Jewish apocalypse with later additions by Christian writers. *The Messianic kingdom in which Christ rules would last 400 years. Then Christ and his people would die. This would be followed by the resurrection from the dead and the final judgement (4 Ezra 7:28ff).*

But in another place it is said that the rule of the Messiah would last till the end of the world and the day of judgement (4 Ezra 12:34).

## **3. The Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Baruch or Syrian Baruch)** (70 - 140 A.D)

This is a Jewish apocalypse. It resembles the Apocalypse of Ezra and is maybe an imitation copy of it. The present time is an unbroken period of despair symbolised by a dark mass of water. But *the coming Messiah, symbolised by lightning, would bring comfort. Amidst the pessimism after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. there exists a vague hope until the Messianic kingdom of peace begins (chapter 29). When the period of the coming Messiah has been completed he would return to heaven (chapter 30:1). That would be the sign for the resurrection of believers who died while they hoped on the Messiah. The Messianic age is temporary and passes by before what is eternal and permanent comes (chapter 74:2).*

But in another place it says that the rule of the Messiah would be for ever (chapter 41:3).

## **4. The book 2 Enoch (Slavonic Enoch or the Secrets of Enoch)** (end 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.)

A late Christian writing that included Jewish material. It describes the periods of the world, *among other the Messianic kingdom. The emphasis is on the transcendental, supernatural eschatology without exclusion of the earthly national aspects. For the first time the Messianic kingdom is limited to 1000 years* (cf. Revelation 20:1-7)!

## **5. Early Christians** (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.)

Especially during the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries when Christians were persecuted for their faith, there were many who held chiliastic beliefs. They expected the imminent return of Christ to be followed by a millennial kingdom. Nevertheless, when Caesar Constantine stopped the persecution with his edict of Milan (313) chiliasm waned.

Walvoord lists (the first letter of) Clement (about 95), Ignatius (thrown to wild animals in 107), (the letter of) Barnabas (70-100), Papias (70-155), (the shepherd of) Hermas (about 150) and Polycarp (burned at the stake in 166) as premillennialists of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.; and Justin Martyr (executed 165), Irenaeus (130-200) and Tertullian (190-216) as premillennialists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.; and Cyprian (200-258) as a premillennialist of the third century A.D. However, Walvoord only quotes Justin Martyr as a proof, "But I and whatsoever Christians are orthodox in all things do know that there is a resurrection of the flesh, and a thousand years in the city of Jerusalem, built, adorned and enlarged, according as Ezekiel, Isaiah and other prophets have promised, For Isaiah saith of this thousand years (ch. 65:17), 'Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered' ...." Walvoord lists Augustine (354-430) as the first amillennialist.

## **6. The Jewish Sibylline Oracles** (3-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).

These books contain a mixture of Jewish, Christian and heathen thought. *Some church fathers seem to have regarded them as genuine. The kingdom of the Messiah would be attacked and destroyed by the nations that had gathered together. Then these nations would be destroyed and the kingdom of God would begin* (3<sup>rd</sup> book verses 652-660) (cf. Revelation 20:7-10).

## **7. Pope Gregory I the Great** (540-604 A.D.)

He explains the parable of the workers in the vineyard by *allegorising* the parable (Matthew 20:1-16). The vineyard represents the Church from the creation of the world to the second coming of Christ (e.g. the whole biblical history). The landowner represents God. The workers represent teachers throughout biblical history.

Pope Gregory I divides biblical history in 5 parts:

- First from Adam to Noah
- Second from Noah to Abraham
- Third from Abraham to Moses
- Fourth from Moses to Christ

The workers of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> hour represent Jews who cared for the vineyard from the creation to Christ's first coming (e.g. the whole Old Testament period).

- Fifth from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming.

The 11<sup>th</sup> hour represents the period between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming (e.g. the whole New Testament period).

The workers of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour represent the apostles or, in another exposition, the non-Jews.

## 8. French and English theologians (150 years before Darby)

A long time before J. N. Darby divided biblical history in 7 parts, Pierre Poiret also divided God's history of salvation in the Bible in different periods of time. Other theologians followed him.

Pierre Poiret 1646-1719	John Edwards 1639-1716	Isaac Watts 1674-1748	John N. Darby 1800-1882	J. H. Brookes 1830-1897	J. M. Gray 1851-1935 (published 1901)	C. I. Scofield 1843-1921 (published 1909)
Creation to the flood (infancy)	Innocent period before fall	Innocent period	1. Paradise state to the flood	1. Eden period	1. Eden period	1. Innocent period before the fall
	Adam period before flood	Adam period after fall		2. Before the flood	2. Before the flood	2. Conscience after the fall
The flood to Moses (childhood)	Noah period	Noah period	2. Noah	3. Patriarch period	3. Patriarch period	3. Human government (Noah)
	Abraham period	Abraham period	3. Abraham			4. Promise (Abraham)
Moses to prophets (adolescence)	Moses period	Moses period	4. <u>Israel</u> – under the law, priests and kings	4. Moses period	4. Moses period	5. Law ( <u>Israel</u> )
Prophets to Christ (youth)						
(manhood + old age)	Christian period	Christian period	5. <u>Gentiles</u>	5. Messianic period	5. Church period	6. Grace ( <u>Church</u> )
			6. Spirit	6. Holy Spirit		
			7. <u>Millennium</u>	7. Millennium		
(renovation of all things)					7. Fulness of times 8. Eternity	

## 9. The father of dispensational doctrine is John N. Darby (1800-1882).

All Christians divide God's salvation history into parts e.g.: the creation to the fall, the fall to Christ's first coming, Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming and the eternal state. However, the radical division between Israel and the Church originated in 1827 with John N. Darby. He is the father of dispensationalism!

His meditation on Isaiah 32:15-20 and Ephesians 2:4-7 led him to conclude that the *earthly* blessings are for *Israel* and the *heavenly* blessings are for *the Church*. He concluded that God has two peoples: an earthly people (the Jews) and a heavenly people (the Christians) and that these two peoples remain eternally separated in God's actions.

[**Remark.** It is incomprehensible that Darby did not explain Ephesians 2:4-7 in the context of Ephesians 2:11-22 and 3:2-6!]

## 10. The prophetic conferences in the USA (19<sup>th</sup> century).

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century so-called prophetic conferences were organised in the USA, where Christians from various denominations tried to explain the Old Testament prophecies. Against the liberal theologians in the USA who tried to *spiritualise* the Bible, the fundamentalists in the USA posed that *the Bible can only be explained or interpreted literally!* Many Americans concluded that *when you interpret God's promises to Israel literally, the most of these promises have not yet been fulfilled and therefore have to be fulfilled somewhere in the future.* John Darby had great influence on these prophetic conferences in the USA.

[**Remark.** The Bible must not be exclusively spiritualised as the liberals do or exclusively literalised as the fundamentalists do! The Bible must be interpreted according to its own rules: sometimes literally and sometimes not, but always in the light of the New Testament revelation!]

## 11. C. I. Scofield (1843-1921).

Finally dispensationalism spread widely across the USA through Scofield and the Scofield Reference Bible (1909), which contains extensive notes including the dispensationalism of Darby.

Scofield also wrote a booklet, "Rightly *Dividing* the Word of Truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) 'being ten outline studies of the more important *divisions* of Scripture)(date unknown). Scofield defended God's two programmes: *God's programme with Israel and God's programme with the Church. In this way the Bible and its contents were radically divided in:*

- a. Jew and Gentile, or Israel and the Church
- b. Seven dispensations in biblical history
- c. Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming that points to the beginning of two separated dispensations
- d. Two physical resurrections (Revelation 20:4-6): the first physical resurrection is of the believers at the so-called rapture of the Church (Christ's first return)(1 Thessalonians 4:16) and the second physical resurrection is of the unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15) after the millennial kingdom
- e. Five judgements, of which three are final judgements:
  - the final judgement of believers in the air, which leads to blessing. This would take place at the rapture of the Church at Christ's first return. Christ's 'coming' (Greek: parousia) would be *invisible* for unbelievers (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Corinthians 5:10)
  - the final judgement of the non-Jewish nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat on the earth (Joel 3:2; Matthew 25:31-46) with respect to how they had treated 'the brothers of Christ' (the Jews). This would take place at Christ's second return. Christ's 'revelation' (Greek: apocalypsis) would be *visible* for all people (2 Thessalonians 1:7)
  - the final judgement of non-believers on the earth (Revelation 21:11-15), which would lead to damnation. This would take place after the millennial kingdom.

## 12. Clarence Larkin

In his book "The Greatest Book on Dispensational Truth in the World" (1918, enlarged and revised, 1920) Larkin says that there are five 'ages' and seven 'dispensations'. Larkin cannot adequately explain the relationship between these two, especially with regard to what is 'before time', 'in time' and 'after time'. Inside time there are 3 ages and 7 dispensations. An 'age' is a period of time between two physical changes in the surface of the earth. The first and the last age are outside time:

- a. The Alpha Ages or the creative ages, 'before time' (Genesis 1:1a). They contain the original creation of the earth (Genesis 1:1-2), which later fell into chaos (Isaiah 45:18; Jeremiah 4:23-26) through the fall of Satan (Isaiah 14:12-14). And they contain the later re-creation of the present earth (Genesis 1:3-31), when 'time' was created (Genesis 1:14) and contain the so-called 1<sup>st</sup> dispensation.

[**Remarks.**

Genesis 1:2 does not imply that the earth was originally created, existed for a long time and then "became empty", e.g. fell into chaos. It rather teaches that the one and only creation of the earth was not yet completed (Genesis 2:1): it was still formless, empty and in a fluid state.

Isaiah 45:18 says that God was the Creator and he had not created the earth in order to become 'empty' again by the military actions of Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1)

Jeremiah 4:23-26 is a figurative description of the earth after the military actions of Nebuchadnezzar]

b. The age before the flood (Antediluvian), 'in time', stretching from the fall of Adam and Eve to the flood (Genesis 7:11; 2 Peter 3:5-6). It contains the so-called 2<sup>nd</sup> dispensation.

c. The present age, 'in time', stretching from the flood to Christ's second return (Zachariah 14:4,10; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Isaiah 65:20). It contains the so-called 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> dispensations.

[**Remark.** Zechariah 14:1-16, Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Isaiah 65:17-25 all prophesy in symbolic terms the one and only second coming of Christ on the day of the Lord. At his second coming together with all his angels Christ will conquer his enemies at the final battle, change the present physical creation into the new heaven and new earth, inhabit the New Jerusalem for ever, bring in the believers from all the nations together with their wealth, and make a permanent end to the killing of wild animals and people (cf. Revelation 21:1 – 22:5).]

d. The Age of ages, 'inside time'. It contains 2 parts: the millennial kingdom or the so-called 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation which is *still imperfect* (Revelation 20:1-15), and the new heaven and new earth which would be *perfect* (Revelation 21:1-22:5; 2 Peter 3:7,10,12,13; Ephesians 1:10).

e. The Omega Ages or Ages of the Ages, 'after time'. It begins when Christ transfers the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28).

[**Remark.** 1 Corinthians 15:28 does not imply that God the Son will subject himself to God the Father. Paul calls Christ by his highest name and refers not to his Person, but to his Office: his work as Mediator. After Christ will have completed his work as Mediator, which consists of saving and protecting his people and of conquering and judging the ungodly, he will terminate this particular dominion at the absolute end of history, at his second coming. He will subject his office as Mediator between God and man, but not his Kingship. This subjection of his office as Mediator does not conflict with the teaching about Christ's eternal Kingship (1 Chronicles 17:14; Isaiah 9:7; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 11:15)!]

### 13. Dallas Theological Seminary

One of the goals of Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) was to spread the dispensational theories as widely as possible. Its first two presidents were Lewis Sperry Chafer and John F. Walvoord. Other known teachers from DTS are Charles C. Ryrie and J. Dwight Pentecost. Also Hal Lindsey was a student at DTS. All their books promote dispensationalism!

[**Remark.** We will show below that dispensationalism cannot stand the test of the Bible as a whole!]

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## **PART 5. THE DOCTRINE OF DISPENSATIONS**

The doctrine of dispensations is a theology of contradistinctions, even a theology of contradictions. It is a theology about the failures of dispensations.

### 1. Definition of 'a dispensation' in dispensationalism

a. C. I. Scofield in the Scofield Reference Bible (1909) writes, "A dispensation is *a period of time* in which man is tested with regard to his obedience to a specific revelation of God's will." (The editor of the Scofield Bible, p 5).

b. Clarence Larkin in *The Greatest Book on Dispensational Truth in the World* (1920) writes, "A dispensation is *a moral or conditional test period* in the history of the world". In every dispensation God rules man in a different way, by another administration."

c. Charles C. Ryrie in “Dispensationalism Today” (Moody Press, 1965, p 31-32) writes, “ A dispensation is the *administration* of the human race or any part of it (e.g. Israel), *at any given time*.” “A dispensation is God’s *distinctive method of governing* mankind or a group of men *during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure, and judgement*. From the divine standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life, or a responsibility for managing God’s affairs in his house. From the historical standpoint, it is *a stage in the progress of revelation*”. Thus, *a dispensation is a historical period of time in which God has a different plan of dealing with people!*

He argues that the Bible is a unity in God’s purpose. God’s purpose is to run the world as his household. But God’s purpose is unfolded in distinguishable stages of revelation when God introduces *new responsibilities* for which man is responsible. These stages are economies, stewardships, or dispensations in the unfolding of God’s purpose. Dispensationalism recognizes both the unity of God’s purpose and the diversity in the unfolding of it.

**[Remarks.**

Dispensationalism *divides* the Bible into seven dispensations. This is *a very serious splitting up of the unity of the Bible*: splitting up God’s revelation in seven time-periods, splitting up God’s plan in seven different plans with people, splitting up God’s message in different messages of salvation and judgement, splitting up God’s people (Israel and the Church) – they never become a unity, splitting up Christ’s second coming in two phases (first and second return), splitting up the resurrection from the dead (the first and the second resurrection) and splitting up the final judgement day into several phases that lasts more than a 1000 years.

Covenant theology *distinguishes* (not divides) two periods in God’s salvation history: the Old Testament is *prophecy, promise or preparation* and the New Testament is *the fulfilment!* The Old Testament deals with *the ‘shadows’ of God’s plan* and the New Testament deals with *the realities of that plan*.

The division of the Bible into dispensations, each with another test of responsibility, actually leads to *a diversity of religious systems in different periods of human history in the Bible*. Dispensationalists believe that during the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation Israel was challenged to be justified (saved) by keeping the law, but during the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation Christians are challenged to be justified (saved) by grace through faith. Thus Romans 3:28, “Man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” did not apply to the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation, but only to the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation! Such diversity of household administrations or stewardships within salvation history destroys the unity of the Bible and the unity of its message.

The division of the Bible into dispensations *forces a literal method of interpretation onto the Bible that leads to the multiplication of the number of contradistinctions*. By enforcing the so-called removal of the Church from the earth at the end of the so-called 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation and by enforcing a literal millennial kingdom on earth, the so-called future 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation, between Christ’s second coming and the final judgement, dispensationalism multiplies the number of contradistinctions:

- two outpourings of the Holy Spirit: *the first* about 2000 years ago at Pentecost (Acts chapter 2), which gave the New Testament Christians a place in Christ *in heaven* together with many *heavenly blessings* (Ephesians 2:4-7). And *the second* in the future on Israel (Isaiah 32:15-20) which would give Israel many *earthly blessings*.
- two people of God (Israel and the Church) instead of one (believers in the God of the Bible)
- two ways of being justified (by keeping the law and by grace) instead of one (by grace through faith without works of the law)
- two second comings (the coming and the revelation, separated by 7 or 3½ years) both a long time before the end of world history instead of one second coming at the end of world history
- several physical resurrections (of Christians, of the tribulation saints and of the wicked) separated from one another up to 1000 years instead of one universal physical resurrection at the end of world history
- several final judgements (of Christians, of the Gentile nations, of Jews and of the wicked) separated from one another up to 1000 years instead of one universal final judgement day at the end of world history.

Such a multiplication of crucial biblical events destroys the unity of the Bible!]

## 2. The correct understanding of the Greek word ‘oikonomia’

a. The word ‘oikonomia’<sup>11</sup> is never used in the Bible in the sense of ‘a dispensation’ – a period of time in God’s salvation history that serves as a test that is failed and judged, as Ryrie suggests. The word is never used of a *period of time* that should be kept distinct from another period of time in the Bible. The word is also never used as a particular administration in a specific distinguishable period of human history.

b. The noun ‘oikonomos’<sup>12</sup> (1 Corinthians 4:2) means a manager, administrator, *steward* or economist, a person to whom God entrusts his plan or work’. The apostles were *stewards* of God’s mysteries (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). The elders are *stewards* (managers) of God’s congregation (Titus 1:7). The Christians are *stewards* of God’s manifold grace (1 Peter 4:10).

c. The noun ‘oikonomia’<sup>13</sup> (Ephesians 3:2) means ‘the management, the administration, *the stewardship*, the entrusted task, the commission, the office, the execution or accomplishment’ of a steward, a person with a commission.

It is not easy to differentiate sharply between *the office* (steward, manager)(Luke 16:3) and *the task or commission* associated with the office (stewardship, management)(Luke 16:2) or to be a steward (manager)(Luke 16:2). The apostle Paul (apostle = an office) was entrusted with a task (a commission) to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, e.g. to make God’s mystery known to them, namely, that through the preaching of the gospel the Gentile believers share on an equal basis with Jewish believers in God’s inheritance (1 Corinthians 9:16-17; Ephesians 3:2-6; Colossians 1:25-26).

Note that the word ‘oikonomia’ is precisely used together with ‘grace’ and with ‘the unity on an equal basis’! The Gentiles in the New Testament Church who believe in Jesus Christ who had come are united on a completely equal basis with the Jews in the Old Testament Israel who had believed in the Messiah that was to come’! The ‘stewardship or commission (oikonomia) of Paul was to make known the revealed truth (mystery) that *God continues and extends his Old Testament believing people, Israel, to include his New Testament believing people, the Church!* Paul’s stewardship or commission was to proclaim *God’s grace* to Jews and to Gentiles! God’s ‘commission’ (task, work) that is by faith (in the truth) is certainly not promoted by teaching false doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3-4).

That is why the word ‘oikonomia’ also means ‘the administration’, ‘the carrying into effect’, ‘the execution’ of God’s plan or purpose (mystery) to bring all things together under Christ in the fullness of time (Ephesians 1:10) or through the Church to make known to the world and its rulers his manifold wisdom (Ephesians 3:9).

## 3. The seven dispensations of Scofield and Larkin

Dispensationalism teaches that a ‘dispensation’ is *a period of time within the history of the world in which people are put to the test with different moral conditions*. On the basis of 2 Timothy 2:15, “rightly dividing the word of truth”, Scofield (1909) and Larkin (1918) divide the Bible into 7 dispensations. In every dispensation God rules and controls people in a different manner, e.g., by a different kind of administration.

The so-called 1<sup>st</sup> dispensation is *the period of innocence*: the Garden of Eden. God rules directly over people.

[**Remark.** Adam and Eve were not innocent, because they knew the commandment of God (Genesis 2:15-17)! The effect of the fall of Adam is not closed. All human beings continue to share in his fall (Romans 5:12-19).]

The so-called 2<sup>nd</sup> dispensation is *the period of conscience*: stretching from the fall into sin to the flood. God rules over people through their consciences.

[**Remark.** The law and conscience were already the principles by which God governed people from the creation onwards (Romans 2:14-16). The days of Noah are not closed. The wickedness of man (Genesis 6:5) remains up to the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:37-41).]

The so-called 3<sup>rd</sup> dispensation is *the period of human governments* (self-government): stretching from the flood and the dispersion of the nations across the earth to the patriarchs.

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<sup>11</sup> οἰκονομία

<sup>12</sup> οἰκονομὸς

<sup>13</sup> οἰκονομία

[**Remark.** The Bible mentions no governments between Noah and Abraham; just nations and cities. Nevertheless human government remains an institution of God until today (Romans 13:1-7).]

The so-called 4<sup>th</sup> dispensation is *the period of God's promise* or *the period of families*: stretching from the patriarchs (including God's covenant promise) to Moses.

[**Remark.** The covenant made with Abraham (Genesis 22:17-18) remains in the period of Moses and the law (Exodus 6:2-8) and in the period of the New Testament Church (Matthew 26:28; Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 8:6-13) right up to Christ's second coming and the new earth (Revelation 21:3).]

The so-called 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation is *the period of the law* or *the period of Israel*: stretching from Moses to Christ's first coming – actually, right up to Pentecost. God rules over people through his law.

[**Remarks.**

The law was never a way to gain righteousness (Romans 3:28; 9:30-33). But the function of the law to know sin, to condemn sin and to drive people to Christ remains until the end (Galatians 3:23-25). Israel was already called 'the Church' (ecclesia) in Judges 20:2, Psalm 22:22 and 2 Chronicles 29:28.

Note that many dispensationalists actually regard the four Gospels as belonging to the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation of Israel and not to the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation of the Church! Why would such dispensationalists then read the Gospels?]

The so-called 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation is *the period of grace* or *the period of the Church*: stretching from the foundation of the Church at Pentecost (the book of Acts) to Christ's first return (the removal of the Church from this earth, called the rapture)(Revelation 4:1)(Larkin) or to Christ's second return (Scofield). This dispensation is *parenthetical, unexpectedly squeezed in the gap* between God's original plan with Israel in the Old Testament and the resumption of God's plan with Israel in the book of Revelation. God rules people through grace. While Scofield arranges the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel under the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation, Larkin arranges it under the 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation.

[**Remarks.**

Grace is not first introduced in the New Testament. Abraham and David were saved by grace through faith (Romans 4:1-8). Salvation by grace through faith was from the beginning the only way people were saved (Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6-14; Hebrews chapter 11).

The rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17) will NOT occur before or in the middle or at the end of the future tribulation period, but at the one and only second coming of Christ, when Christians will be caught up into the air to welcome Christ in order to escort him back to the new earth (1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; cf. Matthew 24:40-41; compare Matthew 25:10 with Revelation 21:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 1:7 to 2:12). That day is called 'the revelation of Christ' (2 Thessalonians 1:7)<sup>14</sup>, 'the coming of Christ' (2 Thessalonians 2:1)<sup>15</sup> and 'the day of the Lord' (2 Thessalonians 2:2)<sup>16</sup> and will happen immediately after the rebellion or apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and the tribulation under the final antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8).]

The so-called 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation is *the period of the millennial (1000 year) kingdom of peace* or *the period of the Holy Spirit free from Satanic influences in the millennial kingdom*: stretching from Christ's first return (Larkin) or from Christ's second return (Scofield) to the renewal of the earth. With Larkin the 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation begins with the removal of the Church from the earth and the return of Israel to the Promised Land. This is immediately followed by the 7 year tribulation period under the antichrist in which God would punish the Jews for their rejection of his original plan and punish the Gentile nations for their unbelief. At Christ's so-called second return the period of tribulation is ended in the battle of Armageddon. Christ binds Satan and inaugurates the millennial kingdom of peace. After 1000 years of Christ's reign on earth Satan is released and defeated in the battle of Gog and Magog. The 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation terminates at the final judgement of the wicked and unbelievers and the renewal of the heaven and the earth.

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<sup>14</sup> ἀποκαλύψις του κυριου Ιησου απ ουρανου μετ αγγελων

<sup>15</sup> παρουσία του κυριου ημων Ιησου Χριστου και ημων επισυναγωγης επ αυτων

<sup>16</sup> η ημερα του κυριου. Hebrew: jom JaHWeH (Joel 1:15).

Larkin also calls the tribulation period ‘the dispensation of judgement’ during which the Church, the Jews and the Gentiles will be judged, not as individuals, but nationally or as bodies. At the beginning of this dispensation all Christians (the Church) will be judged before the judgement seat of Christ for the things done while they lived in their bodies on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10). During this dispensation the Jews will be judged on earth by the terrible oppression of the antichrist for their earlier rejection of God’s kingdom. Their judgement is also known as ‘the time of Jacob’s trouble’ (Jeremiah 30:4-7; Daniel 12:1). At the end of this dispensation the Gentile nations will be judged before Christ’s throne in heavenly glory for the way they had treated Christ’s brothers, the Jews (Matthew 25:31-46). All nations shall be gathered in their representatives before him, and the ‘sheep nations’ shall be rewarded by entrance into the future millennial kingdom, and the ‘goat nations’, as nations, shall be destroyed (Matthew 25:31-46).”<sup>17</sup>

**[Remarks.**

The kingdom of Christ began at his first coming (Matthew 12:28-30; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26; Revelation 12:10-12), is growing all the time (Matthew 13:31-33) and will reach its final perfect phase at his second coming (Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 11:15).

The 1000 years in Revelation 20:1-7 is never called ‘a kingdom on earth’ or ‘a millennial kingdom’ in the Bible. The 1000 years is *a symbol* for the period that begins when Satan is bound (20:2)<sup>18</sup> at the first coming of Christ (cf. Matthew 12:28-30<sup>19</sup>; John 12:31-32; Colossians 1:13; 2:15; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 12:7-12; 20:1-3) and ends at the one and only second coming of Christ, the final battle<sup>20</sup>, the resurrection from the dead, the final judgement day and the renewal of the universe and earth (Revelation 20:7 – 21:1).

In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus addresses ‘the sheep and the goats’ not as ‘nations’, but as individuals! It is individuals that feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the lonely.

All Jews as a nation will not be saved, as dispensationalists believe on the basis of Romans 11:26, because also Jews will be judged for what they as individuals have done (Romans 2:5-6). There is and will be no difference between Jew and Gentile (Romans 10:12)!

#### **4. Dispensationalism is a theology of the failure of God’s administrations**

Dispensationalism wrongly teaches *the failure* of man in all the so-called dispensations.

a. The so-called 4<sup>th</sup> dispensation is the period of God’s promise.

Dispensationalists teach that God’s 4<sup>th</sup> plan (or moral test in running his household in the world) was to bless Abraham and his seed (the Jews) unconditionally and by giving them the land of Palestine for ever. *God’s plan (the 4<sup>th</sup> dispensation) failed* when the Jews under Moses chose to subject themselves freely under the law to obey the law.

**[Remarks.**

Gods covenant promise to Abraham and his descendents was *never unconditional*, because they could break the covenant and subsequently be cut off from God’s people (Genesis 17:14). God gave promises, but *also threats* (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28-29; Jeremiah 18:5-12)! Everyone that disobeyed God’s covenant would receive God’s curses.

The land was ‘an everlasting possession’ to Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 17:8). However, this promise was not literally fulfilled, because Israel did not possess the land during their sojourn in Egypt (1877 - 1447 B.C.)(430 years). They did not possess the land during their exile in Babylon (586 - 538 B.C.)(49 years). And they did not possess the land after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.

The word ‘everlasting’<sup>21</sup> must be interpreted in its immediate context. The word can have an absolute meaning: ‘forever’, e.g. “the LORD reigns forever” (Psalm 9:7). The word can have idiomatic meaning: ‘continuous for the whole time of a particular period’, e.g. “The name of the

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<sup>17</sup> Larkin, Dispensational Truth p. 40

<sup>18</sup> εδησεν < δεω (viaa--3s)

<sup>19</sup> εαν η πρωτον δηση < δεω (vsaa--3s) τον ισχυρον

<sup>20</sup> Note the three parallel sections in Revelation 16:14, 19:19 and 20:8 referring to ‘THE final battle’ (τον πολεμion). The exact same word is used!

<sup>21</sup> Hebrew: olam

LORD will be in the temple as long as the temple exists” (2 Chronicles 7:16). God’s promise to Abraham was fulfilled, but in a much higher sense, e.g. he inherited the whole world (Romans 4:13; Hebrews 11:9-16)!

God’s covenant of grace was ‘an everlasting covenant’ with God’s people (Genesis 17:7). *But because God’s covenant promise is conditional, it was never everlasting with the disobedient part of Israel* (Judges 2:1-2). It is an everlasting covenant, first with the genuine believers from Israel during the Old Testament period, and then with the genuine believers from the Jewish and non-Jewish nations during the New Testament period. For all eternity God will have a people, first on this earth (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10) and later on the new earth (Revelation 21:3)!

The emphasis in God’s covenant promise with Abraham is not put on earthly blessings for him and his descendents in Palestine, but on the coming Messiah (the Seed), in whom all the nations on earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:17-18; Galatians 3:16) and on the heavenly city of God (Hebrews 11:9-10,13-16; Galatians 4:21-31). Abraham believed God’s covenant promise. His faith that focussed on the fulfilment of this promise was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6-9).

God’s covenant promise to Abraham and his descendents never failed, because the believers in the Old Testament period could only receive what was promised (the heavenly Jerusalem that would finally become the New Jerusalem) together with the believers of the New Testament period (Hebrews 11:39-40; cf. 1 Peter 1:12)!

God’s covenant promise to Abraham was never a test from God that failed! God’s covenant promise to Abraham was the official inauguration of God’s promise to all people that God would bless all the nations on earth through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16) is the Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15) and the Seed of Abraham (Genesis 22:18). The Seed came and through him all the nations on earth is being blessed right up to the present moment! *God’s plan cannot and will not fail* (Isaiah 14:24,27; cf. Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9; 21:3,24,26)!

**b. The so-called 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation is the period of God’s law.**

Dispensationalists teach that God’s 5<sup>th</sup> plan (or moral test in running his household in the world) was to justify (save) the Jews by their obedience to the law (Leviticus 18:5). *God’s plan (the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation) failed*, because the Jews did not want to obey the law and could not obey the law!

**[Remarks.**

In the whole Bible only in Genesis 2:15-17 could obedience to God’s law have maintained eternal life for Adam and Eve. This is called God’s covenant of works. After the fall into sin obedience to the law can never again justify (save, give eternal life) to anyone (Galatians 2:16; 3:10-13; 5:4)! No one would qualify (James 2:10)! After the fall into sin only faith in God’s grace could justify (save) a person (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Leviticus 18:5 and Galatians 3:12 say, “The man who does these things will live by them”. This is *the biblical formulation of God’s eternal demand for natural man to be absolutely righteous in order to be justified (saved)*. Because God himself is 100% holy and righteous, he demands that all people must continuously live 100% holy and righteous lives; or that all their transgressions must be 100% punished; or that their sins must be 100% atoned for, that is, 100% forgiven! God will only justify a man whose sins are 100% atoned for and thus 100% forgiven; and who lives a 100% righteous life thereafter!

God poses his absolute demand for righteousness (salvation), not with the purpose that people themselves would try to be justified by obeying the law (Galatians 2:16; 3:10), but with the purpose to lock up all people under the law as prisoners of sin (Galatians 3:22-23; Romans 3:10-12,23). All people in the history of the world must realise that they cannot keep the law and that they need a Saviour! The law makes very clear what ‘sin’ is. The law locks all people up under sin and its consequent doom. After the fall of man into sin the function of the law is to show all natural people their sin (Romans 3:19-20; 1 Timothy 1:9-11) and to lead them to Christ who is the only One that can save them from sin (Acts 4:12; Galatians 3:13-15).

Leviticus 18:5 and Galatians 3:12 is also *the biblical formulation of God’s eternal demand for justified believers how to live a righteous life as a believer (as God’s child)*. After God had

graciously saved his people out of the house of slavery of sin God established the law with the purpose that God's saved people would live according to the guidelines of God's law (Exodus 20:1-17). Thus, throughout the Old Testament period the law (the moral law, the ceremonial law including the animal sacrifices as an atonement for sin and the civil law) functioned as 'a supervisor' that kept God's children in line until the Saviour, Jesus Christ, came and brought complete atonement for their sins by his death on the cross (Galatians 3:15-25) and saved them from the slavery to their sinful nature by his resurrection (Romans 6:5-14).

Also during the whole New Testament period the moral law of God still has the same function: it not only shows non-believers (natural people) their sins, but also is he guideline for believers (born-again people) how to live as God's children (Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10).

After the fall of man God's law was never a test from God that failed! God's law to Moses never replaced God's covenant promise to Abraham (or in the language of dispensationalists: the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation *never replaced* the 4<sup>th</sup> dispensation)! The law to Moses was officially added to the covenant promise in order to prepare God's people to receive the coming Saviour (Galatians 3:17-19)!]

c. The so-called 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation is the period of grace or the Church.

Dispensationalists teach that God's 6<sup>th</sup> plan (or moral test in running his household in the world) was especially designed to save the Gentiles by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Dispensationalists believe that they are now living in the so-called 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation. But they also believe that *God's plan (the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation) would end in failure*, because relatively few Gentiles would become believers and join the Church during this 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation! Dispensationalists believe that the evangelisation of the whole world would only take place during the future 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation, when especially the 144 000 sealed Jews would proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations (Matthew 24:14)!

**[Remarks.**

Dispensationalists generally have a pessimistic view of the present world and this leads to much passivity with regard to evangelisation, mission and influence in the world! However, Jesus Christ teaches that Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). Vigorous Christians are eagerly taking possession of the kingdom of God (Matthew 11:12). Christians are able to do greater works than Jesus did on earth (John 14:12). Christians are proclaiming the gospel of God's grace or God's kingdom everywhere (Acts 5:42; 20:24-25). Christians are turning the world upside down (Acts 5:28; 17:6). The gospel will be proclaimed to all the nations before the one and only second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:14) and that there will be an uncountable large crowd of Christians at Christ's second coming (Romans 11:25; Revelation 7:9)!

God's grace is never a test from God that can fail! God's grace never fails (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Church (not the institute, but the Body of Christ), which is a result of God's grace, is never a test from God that can fail! Jesus Christ promised that his Church will never fail – the gates of hell cannot overcome his Church (Matthew 16:18)! Grace never replaces the law (or in the language of dispensationalists: the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation *never replaced* the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation). Christians are saved by grace through faith without the works of the law just as believers during the Old Testament period were saved by grace (Exodus 20:1-2; Psalm 18:16; 40:1-3). Christians do the works of the law and good works as their new life-style (Ephesians 2:8-10) just as believers during the Old Testament period did the works of the law as their new life-style (Exodus 20:3-17; Psalm 40:8).

Grace never excludes the law, because it needs the law to establish God's demand for righteousness that puts everyone in a state of guilt (Romans 3:19-20). And grace needs the law to show saved people how to live as a believer (Romans 13:8-10).]

d. The so-called 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation is the period of the millennial kingdom.

Dispensationalists teach that God's future 7<sup>th</sup> plan (or moral test in running his household in the world) will be the majestic appearance of Christ by which all Jews would become believers and it will be his visible (1000 year) rule on earth by which many Gentiles would become believers. But although all Jews and very many Gentiles would become believers, also *God's future plan (the 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation) would end in failure*, because Satan would gather the hostile Gentile nations in revolt against Christ and his people (Revelation 20:7-10)!

**[Remarks.**

The revelation in the Bible does not expect any more historical events after the one and only second coming of Christ! The revelation in the Bible calls the period between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming '*the last days*',<sup>22</sup> or '*the end of times*',<sup>23</sup>. These expressions point to a situation after which no more historical events follow! The period of the last days begins with Christ's first coming (1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 1:1) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17). The period of the last days ends on 'the last day'<sup>24</sup> on which Christ's one and only second coming, the one and only resurrection from the dead (John 6:39-40) and the one and only final judgement (John 12:48) will take place. During this whole period of 'the last days' Christians will suffer tribulation (2 Timothy 3:1-5), people will scoff because the second coming is delayed (2 Peter 3:3), many rich people will gather earthly treasures without realising that they are living in the last days (James 5:3) and many antichrists will appear (1 John 2:18)! There is thus after the one and only second coming of Christ and the renewal of the earth no longer any place for further historical events!

There is no biblical warrant to believe that there would be a literal millennial Jewish-nationalist kingdom in the future in which Christ would reign with an iron rod over the old earth and its nations. The expression 'a thousand years' occurs only in Revelation 20:1-7 and is best explained in another way. To maintain that the Old Testament prophecies about Israel find their ultimate fulfilment in the millennium flies into the face of the general New Testament exposition of these Old Testament prophecies. These Old Testament prophecies find their fulfilment in the salvation which Christ had earned on the cross at his first coming (cf. the references to fulfilled prophecies in the Gospel of Matthew and the letters of Paul) and will reach perfection at his second coming. In the Bible the Christian hope is nowhere focussed on a temporary golden future period of 1000 years, but is focussed on the eternal new heaven and new earth at the second coming of Christ (Revelation 21-22).

Some Jewish apocalypses expect a temporary limited messianic kingdom on this earth in the future and after that the permanent eternal kingdom of God. But Jesus and Paul in Matthew 12:28-30; Luke 17:20-21; Colossians 1:13 teach that *the kingdom of God is already a present reality from Christ's first coming onwards!* And Jesus, Paul and John teach that this present kingdom becomes the eternal kingdom at Christ's second coming (cf. Matthew 13:40-43; 21:43; 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28; Revelation 20:1 - 22:6)!

In Revelation 20:1-7 the number '1000 years' is a symbol of a very important, but limited period that begins with the binding of Satan (Revelation 20:1-3) and ends with the great tribulation, Christ's second coming, the resurrection from the dead and the final judgement (Revelation 20:11-15). According to the rest of the Bible Christ bound Satan at his first coming (Matthew 12:28-30; Luke 10:17-20; John 12:31-32; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 12:5-12). *The number '1000' is thus a symbol for the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming.* It is a symbol for 'the last days' that begins with 1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 1:1; Acts 2:17 and ends with John 6:39-40 and John 12:48.

God's government through Jesus Christ in his present kingdom is not a test from God that can fail! The beginning of the kingdom symbolised by the number 1000 years was at Christ's first coming! Immediately after his resurrection from the dead Jesus said that all power in heaven *and on earth* had been given to him (Matthew 28:18)! Immediately after his ascension into heaven he sat on the right hand of God *above everyone and everything and every thinkable power in the present age* (Ephesians 1:20-22). *The present kingdom of Christ is no failure and shall never fail!* At his second coming he will defeat his enemies (the antichristian world, the antichrist, the false prophet, the great prostitute and Satan) in the final battle (Revelation 19:11-21; 20:7-10) and death at the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:25; Revelation 20:11-15). The kingdom of God *never displaced* grace (or in the language of dispensationalists: the future 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation *will never replace* the 6<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> η εσχατος ημερων

<sup>23</sup> η εσχατος των χρονων

<sup>24</sup> εν τη εσχατη ημερα

dispensation), because ‘the gospel of the kingdom’ is exactly the same as ‘the gospel of grace’ (Acts 8:12; 20:24-25; 28:23,31; cf. Colossians 1:12-14; 2:13-15). Salvation by grace through faith without the works of the law is proclaimed throughout the whole New Testament period, which is symbolically the 1000 years.]

## **5. Dispensationalism is a theology of contradistinctions that becomes a theology of contradictions**

### **a. Dispensationalism creates many contradistinctions: especially Israel and the Church.**

The teachers of dispensationalism wrongly create as many as possible irreconcilable contradistinctions in the Bible in order to point out that such contradistinctions can only be resolved in the scheme of two great plans of God (one with Israel and another with the Church) that unfolds in 7 chronological successive dispensations.

*Extremely important in dispensationalism is the contrast between Israel and the Church and this contrast is emphasised as much as possible in their exposition of the Bible. The followers of dispensationalism teach that in the Bible God has two plans: one for Israel and another for the Church; that God has two people: the Jews and the Church; and that God has two distinct final destinations for the Jews (on earth) and for the Church (in heaven).*

**[Remark.** Covenant theology teaches that in the Bible God has *only one plan* of salvation and judgement for all people; and that God has *only one people*, the believers within Israel together with the believers in all the non-Jewish nations in the world; and that God has *only one final destination* for all of them: the new heaven and the new earth.]

Dispensationalists accuse the followers of covenant theology that they are *guilty of reading back (and sometimes forcing back) the teaching of the New Testament into the Old Testament* in order to try to substantiate their doctrine of salvation in the Old Testament.<sup>25</sup>

**[Remark.** The followers of the covenant answer that dispensationalists are guilty of reading (*even forcing*) *their understanding of the Old Testament into the New Testament* in order to try to substantiate their doctrine of Israel and the millennial kingdom. Therefore the study of how the New Testament understands the Old Testament prophecies is decisive!]

Dispensationalists accuse the followers of the covenant that they *replace* God’s people, Israel, with God’s people, the Church.

**[Remarks.**

The followers of the covenant answer that dispensationalists *replace* the Church with Israel and grace with the law in the period covered by the book of Revelation. The doctrine of dispensationalists emphasises the division between believers from Israel and believers from the Gentiles.

Covenant theology teaches that Israel in the sense of God’s Old Testament people is *not abolished or replaced* in the New Testament by the Church. Israel as God’s people in the Old Testament period is *continued and extended on a higher plane* to include believers from the non-Jewish nations in God’s people, the Church! The Church consists of believers from the Jews and believers from the non-Jews (Ephesians 2:1-22; cf. Numbers 15:14-16; Isaiah 56:3-8). The doctrine of the covenant emphasises the unity between believers from Israel and believers from the Gentiles.

The real people of God during the Old Testament are called by different names and these different names are also used for God’s people during the New Testament:

- In the Greek Old Testament God’s people, Israel, is called by the name ‘Church’ (ekklesia)<sup>26</sup> (Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:28) and in the New Testament God’s people, the Church, is called by the name ‘Israel’ (Galatians 6:16; cf. James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; Revelation 7:4).
- In the Old Testament the land of Israel is called by the name of Christ: ‘Immanuel’ (God with us) (Isaiah 8:8; cf. Matthew 1:23) and the Servant of the Lord (Christ) is called by the name of ‘Israel’ (Isaiah 49:3).

<sup>25</sup> C. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p 34

<sup>26</sup> εκκλησια

- In the Old Testament the land of Israel is called 'the Bride, married to the Lord' (Isaiah 62:1-5) and in the New Testament the Church is called 'the Bride of Christ' (Revelation 21:9).
- In the Old Testament the city of Jerusalem is called 'the Lord is there' (Ezekiel 48:35; cf. Revelation 3:12; 21:3) and in the New Testament the Church is called the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23) and Christ promises to be with them always (Matthew 28:20).
- In the Old Testament Israel is called 'a kingdom of priests, a holy nation' (Exodus 19:6) and in the New Testament the Church is called 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people belonging to God' (1 Peter 2:9) or 'a kingdom of priests' (Revelation 1:6).]

b. A presupposition of dispensationalism is that the Bible must be interpreted literally.

By presupposing that the Bible must be interpreted literally dispensationalists conclude that there are still many Old Testament prophecies about Israel that have not yet been *literally* fulfilled.

[**Remark.** Covenant theology teaches that the Bible determines its own method of interpretation, e.g., the Bible must sometimes be interpreted literally and sometimes in a non-literal or symbolic way, as the particular passage in the Bible demands. The biblical interpretation (hermeneutic) of covenant theology is determined by the New Testament explanation of Old Testament passages. Thus, the Old Testament preparation, prophecies and shadows have been fulfilled and are being fulfilled in the New Testament teachings and reality.]

c. A presupposition of dispensationalism is that Israel and the Church must be radically kept separated.

Dispensationalists hold that the original and real message of God in the Bible *centres on his people, Israel*. This message covers the whole Old Testament and a large part of the New Testament (the Gospels and Revelation). The revelation of God about the Church only covers a small part of the New Testament (Acts and the Letters) and forms *a parenthetic period (intermezzo) in God's plan with Israel*. Dispensationalists teach that Israel and the Church must forever be kept apart.

[**Remark.** Covenant theology teaches that the original and real message of God in the Bible *centres on Jesus Christ who comes to save his covenant people* and judge his opponents in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. God's covenant people already begins with Gentiles like Adam and Eve, Abel Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Isaac (Hebrews 11:1-20), is initially continued throughout the Old Testament period especially in Jacob and his descendants, Israel, and is finally continued and extended on a higher plane to include believers from all the Gentile nations in the world (Genesis 22:18; Matthew 28:19; Revelation 5:9-10; cf. Exodus 19:5-6 with Revelation 1:5-6).]

Dispensationalists hold that the so-called 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation (the period of the Church) is therefore a necessary parenthesis (interpolated period) between God's original plan with Israel in the so-called 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation and God's resumed plan with Israel in the future so-called 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation.

In order to give a place in God's salvation history in which all the so-called unfulfilled prophecies of God to Israel can be literally fulfilled the dispensationalists create a future 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation. Because in the view of dispensationalists God's plan with Israel is completely different to his plan with the mainly Gentile Church, dispensationalists hold that such a future period for Israel *cannot coincide in time* with the execution of God's plan for the Church. God's fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies for Israel cannot coincide with God's plan for the Church in God's present history of salvation.

Thus the dispensationalists created *a present 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation* in which God is mainly occupied with the Gentile Church and they created *a future 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation* (that consists of the great tribulation and the millennium) in which God would be mainly occupied with the nation of Israel.

[**Remark.** Covenant theology teaches that many Old Testament prophecies have already gone into fulfilment:

- Some Old Testament prophecies have already gone into fulfilment in the Old Testament period after the return of the remnant of Israel from the Babylonian exile: Israel returned to their land, the temple was rebuilt and the ceremonial law consisting of animal sacrifices was restored.
- Other Old Testament prophecies have already gone into fulfilment in a higher literal or non-literal sense in the New Testament period: Many prophecies about the Messiah's first coming were fulfilled in a literal (cf. Micha 5:2) and non-literal (Isaiah 7:14) sense in Jesus Christ; his birth and life, his death and resurrection, his enthronement in heaven, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his ministry as the greatest Prophet, the highest Priest and the most sovereign King. Prophecies about the extension of God's people to include the believing Gentiles are continually going into fulfilment during the whole New Testament period (Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 52:15; Amos 9:11-12).

Other Old Testament prophecies with regard to God's messianic kingdom are presently a reality (Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 2:44; 4:3; 7:14,18). Prophecies with regard to the Messiah's second coming, the final judgement day and the final perfect phase of the kingdom obviously go into fulfilment on the last day at the end of history.]

Dispensationalists hold that the whole Old Testament and a large part of the New Testament (the Gospels and most of the book of Revelation) are thus not relevant for or applicable to Gentiles. At the most they are historically interesting for Christians.

**[Remark.** Covenant theology teaches that the whole Bible is relevant for and applicable to all people in all the nations in the world. Believers from all the natural nations are part of God's one people (John 10:16; Romans 10:12-13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:9-10).]

Dispensationalists hold that only Revelation chapters 1 to 3 and 20 to 22 are relevant for the Church (Christians), because Revelation 4:1 to 19:21 is applicable only to Israel.

**[Remark.** Covenant theology teaches that the whole book of Revelation is a message to all people from all the nations in every age between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. It is a book of encouragement for Christians and a book of serious warning for non-Christians in every age.]

Because dispensationalists teach that God's plan in the Bible centres mainly on Israel and not on the Church, they interpret everything written about Israel in the New Testament in the light of the Old Testament revelation. For example, the New Testament book of Revelation is interpreted in the light of the Old Testament books of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah.

**[Remark.** Covenant theology always explains the Old Testament revelation in the much clearer light of the New Testament revelation (2 Corinthians 3:13-18)!]

When the followers of covenant theology interpret the Old Testament revelation in the much clearer light of the New Testament revelation, dispensationalists accuse them that they are guilty of *reading back (and sometimes forcing back)* the teaching of the New Testament into the Old Testament in order to try to substantiate their doctrine of salvation in the Old Testament<sup>27</sup>.

**[Remark.** The followers of the covenant reply that dispensationalists are guilty of reading (*even forcing*) *their understanding of the Old Testament into the New Testament* in order to try to substantiate their doctrines of Israel and the millennial kingdom. For example, they impose their interpretation of the books of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah on their interpretation of the book of Revelation. Therefore the study of how the New Testament understands the Old Testament is decisive!]

## **6. The most important contradistinctions created within dispensationalism**

### **a. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches two outpourings of the Holy Spirit.**

J. N. Darby (1800-1882) is the father of modern dispensationalism. In 1827 he meditated on Isaiah 32:15-20 and Ephesians 2:4-7. He interpreted these passages as follows:

*The first historic outpouring of the Holy Spirit* occurred about 2000 years ago at Pentecost (Acts chapter 2). Darby says that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Christ's first coming gave the New Testament Christians a place in Christ *in heaven* together with many *heavenly blessings* (Ephesians 2:4-7).

*The second historic outpouring of the Holy Spirit* would occur in the future. Darby says that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel would give Israel many *earthly blessings* (Isaiah 32:15-20).

This interpretation led to Darby's doctrine that *God has two peoples: Israel is God's earthly people and the Church is God's heavenly people.*<sup>28</sup>

**[Remark.** The doctrine of *two peoples of God* brings Darby to adopt *the parenthesis theory* (the 'gap' theory). He wrongly assumes that the New Testament period of the Church is a heavenly parenthesis in God's earthly programme with Israel. Moreover Darby wrongly teaches that these presuppositions demand *a literal interpretation of the Bible.*]

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<sup>27</sup> Ryrie p. 34

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Payton Fuller, *The hermeneutics of dispensationalism*, 1957, p.38-41

b. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches two holy books with two different plans.

Dispensationalism believes that the Bible with its 66 canonical books is one book, but in dispensational theology the Bible is practically divided into two books: *the book of Israel and the book of the Church*. The contents of these two books differ completely. Both books have irreconcilable contradistinctions! Dispensationalism confesses the unity of the Bible because it speaks about the same God, but puts all emphasis on the differences between Israel and the Church. Dispensational theology brings forward as many as possible differences and contradistinctions in order to prove that God has two books and two plans.

Dispensationalism teaches that God's first plan is directed on Israel that consists of the Jews and a very small number of Gentiles that joined Israel. This plan is recorded in the Old Testament, the four Gospels and the greatest part of the book of Revelation. In the past this plan focussed on Israel's earthly blessings. In the future it would again focus on Israel's *earthly blessings*.

And dispensationalism teaches that God's second plan is directed on the Church that consists mainly of Gentiles and a very small number of Jews that join the Church. This plan is recorded in only a part of the New Testament (the book of Acts, the letters and a small part of the book of Revelation). This plan focuses especially on the *heavenly blessings* of the Church (Christians).

**[Remark.** *The Bible teaches one plan of salvation that has a preparatory and a final phase.* The Bible is unity, not only because it deals with the same God, but also because it has *the same message* in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament, namely, that God in Christ saves his people and judges his opponents. He saves his people from sin and doom and protects them. And he conquers his opponents and judges them. *The same Jesus Christ is the Mediator of God's plan* of salvation and judgement in both the Old Testament (1 Peter 1:9-12) and the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

In the preparatory phase, the Old Testament prophets served God's New Testament people and searched and spoke about the death and resurrection of Christ and about the grace that would come to the believers in the New Testament to save their souls (1 Peter 1:9-12).

In the preparatory stage God spoke to his people through the prophets (Hebrews 1:1), but in the final phase, God speaks to his people in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:2).

In the preparatory phase the Old Testament believers looked forward to the same city with foundations as the New Testament believers (Hebrews 11:10,16; 13:14), but they did not receive what had been promised, because God had planned that they would only be made perfect together with the New Testament believers (Hebrews 11:39-40)!

The preparatory phase of the Old Testament prophesied the coming Messiah, but the final phase of the New Testament fulfilled these prophecies and brought Jesus Christ (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). The preparatory phase of the Old Testament brought the law that functioned like 'a supervisor' that locked God's 'children' (like slaves) up until the New Testament time. The final phase brought grace through faith in Jesus Christ and gave the children the full rights of 'sons' (John 1:17; Galatians 3:17 – 4:7).

The Old Testament taught 'the shadows' of priests, animal sacrifices and the temple, but the New Testament teaches 'the realities' of Christ, our High Priest, his sacrifice of atonement on the cross and his spiritual temple (the Church)(Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). The Old Testament inaugurated God's covenant with his people (Genesis 17:7), but the New Testament realised God's covenant with believers from every nation on earth (2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3). The Old Testament made many promises to God's people, Israel, but all these promises are being fulfilled to everyone who is in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20.)

c. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches two peoples of God.

Dispensationalism teaches that 'God's earthly people' is the natural or national nation of Israel and that 'God's heavenly people' is the spiritual community, the Church. Dispensationalism tends to see Israel as God's main plan and the Church as an intermezzo in God's plan. Dispensationalists teach that when God offered his earthly kingdom to Israel at Christ's first coming, Israel rejected it. So God came up with another plan about which the Old Testament knows nothing. God planned to win for himself a second people out of the Gentile nations, the Church. That plan consists of the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation (the period of the Church) and is regarded as a parenthetic period that is inserted between God's plan with Israel in the Old Testament (the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation) and God's plan with Israel in the end time (the 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation). The 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation begins

with outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and ends with the removal of the Church from the earth (the rapture).

But dispensationalists teach that also in the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation the *Jewish* believers in Christ are the real New Testament people of God! Israel is regarded as the natural olive tree. The Jewish believers in Christ are regarded as the natural branches of the cultivated olive tree. And the non-Jewish believers in Christ are regarded as the natural branches of the wild olive tree that are grafted onto the natural olive tree (Romans 11:17-24). Thus, the non-Jewish believers may also belong to the Jewish believers in the Church.

**Remarks.**

*God has only one people, namely, the believers in Jesus Christ, no matter from which natural nation they originally came.*

Long before the existence of Israel, there were already Gentile believers in the God of the Bible: Adam, Enoch (Genesis 5:24), Noah (Genesis 6:9), Job (Job 1:1), Abraham (Genesis 15:6) and Isaac. God began his plan of salvation, not with Jews, but with non-Jews (Genesis 3:15)!

From Jacob (Israel) onwards only believers in the coming Messiah from mainly the Jews were regarded as God's people (Romans 9:6). People in the Old Testament became children of God, *not because of their natural descent*, but by God's sovereign promise (Romans 9:6-9); *not because of their good works*, but by God's sovereign election and calling (Romans 9:10-13); and *not because of their own will or desire*, but by God's sovereign mercy (Romans 9:14-18). Only *the believing remnant* in Israel were regarded as God's people (1 Kings 19:18; Isaiah 1:9; 4:3; 6:13; 10:20-22; 37:31-32; Jeremiah 23:3; Joel 2:32; Romans 9:29). Believing Gentiles in the Old Testament like Ruth and Babylonians that joined Israel (Isaiah 56:3-8) were also regarded as God's people. Unbelieving Jews and idolaters were regarded as 'not my people' (Hosea 1:9). Only when such people repented and believed were they again regarded as 'God's people' (Hosea 2:14-23).

Also in the early New Testament period only believing Jews (John 3:16-18,36; Romans 11:5,20,23) and believing non-Jews (Romans 11:20,22) were regarded as God's people.

In the Bible God's people do not centre on the natural or national Israel, but on spiritual (believers) and even international people. Only believers from every nation in the world form together God's covenant people.

*God extended the national existence of his people (Israel) to its world-wide existence (the Church).*

The main purpose of God's Old Testament people, Israel, was to bring forth the Messiah, Jesus Christ (John 4:22; Romans 9:5; Revelation 12:4). At his first coming Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament Law and Prophets (Matthew 5:17) and extended God's people from its national to its international boundaries. God's people always remain one people! Believers from the Gentile nations do not form a second people of God, the Church, but are added to the already existing people of God, to believing Israel. *Israel in the sense of God's people is never abrogated or replaced by the Church, but Israel as God's people are continued and extended on a higher plane as the Church to include (besides believing Jews) all the believers coming from the Gentile nations.*

Jesus builds his world-wide Church on the rock, the Jewish Peter (Matthew 16:18) and the other Jewish apostles (Ephesians 2:19-22). Gentile believers as spiritual stones are also built into this one spiritual house of which Jesus is the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Jesus gathers his sheep from the Jewish sheepfold and the other Gentile sheepfolds in the world so that it becomes one flock under one Shepherd (John 10:16).

God continues to graft Jewish believers and non-Jewish believers together on the one Root of the olive tree (Romans 11:17-18). It remains one Root (cf. Revelation 5:5), one tree with believing Jewish branches and believing non-Jewish branches (Romans 11:16).

Through the proclamation of the gospel believing non-Jews become heirs with believing Jews, members together of one Body and sharers together in the promise in Christ on complete equal footing with the believing Jews (Ephesians 3:2-6; Romans 1:16).

Through Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, all the promises that God ever made in the Old Testament to Israel and all the promises he made in the New Testament are 'yes' and 'amen', e.g. absolutely certain also for the believing non-Jews (2 Corinthians 1:20)!

In the Bible it remains one God, one faith, one baptism with the Spirit, one Body (the Church) and one future hope (Acts 11:14-18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4-6).]

d. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches several different ways of salvation.

Dispensationalists wrongly teach that God intended to save people during their so-called 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation by obedience to the law (Leviticus 18:5). Dispensationalists teach that obedience to the law was regarded as a means to be justified by God. However, God's intended way of salvation failed, because Israel did not and could not obey the law.

Dispensationalists rightly teach that God gives eternal life during their so-called 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Dispensationalists wrongly teach that during their so-called future 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation the Jews will come to faith (and be saved), not by the preaching of the gospel of grace, but by the sudden disappearance of the Church at its removal from the earth, by the terrible judgements of God during the tribulation period and finally by the overwhelming appearance of Christ at his second return when he comes to establish his millennial kingdom! And they teach that the Gentiles will come to faith, not by he preaching of the gospel of grace, but by the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 24:14) by the Jews, e.g. the preaching of the imminent establishment of the millennial kingdom.

**[Remarks.**

No one will ever be justified by keeping the law (Romans 3:10-12,19-20,28; Galatians 2:16; 3:10-11; 4:5; James 2:10).

Also during the Old Testament period non-Jews and Jews were only justified by grace through faith (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 3:21; Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 4:2)!

Jesus teaches that no one will ever come to faith by any supernatural appearance (cf. Luke 16:27-31). A dream or vision may be the first step that leads to hearing the gospel.

People can only come to faith by hearing the gospel (Romans 10:14-17). That was also true for the Jews during the Old Testament period (Romans 9:30-33; 10:17-21; 11:20,23; Hebrews 4:1-2).

The gospel of the kingdom is exactly the same as the gospel of grace (Luke 16:16; Acts 8:12; 20:24-25; 19:8; 28:23,31).]

e. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches two second comings of Christ.

Dispensationalists believe that Christ's first return would be on the clouds to remove the Church from this world (the rapture) (1 Thessalonians 4:17). It would be imminent, invisible and inaudible for the non-Christians. Non-Christians and Jews would remain behind to go through the tribulation period.

Dispensationalists disagree among one another when this first return of Jesus would take place. The pre-tribulation pre-millennialists believe that it would take place before the tribulation period, 7 years before the millennial kingdom (Revelation 4:1). Mid-tribulation pre-millennialists believe that it would take place in the middle of the tribulation period, 3½ years before the millennial kingdom (before Revelation 6:12). And post-tribulation pre-millennialists believe that it would take place at the end of the tribulation period, just before the millennial kingdom (Revelation 14:14-16).

Dispensationalists believe that Christ's second return would be in overwhelming power and majesty on the Mount of Olives to save the Jews and to establish the millennial kingdom on earth (Matthew 24:30-31). It would take place immediately before the millennial kingdom.

**[Remarks.**

In the past dispensationalism called Christ's first return 'the coming' (Greek: parousia)(2 Thessalonians 2:1) and Christ's second return 'the revelation' (Greek: apokalupsis)(2 Thessalonians 1:7). But this has been proven false, because the two words are used interchangeably (Compare Matthew 24:37 with Luke 17:30!)

No where in the Bible does Jesus teach that he is coming back twice! He clearly teaches one second coming (Matthew 16:27). This one and only second coming will not be in secret (invisible and inaudible for non-Christians). On the contrary, it will be visible to everyone in the whole world (Matthew 24:27; Revelation 1:7) and very audible (Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16). It will be sudden and unexpected for both believers and unbelievers (Matthew 24:36-42; 25:5-6). It will be the absolute decisive day for believers and unbelievers (Matthew 25:31-46).]

f. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches three physical resurrections.

The first physical resurrection was the ‘the resurrection of the first fruits’, which consisted of the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22-23) and of the holy people who had died (Matthew 27:52-53). That took place about 2000 years ago.

The second physical resurrection would be ‘the first resurrection’ and would take place in two phases separated by 7 years: the resurrection of the Church saints (those who belong to him) at Christ’s first return (1 Corinthians 15:23,51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) and the resurrection of the tribulation saints at Christ’s second return (Revelation 7:14; 20:4).

The third physical resurrection would be ‘the second resurrection’ (!), which would consist of the resurrection of the unbelievers and the wicked at the end of the millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:6, 11-15; Matthew 13:28-30).

**[Remarks.**

Matthew 27:52-53 does not speak of a physical resurrection, but of a resuscitation from death. Like Lazarus these people later died again. Christ still remains the only one that has been permanently raised from physical death (1 Corinthians 15:20,23).

Jesus and Paul teach clearly that there will only be one comprehensive physical resurrection from the dead of all believers and all unbelievers at the same time at Christ’s one and only second coming (John 5:28-29; 6:39-40; Acts 24:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). 1 Thessalonians 4:17 refers to the same thing as 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. When 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 do not mention the resurrection of unbelievers, it does not mean that the unbelievers are not resurrected at the same time!

Revelation 20:5-6 is a figure of speech called a chiasmus: a crosswise arrangement of thoughts. ‘The first resurrection’ implies a first death, and ‘the second death’ implies a second resurrection. ‘The first death’ is a physical event when the spirit or soul is separated from the body. All people will share in the first death. ‘The first resurrection’ is a spiritual event when the spirit or soul of the believer is translated or transferred into the presence of Christ. *Only Christians will share in the first resurrection* (2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:23; cf. Luke 16:23-28). ‘The second resurrection’ is a physical event when the body is clothed with immortality and reunited with the spirit or soul (1 Corinthians 15:42-54). All people will share in the second resurrection (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). ‘The second death’ is a spiritual event when the unbeliever is thrown body and soul into hell (Revelation 20:15; 21:8; Matthew 10:28). *Only non-Christians will share in the second death.*]

g. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches five final judgements.

The first final judgement was ‘the judgement of the believer for sin’. That took place about 2000 years ago. Only Christians will share in the death of Christ on the cross when he comes to faith (John 5:24; Romans 6:3-7; 1 Peter 2:24).

The second final judgement will be ‘the judgement of the believer for works’ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15) before the judgement seat of Christ or God (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10) at Christ’s first return, 7 or 3½ years before the millennial kingdom.

The third final judgement will be ‘the judgement of the Jews’ during the 7 year tribulation period between Christ’s first return and Christ’s second return (Jeremiah 30:4-7; Ezekiel 22:19-22; Daniel 12:1).

The fourth final judgement will be ‘the judgement of the Gentile nations’ for their treatment of Jews before Christ’s throne in heavenly glory at Christ’s second return just before the millennial kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The fifth final judgement will be ‘the judgement of the wicked dead’ for their unbelief and wickedness before the great white throne at the end of the millennial (1000 years) kingdom (Revelation 20:11-15).

**[Remarks.**

Trials and persecutions of Christians are not intended as a judgement of God, but rather as a refinement of character (1 Peter 1:6-7). Although the sin of Christians are completely atoned for, Christians are not yet completely saved from trials and persecutions on earth (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:16-23; John 16:33; Revelation 6:1-11; 7:14; 12:10-17; 20:3-4), from the great tribulation in the end-time (Matthew 24:4-25; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12; Revelation 3:10; 11:7-12; 13:5-10; 16:12-16; 17:10-18; 20:7-10) or from physical death (Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians 15:26).

Jesus teaches very clearly that there will only be one comprehensive final judgement of believers and unbelievers at his one and only second coming (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Revelation 21:11-15). When 2 Corinthians 5:10 does not mention the judgement of unbelievers or 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 does not mention the judgement of believers it does not mean that they are not judged at that same time!

God the Father has entrusted all judgement to God the Son (John 5:22). Therefore it is Christ who sits on the great white throne to judge (Revelation 20:11-15).]

h. Dispensationalism wrongly teaches several different kingdoms.

The first kingdom is 'the mystery kingdom' (Matthew 13:11) or 'the kingdom of heaven' and it is only a present reality *in heaven*, because Satan is the present prince *on earth* (1 John 5:19).

The second kingdom will be 'the millennial kingdom' or 'Messianic kingdom'. It will be a *future Jewish kingdom on this earth* and the Jews will rule over the Gentile nations (Deuteronomy 28:15). It will be a nearly perfect kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6; Ezekiel chapter 40-48).

The third kingdom will be 'the eternal perfect kingdom'. It will be the kingdom of God for Jews and Christians *on the new earth* (Revelation chapter 21-22) or it will be the kingdom of God only for Jews on the new earth and the kingdom of God only for Gentiles in heaven.

**[Remarks.**

'The kingdom of heaven' is exactly the same as 'the kingdom of God' in the Gospels. (Compare Matthew 13:31-32 with Mark 4:30-32). Jesus clearly teaches that the kingdom of God came at his first coming (Matthew 12:28; Revelation 12:5-11): Jesus proclaimed that kingdom, taught and healed people (Matthew 4:17,23). He taught that he had bound Satan (Matthew 12:28-30); that he gives the kingdom to people who will produce the fruit of the kingdom (Matthew 21:43); that people can enter the kingdom when they are born again by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8); and that the kingdom is his sovereign rule in heaven and on earth in the hearts, minds and bodies of his servants, the Christians (Luke 17:20-21; all parables; Revelation 1:5-6). He taught that the kingdom results in their salvation from beginning to end (Mark 10:25-26); that the kingdom results in them being established in congregations everywhere in the world (Matthew 16:18-19; 13:24-30,36-43); that the kingdom results in Christians having influence in every aspect of life in the world: peace, righteousness, joy, service, mutual edification and good deeds (Matthew 5:10-16; Romans 14:17-19); that the kingdom grows continually in every country (Matthew 13:31-32) and permeates every aspect of life in that country (Matthew 13:33) until finally at Christ's second coming this present kingdom on this present earth results in the perfect and eternal kingdom on the new earth (Matthew 25:31-34; Revelation 11:15,18).

Unintentionally dispensationalism belittle Christ's accomplished work of salvation (John 19:30), his complete victory over Satan (Luke 10:18-20) and his sovereign authority over everyone and everything on earth at his first coming (Matthew 28:18; John 13:3).

Satan was *never* the King of this earth, because God is the *only* Ruler, the King of all kings on earth, the Lord of all lords in the universe (1 Timothy 6:15) and he reigns *forever* (Psalm 9:7-8; 145:13; 146:10)!

God had *permitted* Satan and his evil angel princes to have much evil influence in countries in the past (Daniel 10:13,20), but at his first coming Christ bound Satan and thereby curtailed (curbed, restrained, limited) his evil influence on earth (Matthew 12:28-29; John 12:31-32; 1 John 3:8). Satan's evil influence has been curbed and he cannot keep the nations away from hearing the gospel (Revelation 20:1-3). Only the evil *world* that opposes God and his Christ is lead astray (Revelation 12:9) and lies in the power of Satan (1 John 5:19; Revelation 13:1-8), because Satan cannot harm born-again Christians (1 John 5:18; John 10:28; James 4:7).

Satan is a liar (John 8:44) and he lies when he claims that all the authority and splendour of the kingdoms in the world belong to him (Luke 4:6). Through the proclamation of the gospel in all countries of the world God continually robs people out of Satan's dominion and transfers them into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13; Matthew 6:10; John 12:32).

There will never be a literal future millennial kingdom on earth. The number 1000 is symbolic in the Bible. God remembers his covenant also for a symbolic 1000 generations, that is, forever, for as long as history on earth exists (Genesis 20:6; 1 Chronicles 16:14-16; Psalm 105:7-9). While God executes

his judgements on earth, he does not for one moment forget his covenant with his people. He will continue to act until the ultimate end of all human generations, that is, until he has ultimately completed what he has promised to his own people and what he has threatened against the nations of the world.

“With the Lord a 1000 (human) years is like one (divine) day” (Psalm 90:1-5; 2 Peter 3:8). God is incomparably greater than man. From everlasting, before the creation of the world, he is God. He has absolute power over man, whom he ultimately returns to the dust. What is the temporary life of man in comparison to God’s eternity? Even the longest life ever given to a man, about 1000 years (969 years, Genesis 5:27), is for the eternal God as short as one day. It is even as short as a night watch, during which a person sleeps and remembers nothing. And although the final judgement day at the end of this present world history seems for people to be very far away or even to stay out, in God’s time-frame a 1000 human years passes as fast as a divine day. When God’s time is ultimately completed, the final judgement day and end of this present earth will arrive!

The 1000 years in Revelation 20:1-7 is symbolic of *an ultimate complete period of time*, which God has decreed for the unfolding of his eternal plan of salvation on this present earth. It is a long time and yet a divinely limited time. The 1000 years clearly *began* with the binding of Satan, which happened at Christ’s first coming (Matthew 12:29; John 12:31-32; Revelation 12:5-11) and *will end* at Christ’s second coming (Revelation 20:11-15)! *The 1000 years is another symbolic number signifying the messianic age, the gospel age or the whole New Testament period, that is the period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming!* The Bible does not teach pre-millennialism, post-millennialism or a-millennialism, but *realised millennialism or inaugurated millennialism*. The period symbolised by the number 1000 has already begun! We are presently living within this symbolic period of 1000 years!]

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## **PART 6. THE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF DISPENSATIONALISM**

The three dispensational schools of thought are: ultra-dispensationalism, classical dispensationalism and new dispensationalism.

### **1. Ultra-dispensationalism**

#### **a. The assertions of ultra-dispensationalism.**

- All 4 Gospels and the book of Acts are intended only for Jews and not for Christians!
- The close association of the Lord’s Supper with the new covenant (Luke 22:20) makes the Lord’s Supper a Jewish institution (the Passover). The Lord’s Supper has no place in the Church.
- Joel 2 was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2), but only for Jews and not for the Church!
- The Church only begins in the middle of the book of Acts (Acts 13) with the missionary work of the apostle Paul, who planted congregations everywhere. Some extremists claim that the Church only begins after the book of Acts with the letters of the apostle Paul.
- God has three peoples: first the Old Testament Israel; second the early Church of the apostle Peter only amongst Jews (called, “The Pentecostal Apostolic Church of the book of Acts”); and third the later Church of the apostle Paul as ‘the Body of Christ’ (called, “The mystery Pauline Church of the prison epistles.”)<sup>29</sup>

#### **b. The advocate of ultra-dispensationalism.**

E. W. Bullinger.

### **2. Classical dispensationalism** (end 1800 to 1950).

#### **a. The assertions of classical dispensationalism.**

- Israel and the Church must remain separate for ever as the two peoples of God.
- During the literal millennial kingdom everything revolves around Israel. After the millennial kingdom only Israel will live on the new earth and the Church in heaven. Israel and the Church will never meet one another!

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<sup>29</sup> John B. Graber, Ultra-dispensationalism, doctoral dissertation, DTS, 1949, p 6, 85

- There are two ways of salvation: salvation through works of the law during the Old Testament period and salvation through faith during the New Testament period.
- There are two new covenants: the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 is only for Israel and the new covenant in Hebrews 8 is only for the Church.

b. The advocates of classical dispensationalism.

John N. Darby, C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer (the 1<sup>st</sup> president of Dallas Theological Seminary).

**3. Neo-dispensationalism** (1950 to today)

a. The assertions of neo-dispensationalism.

- Israel and the Church must remain separate during the millennial kingdom. Jesus together with the Church would be in the heavenly Jerusalem that would hover over Israel in the earthly Jerusalem in Palestine. Jesus would rule together with the Church in heaven and through king David and all the Jews on earth in the millennial kingdom on earth with Israel as the centre over all the Gentile nations in the whole world.
- After the millennial kingdom in the eternal kingdom of God, Israel and the Church would again live together on the new earth, but Israel would never be a part of the Body of Christ (the Church)!
- There is but one way of salvation in both the Old Testament and the New Testament – faith.
- There is only one new covenant: it is only given to Israel, but is also applied to the Church!

b. The advocates of neo-dispensationalism.

Dallas Theological Seminary, Charles C. Ryrie, John F. Walvoord (2<sup>nd</sup> president of Dallas Theological Seminary), J. Dwight Pentecost, Hal Lindsey.

**PART 7. THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT PRESUPPOSITIONS OF DISPENSATIONALISM**

**1. The first presupposition of dispensationalism: The absolute separation of Israel and the Church**

a. The theory of earlier dispensationalism: Israel and the Church are forever separated.

This theory was preached by the early promoters of classical dispensationalism: C. I. Scofield (his notes in the Scofield Reference Bible) and Lewis Sperry Chafer (the founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary).

They divided God's people radically in two peoples: Israel was God's Old Testament people and the Church was God's New Testament people. The Old Testament saints (believers) were never and are not part of the Church. The New Testament saints (believers) were never and are not part of Israel. Israel and the Church are forever separated!

**[Remarks.**

Both the Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church are called 'church' (Greek: ekklesia) in the Bible. The word 'ekklesia' means 'the congregation of people that God called out of the world to be his people'. Israel, God's Old Testament congregation consisting mainly of Jews, is called ekklesia in Judges 20:2, 2 Chronicles 29:28 and Psalm 22:22. The Church, God's New Testament congregation consisting of Jewish and Gentile Christians, is called ekklesia in Matthew 16:18; 18:17 and in many places in the New Testament. God's congregation or Church does not *begin* with Pentecost at Christ's first coming (Acts 2), but already in the Old Testament with Gentile believers (Adam, Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham) and later Jewish believers (Jacob, etc) and is then *continued and extended* to include half-Jews (Samaritans, Acts 8; 9:31) and finally non-Jews (Gentiles, Acts 10-11)! The (Jewish) apostles of Jesus Christ were his witnesses to the Jews in Judea, the Samaritans in Samaria and the Gentiles in the ends of the world (Acts 1:8).

Both Israel and the Church are children of Abraham. The circumcised Israelites (Jews) of mainly the Old Testament period that believed in the Messiah that was still to come had Abraham as their father (Romans 4:12). The uncircumcised believers of mainly the New Testament period that believed in Christ (the Messiah) who had already come, also have Abraham as their father (Romans 4:11). Abraham is the father of all believers, whether from the Old Testament period or the New Testament period (Romans 4:16). Other people have the devil as their father (John 8:37-44).

Both Israel and the Church have heard the gospel. The gospel was preached to people during the Old Testament period (Romans 3:21-22; Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 4:2; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The message was about Jesus Christ: “In the Seed (singular) of Abraham *all the nations in the world* would be blessed” (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16). The gospel was thus about Jesus Christ (the Seed) who still had to come (cf. Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7, etc). The fact that the gospel was already proclaimed during the Old Testament period is a proof that the Old Testament Scriptures foresaw that God was also going to justify the Gentiles through faith (cf. Romans 3:21; 4:1-8; 1 Peter 1:9-12). During the New Testament period the gospel was therefore preached to Jews and Gentiles without distinction (Romans 1:16-17). People are saved only through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18,36; Romans 3:28-30; 10:12-17).

Both Israel and the Church locked unbelievers of their own group out and believers of the other group in God’s people. During the Old Testament period unbelieving Jews were locked out of Israel (Hosea 1:9; Romans 11:7-10,20) until only ‘a remnant’ remained (Isaiah 1:9; 4:2; 6:13; 10:20-22; 28:5; 37:4,32-32; Romans 9:29; 11:4). During the New Testament period unbelieving Jews were also locked out of the Church (Matthew 8:11-12; 21:42-44; John 3:18,36; Acts 13:32-46), but believing Jews were included in the Church (the 12 disciples, Acts 2:37-41; Romans 11:5-6,23).

Likewise during the Old Testament period believing Gentiles were included in Israel (Ruth, Rahab, Isaiah 56:3-8). And during the New Testament period believing Gentiles are included in the Church (Acts 13:46-48; Romans 11:24; Revelation 21:27), but unbelieving Jews and Gentiles are excluded from God’s people (Matthew 8:11-12; Revelation 21:8).

Both Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament are called by the same names. The word ‘Jew’ means ‘a person who receives praise from God’ (cf. Romans 2:29). In the eyes of God a person is not a Jew if he is only a Jew outwardly and if his circumcision is merely in the flesh (physical). But he is a Jew if he is a Jew inwardly and if his heart has been circumcised (Romans 2:28-29). Thus a Gentile in the physical sense may be called a Jew in the spiritual sense!

The Bible teaches that only people (whether Jews or non-Jews) who worship God by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh (their outward circumcision in the body) are the true circumcision (Philippians 3:3). And the Bible teaches that (physically) uncircumcised believers in Galatia that had become a new creation in Christ are called ‘the Israel of God’ (Galatians 6:16). Thus a Gentile that has been born again is actually called ‘Israel’ in a spiritual sense!

The believing Gentiles in Ephesus are called by Old Testament names for Israel: ‘the holy temple of God’ (Ephesians 2:21; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16) and ‘heirs together with Israel’ (Ephesians 3:2-6). And the believing Gentiles in Asia Minor are called ‘God’s chosen people’ (Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9-10), ‘God’s kingdom of priests’ (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6) and ‘God’s flock’ (Isaiah 40:11; 1 Peter 5:2).

Both believing Jews and believing Gentiles together form ‘one new man’. The ceremonial law consisted of laws with regard to holy places (the tabernacle or temple), holy people (the priests and Levites), holy times (the Sabbath, the Old Testament festivals) and holy actions (circumcision, sacrifices, clean foods, first fruits, firstborn, and tithes). Already during the period between the Old and New Testaments when many Gentiles joined Israel, but especially during the New Testament period when the Church spread to the Gentiles, the ceremonial law formed a barrier between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

At his first coming Christ fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17), cancelled it (Colossians 2:14) and declared it invalid or abrogated it (Ephesians 2:14-15). Thus, from Christ’s first coming onwards believing Jews and believing Gentiles form ‘one new man’ (Ephesians 2:15-18). God’s programme, which he began with Israel, was *not stopped for an interim period* (the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation, as dispensational theology teaches), but on the contrary was *continued and even extended* to include the believing Gentiles (as covenant theology teaches)! Israel was *not abrogated or replaced* by the Church, but on the contrary Israel *became what God had intended Israel to become* throughout the Old Testament period: an uncountable number of God’s people (Genesis 22:17; Revelation 7:9) from every nation on earth (Genesis 22:18; Revelation 5:9-10) that form the kingdom of God (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44; Matthew 12:28, 21:43).]

b. The theory of later dispensationalism: Israel and the Church are not forever separated.

This theory was preached by later promoters of dispensationalism – the neo-dispensationalists. They are: John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost en Charles C. Ryrie. They assert that although Israel and the Church will not forever live separated on the new earth, Israel will remain forever excluded from the Church (the Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ)!

During the millennial kingdom Israel and the Church will be separated. Israel will live on the earth around the earthly Jerusalem and the Church will live in heaven in the Heavenly Jerusalem that hovers over the earthly Jerusalem! The Jews in the millennial kingdom on earth and the Christians in the Heavenly Jerusalem in heaven will thus remain separate during the future 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation. But after the millennial kingdom Israel and the Church will dwell together on the new earth. However, not as equals! Israel will never be a part of the Bride of Christ, but will only be the friend of the Bridegroom (cf. John 3:29). Israel that consists of the Jews of the Old Testament period, the Jews of the future tribulation period and the Jews living in the millennial kingdom will forever be excluded from the Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ (the Church)! “The marriage of the Lamb is an event which evidently involves only Christ and the Church. While it would be impossible to eliminate (Old Testament saints and tribulation saints) from the place of *observers*, they cannot be in the position of participants in the event itself.”<sup>30</sup> “Israel will have her place of honour in the kingdom as a *companion* of the bride.”<sup>31</sup>

[**Remark.** In the Old Testament revelation believing Israel (‘the Church’, Judges 20:2) is symbolised by ‘the wife of God’ (Isaiah 54:5; Ezekiel 16:32). But also in the New Testament revelation Christians together are symbolised by ‘the Bride of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 11:2). The New Jerusalem, which consists of the Old Testament believers (Revelation 21:12) and the New Testament believers (Revelation 21:14), is called ‘the Bride of the Lamb’ and even ‘the wife of the Lamb’ (Revelation 21:9-10)! The words: ‘Church’, ‘Bride’, ‘Body of Christ’ all point to one and the same reality!]

c. Dispensationalism asserts that the relationship between God and Israel is determined only by physical birth. But the relationship between God and the Church is determined by *spiritual rebirth*.<sup>32</sup>

[**Remark.** God’s relationship to Israel was never determined by their physical birth. The unregenerate, natural people of Israel are not God’s people! In Hosea 1:9 God says that unfaithful Israel is “not my people”! And in contrast God says that he would call non-Jews “my people” and “my beloved one” (Romans 9:25)!

Romans 2:28-29 teaches that God does not regard a natural and circumcised Jew as a genuine ‘Jew’. A genuine Jew must be spiritually circumcised, that is, must be born again by the Spirit (cf. John 3:3-8)!

Romans 9:6-18 teaches that not all Jews from the natural and national nation of Israel are the true and spiritual Israel in God’s eyes. Not the natural children (of Israel) are God’s children, but only the children of God’s sovereign promise. People do not become children of God by their performance (good works), but only by God’s sovereign election and calling. People do not become God’s children by their own desire or (free) will, but only by God’s sovereign mercy.

The Old Testament (Genesis 15:6; Isaiah 28:16; Habakkuk 2:4) and the New Testament (Romans 3:28-30; Ephesians 2:8-9) clearly teach that the relationship between God and his covenant people in both Testaments are determined by faith! ]

d. Dispensationalism teaches that the relationship between God and Israel is determined by their works of the law. Dispensationalists teach that the Israelites were appointed to live and serve under the system of the law and gain merit. But Christians are appointed to live and serve under the system of grace.<sup>33</sup>

[**Remarks.**

*No one can keep the law as condition for justification (salvation).* Dispensationalism wrongly teaches on the basis of Leviticus 18:5 that the Jews could be justified by keeping the law. However the Bible teaches that before the fall the principle of Leviticus 18:5 is God’s condition for eternal life. God gave Adam a commandment in Genesis 2:15-17 and if Adam had obeyed that commandment he would not have lost eternal life! But after the fall no human except Christ (Matthew 5:17) could obey the law. All have sinned and fall short of God’s glorious standard (Psalm

<sup>30</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to come, p 227

<sup>31</sup> L. S. Chafer, Systematic theology, 1948, Vol 4 of 8 volumes, p 133

<sup>32</sup> L.S. Chafer, Systematic theology, vol 4, p 248-249

<sup>33</sup> L. S. Chafer, Systematic theology, vol 4, p 30

14:2-3; Romans 3:23). Not a single natural person is righteous in God's eyes (Psalm 143:2). No one will be justified by observing the law (Galatians 2:16). No one keeps the whole law (James 2:10). No natural person keeps the law; no natural person is able to keep the law (Romans 8:7-8). God's curse rests on the man who still tries to be justified by keeping the law (Galatians 3:10)!

*Believers in Old and New Testament should keep the law as the rule of conduct.* Only after God had saved Israel out of the house of slavery he gave to his saved people the law (the Ten Commandments)(Exodus 20:1-2). God did not intend the law to be the condition of their justification (salvation), but he did intend the law to be the rule of their living righteously as his saved people (Exodus 20:3-17)!

The relationship between God and Israel is not determined by their keeping the law, but is based solely on God's sovereign elective foreknowledge and irresistible calling (Romans 8:29-30; 9:6-18)!

e. Dispensationalism teaches that the beginning of the Church is at Pentecost.

Dispensationalists teach that the Church is the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) and therefore could only have come into existence after Christ began his work at his first coming. They teach that the Church came into existence only at Pentecost (Acts 2).

**[Remarks.**

Christ did not only begin his work at his first coming, but before creation. Christ is the Mediator of God's creation (John 1:1-3), the Mediator of God's revelation (John 1:18 Hebrews 1:1-2), the Mediator of God's salvation (1 Timothy 2:5) and the Mediator of God's judgement (John 5:22). Christ through his Spirit was already actively speaking through the Old Testament prophets and doing his work as Mediator during the Old Testament period (1 Peter 1:9-12; cf. Zechariah 1:11-12; 2:10-11; 3:1-9). *Christ began his work before the creation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Ephesians 1:4) and not only at his first coming!*

The promise about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was made to God's Old Testament Israel (Joel 2:28-29) was fulfilled in God's New Testament Church (Acts 2:17-18). His Old Testament Church to whom he made this promise is the same as his New Testament Church to whom he fulfilled his promise! *God's Church already came into existence in the Old Testament (Judges 20:2; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Psalm 22:22) and not merely at Pentecost in the New Testament!*

Note that both Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament are called by the same names. See remarks under part 7, 1 a. The only possible conclusion is that the Church that God had *begun* in the Old Testament is *continued and extended* in the New Testament to include the Gentile believers in all nations. The only difference is that God's Church in the Old Testament believed in the Messiah that still had to come, and that God's Church in the New Testament believes in the Christ (the Messiah) that has already come!]

f. Dispensationalism teaches that Israel will never be a part of the Bride of Christ.

Dispensationalists teach that Israel is never the Body of Christ and never the Bride of Christ. They teach that the Israel of the Old Testament, the Israel of the future tribulation period and the Israel of the millennial kingdom is God's earthly people: the Israelites receive earthly blessings and will forever live on the new earth. And dispensationalists teach that the Church of the interim period inserted between God's plan with Israel in the Old Testament and God's continued plan with Israel after the removal of the Church from the earth (the rapture), is God's heavenly people: the Christians receive heavenly blessings and will forever live in heaven. "The holy Jerusalem of Revelation 21 is the bride, the Lamb's wife, for whom is the new heaven, while the new earth will be for Israel."<sup>34</sup>

**[Remarks.**

The New Jerusalem. The above dispensational argument is not based on biblical truths, but on Darby's meditation. See E 6 a. The biblical truth is that the Bride of the Lamb is the New Jerusalem. Both the believers from the twelve tribes of Israel and the believers from the Church will be part of the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven onto the new earth.

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<sup>34</sup> C. I. Scofield, in Dr. C. I. Scofield's questionbox, 1917, p 70

Jerusalem as mother. In the Old Testament Hagar is *a symbol of the earthly Jerusalem* and a symbol of the Jews (and non-Jews) who desire to be justified by keeping the law. Sarah is *a symbol of the Heavenly Jerusalem* and a symbol of all people (whether Jews or non-Jews) who are actually justified by faith. Thus, the earthly city of Jerusalem is the mother of all Jews and non-Jews who desire to be justified by the law, while the Heavenly Jerusalem is the mother of all Jews and non-Jews who are justified by faith in Christ, whether they lived during the Old Testament period or the New Testament period (Galatians 4:24-27).

Already in the Old Testament period Abraham focused on the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:8-16). Also in the New Testament period Christians focus on the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 13:14).

Already in the Old Testament period Mount Zion was the symbol of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4; 24:23). Also in the New Testament period Mount Zion is the symbol of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24)! The Bible teaches that the people belonging to the Heavenly Jerusalem consists of two groups of people: On the one hand it consists of 'the spirits of righteous men made perfect' (the Old Testament believers that were recorded in Hebrews chapter 11, that had already died and that would only be made perfect together with the new Testament believers)(Hebrews 11:39-40). On the other hand it consists of the Church of the firstborn (the New Testament believers) whose names are recorded in heaven even when they are still living on earth (Hebrews 12:22-23)! The Bible teaches that the Old Testament believers and the New Testament believers together form one reality in the present time: the Heavenly Jerusalem!

Jerusalem as Bride. In the Old Testament revelation Jerusalem was already called the Wife of God in figurative sense (Isaiah 54:1-14). In the New Testament revelation the Heavenly Jerusalem that descends onto the new earth as the New Jerusalem is called the Bride of the Lamb and the Wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:2,9-10). And this New Jerusalem is described in terms of both the Old Testament Israel (the twelve tribes)(Revelation 21:12) and the New Testament Church (the twelve apostles)(Revelation 21:14).]

## **2. The second presupposition of dispensationalism: The parenthetic period (6<sup>th</sup> dispensation)**

### **a. Dispensationalism teaches that God inserted an unforeseen Church period in his plan with Israel.**

Dispensationalism teaches that the prophets in the Old Testament period knew nothing of the Church of the New Testament. They hold that the Church is *an unforeseen parenthesis (insertion, interpolation, or intermezzo) in God's plan with Israel* as prophesied in the Old Testament.

"The present age of the Church is *an intercalation* into the revealed calendar or program of God as that program was foreseen by the prophets of old."<sup>35</sup>

"The Church is a mystery in the sense that it was completely *unrevealed in the Old Testament* and now revealed in the New Testament."<sup>36</sup>

If the Jews (note: the Jews in the New Testament, but regarded as still belonging to the Old Testament period) had not rejected Jesus Christ, *a Jewish national kingdom* would have been established at Christ's first coming! This would have been in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

But because the Jews had rejected the Messiah, Jesus Christ, *God's prophetic programme with Israel was interrupted, temporary broken off, and an unforeseen Church period was inserted.* God's prophetic programme with Israel would be resumed after Christ's so-called first return when the Church would be removed from the earth (the rapture). God's resumed programme with Israel includes the so-called future tribulation period (7 years) and the millennial kingdom (1000 year).

### **[Notes.**

The Spirit of Jesus Christ already spoke through the Old Testament prophets of the grace and salvation that would come to the New Testament Church (1 Peter 1:9-12), for example, to the Church scattered throughout Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1-2). So it is simply not true that the Old Testament prophets knew nothing of the Church of the New Testament!

<sup>35</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, vol 4, p 40-41

<sup>36</sup> C. C. Ryrie, The Basis of the Premillennial Faith, 1953, p 136

The Church is not simply an interim people of God in the midst of his so-called 'real' people, Israel. Instead, Israel in the Old Testament period constituted *the beginning* of God's people (called the Church in Judges 20:2) and the Church in the New Testament period constituted *the continuation and extension* of God's people to all the nations and *the final form* of God's people. The New Testament Church is the fulfilment of God's purpose to create out of his Old Testament people and his New Testament people 'one new man', 'one nation of God's people', 'one household of God' 'one holy temple of God' in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-22). The New Testament Church consists of the sheep coming from the Jewish fold *continued and enlarged* by the sheep coming from the Gentile folds all over the world to form one flock with one Shepherd (John 10:16)! 'The mystery' is not that the Old Testament prophets did not know about the Church, but that the Gentile believers in the New Testament would be heirs together with Israel (the Old Testament name of God's people), members together of one Body (the New Testament name of God's people), and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus on a complete equal footing with the Jewish believers (Ephesians 3:2-6; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20).

Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus Christ offer the Jews a Jewish national and nationalistic kingdom and nowhere does the New Testament speak of the Jews rejecting any nationalistic kingdom. The kingdom of God is God's (Christ's) kingship acknowledged and received in hearts and lives that results in salvation (regeneration, John 3:3-8). Because many Jews rejected Christ as Messiah and Saviour, Christ took the kingdom of God away from those unbelieving Jews and gave it to believing Jews and Gentiles who would produce its fruit (Matthew 21:43).

God's so-called prophetic programme with Israel, or better, God's purpose with Israel was that Israel would bring forth the Messiah (cf. John 4:22; Romans 9:4-5; 15:8-9; Acts 13:23). Through this Messiah God would bless all the nations of the world, including Israel (Genesis 22:18).

The Bible does not speak of any protracted period of time after the one and only second coming of Christ. The rapture of the Church happens on the final day of the history of this world and will be immediately followed by the general final judgement and the renewal of all things (Matthew 24:30-31,40-41; 25:31-46).]

b. Dispensationalism teaches that the Old Testament prophecies refer to Israel and not to the Church.

Dispensationalism teaches that not a single prophecy in the Old Testament can refer to the Church or Church period! All the Old Testament prophecies made to Israel must be literally fulfilled in the future when God resumes his prophetic programme with Israel by *resurrecting the old Jewish national system!* "The Church is not fulfilling in any sense the promises to Israel ..."<sup>37</sup>

**[Remarks.**

*The Old Testament prophecies and promises were made by Jesus Christ.* It was the Spirit of Jesus Christ that was working in the Old Testament prophets when they prophesied (1 Peter 1:9-12; cf. Isaiah 11:2)!

*The Old Testament prophecies and promises were not only meant for Israel, but for all believers!* The believers in the Old Testament did not receive what had been promised, because God had planned something better for the New Testament believers so that only together with the New Testament believers the Old Testament believers would be made perfect (Hebrews 11:39-40). 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For no matter how many promises God has made (in the Old Testament and in the New Testament), they are 'Yes' (guaranteed to be fulfilled) in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' (so be it, we believe it) is spoken by us (the Jewish apostle and believers and the Gentile Corinthians believers) to the glory of God." Not a future nationalistic Israel, but the present New Testament Church consisting of Jewish believers and Gentile believers is the heir of all the promises of God in the Bible! All God's promises made to his Old Testament people (Old Testament Church) are being fulfilled in his New Testament people (New Testament Church)! Examples:

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<sup>37</sup> C. C. Ryrie, The basis of the premillennial faith, p 136

God promised to Israel that he would not only bring back those of Israel he had kept (the remnant of Israel), but also bring his light (revelation) and salvation *to the ends of the earth*” (Isaiah 49:6). And this promise began to go into fulfilment when *the Gentiles* in Asia Minor believed in Christ (Acts 13:45-48)!

God promised to Israel that *aliens* would bind themselves to the God of the Bible and be his servants, that God’s house would be a house of prayer for *all the nations* and that God would gather not only the Jewish exiles from Babylon, but also *others* to be his people” (Isaiah 56:6-8)!

Some Old Testament prophecies and promises *were fulfilled much more than they literally promised*. Example: God promised to Abraham (who was not a Jew) *the land* of Israel from the Euphrates River to the border of Egypt (Genesis 15:18-21). But his offspring, the Church of the Old Testament and the New Testament, will inherit *the world*, the whole new earth (Romans 4:13).

Some Old Testament promises and prophecies were *fulfilled in a non-literal way on a higher plane*. Example: God promised to Israel the restoration of David’s fallen tent so that Israel may possess all the nations that bear God’s name (Amos 9:11-12). But the New Testament explains that these prophetic words were fulfilled when God took from *the Gentiles* a people for himself. God made the remnant of men (*all Gentiles who bear his name*) seek him. The New Testament moreover teaches that *the words of the Old Testament prophets are in agreement with this* (Acts 15:14-18)!

c. Dispensationalism teaches a ‘gap’ theory: an inserted period from Daniel 9:24-27.

Dispensationalism asserts that this unforeseen interruption in God’s prophetic programme with Israel takes place between Daniel’s so-called 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week of years. They assume that Daniel’s 69<sup>th</sup> week refers to the death of Christ after Israel’s refusal to accept Christ as King. Thus they rejected the so-called promised Jewish kingdom. And they assume that Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week refers to the future tribulation period in which they assume God would resume his prophetic programme with Israel. Dispensationalists make these assumptions, because *without these assumptions the Old Testament prophecies made to Israel would never be literally fulfilled!*

[**Remark.** Many Jews did not reject a so-called Jewish nationalistic kingdom. They rejected the King and thereby they rejected God (Luke 10:16) and Gods kingdom (Matthew 21:33-44)!]

d. Dispensational theology interprets Daniel 9:24-27 literally and chronologically.

Some interpreters believe that Daniel 9:24-27 was intended to give literal and chronological information about God’s prophetic programme for Israel, which we could verify with our chronological knowledge of history.

The theory of Behrmann. The period from the prophecy of Jeremiah (605 B.C.) to the enthronement of Cyrus (556 B.C.) was 49 years (7 weeks of years). The period from the prophecy of Jeremiah (605 B.C.) to the death of the high priest Onias III (171 B.C.) was 434 years (62 weeks of years). The sum of these two numbers is 483 years. The last 7 years consists of the events until the restoration of the temple in 164 B.C.

[**Remark.** This argument must be rejected because it is completely arbitrary. There is no reason to add the years of two parallel periods of time together.]

The theory of Julius Africanus (as reported by Eusebius). The period from Nehemiah (445/444 B.C.) to the death of Christ (32/33 A.D.) was precisely 483 years. The 70<sup>th</sup> seven is *postponed* to a later time, after the so-called rapture of the New testament Church. Many dispensationalists follow this theory.

[**Remarks.** Also this theory must be rejected, because it is completely arbitrary.

There is no reason to assume that “the decree to restore and rebuild *Jerusalem*” refers to the commission of Nehemiah to rebuild *the walls* of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:7-8).

Why should the calculation necessarily be based on a 360 day year?

Why must the 7+62 sevens of years necessarily be separated from the 70<sup>th</sup> seven of years in order to create the parenthetic gap (the Church period) within God’s so-called prophetic programme for Israel?

Why must we adopt the date 444 B.C. for Nehemiah and the date 32 A.D. for the death of Christ to make the calculation credible, while the correct dates are 445 B.C. and 30 A.D.?)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> J. Finegan, Handbook of biblical chronology, Princeton, 1964, 285-301

The theory of the critical school of theologians. The 70 weeks of years (490 years) stretch without interruption from a point in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the period of Antiochus IV in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. The number in Daniel 9:24 is a mathematical exaggeration.<sup>39</sup>

**[Remarks.**

Nothing in the Bible suggests that the number 70 sevens of years (490 years) should be understood literally or chronologically. The number is rather a symbolic expression that God's judgement and God's salvation would be complete and would take place at a time predetermined by God.

Dispensational theology claims to be literal and chronological. But dispensationalists themselves interpret Matthew 24:26-31 as being Christ's so-called *second* return and Matthew 24:36-41 as Christ's so-called *first* return! This is neither literal nor chronological! They must interpret Matthew 24:26-41 in this way to ensure that Christ's so-called first return cannot be calculated (his first coming must be imminent). Nevertheless, dispensationalism is able to predict Christ's so-called second return (7 years after Christ's so-called first return) even when Christ himself taught that no one knows about that day or hour (Matthew 24:36)! The truth is that Jesus in Matthew 24:26-41 is speaking of his one and only second coming and not about two separate returns seven years apart.

e. Biblical theology (covenant theology) interprets Daniel 9:24-27 symbolically and chronographically.

Chronography may be compared to cosmology and genealogy in the Bible.

Chronography in Matthew. Matthew 1:1-17 employs a historical scheme that consists of 3 times 14 generations between Abraham and Christ (Matthew 1:17). But the real genealogy of the kings (1 Chronicles 3:10-14) shows that the kings Ahaziah, (Athaliah), Joash and Amaziah were *literally* left out of the scheme, that David and Jeconiah were *literally* counted twice and that one or two of the final four kings (Zedekiah and Gedaliah) were *literally* not counted at all!

Chronography in Judges. While the books of the Kings give precise historical facts with regard to when and how long each king ruled (chronology), the book of Judges often speaks of a period of 40 years of oppression or peace that does not seem to indicate to a chronological period of time, but rather is a symbol of a period of oppression or a period of peace (chronography)(Judges 3:11; 5:31; 8:28; 13:1; 1 Samuel 4:18).

Chronography in Daniel. The expression '70 sevens' is not intended to express a chronological calculable period of time. **Read** Leviticus 25:1-7; 26:27-35,43 and 2 Chronicles 36:20-23. God had commanded Israel to refrain from agriculture every 7 years and to let the land rest from producing. This was called 'a sabbath year'. But Israel disobeyed and did not keep these sabbath years during the approximate 490 years that kings ruled in the land (Saul to Jehoiakim, 1050-587 B.C.). Israel had skipped 70 sabbath years! Thus God forced the land to rest for a symbolic 70 years during Israel's exile to Babylon (605-538 B.C.). Thus, the number '70' is a symbolic number with theological significance.

The number '70 sevens' is also a symbolic number with theological significance, namely, that God would claim the 70 years of exile and desertion sevenfold (Leviticus 26:18,21,24,28)! In Daniel 9:24 Daniel proclaimed that the 70 years of punishment for disobedience (the exile, desertion and oppression by foreigners) (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10) would be demanded sevenfold!

The number '70 sevens' probably refers to years, because the 70 also refers to years (Daniel 9:2). But these years are not intended to be taken literally and chronologically, but rather *symbolically and chronographically*. It is a stylistic manner of writing history, not to give historical facts, but rather *to explain history*! The number '70 sevens' combines two other symbolic numbers: '70' is the symbol of desertion and oppression by foreigners (the exile) and '7' is the number of God's complete and perfect action. The number '70 sevens' of years is therefore a symbol of God's complete and perfect punishment. God deserts Israel and allows her to be oppressed by foreigners for such a symbolic and chronographic period of time.

The 70 sevens period cannot be determined more specifically.

*The beginning of the period.* "The decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:25) may refer to the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11 in 605 B.C., or Jeremiah 29:10 in 597 B.C.), or to the angel Gabriel's instruction (Daniel 9:1,21-27 in 539 B.C.), or to the decree of Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28 in 539 B.C.), or to the decree of Darius (Ezra 6:1-12 in 520 B.C.), or to the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezra 7:12-26 in 458 B.C.), or to the authority Artaxerxes gave to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:4-9 in 445 B.C.).

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<sup>39</sup> "Wrongheaded arithmetical calculations", Porteous

*The end of the period.* “The coming of an anointed one, a ruler” (Daniel 9:25) may refer to a heathen ruler, e.g. Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1; Ezekiel 28:2,14) or to an anointed Jew: a king (1 Samuel 2:10), or a priest (Leviticus 4:3; 2 Maccabees 1:10). If the punctuation causes the ruler to come after 7 weeks of years, the ruler refers to the governor Zerubbabel or the high priest Joshua (Zachariah 4:14; Ezra 2:2). Then the period of exile began in 586 B.C. and ended in 537 B.C., that is, 49 years. However, if the punctuation causes the ruler to come after 7 plus 62 weeks of years, the ruler probably refers to the high priest Onias III (198-174 B.C.) (Daniel 9:26), just as Daniel 11:22 refers to him. Then the subjection of Judah began in 609 B.C. and Onias was killed in 174 B.C., that is, 435 years later. It is not likely that it refers to the independence of Judea under the high priest John Hyrcanus in 122 B.C.

*The 70 sevens period is a symbolic period with theological significance.* The period must stretch from the beginning of the exile to Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.), but the exact dates are not meant to be determined, just as the exact dates of the exile are not meant to be determined. The beginning of the exile may be seen as Nebuchadnezzar subjecting Judea in 605 B.C. or as the surrender of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. or the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Likewise, the end of the exile may be seen as the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., or the return of the Jews from Babylon in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1), or as the completion of the temple building in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:14-15). Both the number ‘70’ and the number ‘70 sevens’ are symbolic and chronographic. They are not chronologic, but are chronographic. That is, they do not predict history, but explain history.

*The 70 sevens period refers to the period of God’s complete and perfect punishment by deserting Israel and by allowing them to be oppressed by foreigners.* The monarchy lasted from 1050 to 586 B.C., approximately 464 years. Thus not  $70 \times 7 = 490$  literal years, but rather 490 chronographic years. Likewise the exile lasted from 605 to 538 B.C., approximately 67 years. Thus not 70 literal years, but rather 70 chronographic years. The period of punishment about which Daniel prophesied lasted from the beginning of the exile to the appearance of a ruler who destroyed the city and the sanctuary (Daniel 9:26) was from 605 to 167 B.C., approximately 438 years. Thus not  $62 \times 7 = 434$  literal years, but rather 434 chronographic years. The period of oppression that began with the death of the high priest Onias III in 171 B.C. and ended with the re-consecration of the temple in 164 B.C. was 7 years. In the middle of this period, in 167 B.C., Antiochus IV had ordered Apollonius, the commander of the mercenary troops in Mysia, to desecrate the temple. Daniel does not occupy himself with numbers that have literal meaning, but with numbers that have symbolic and theological meaning!

### **3. The third presupposition of dispensationalism: The necessity of literal interpretation**

#### **a. Dispensationalism teaches that the only correct understanding of the kingdom is the literal millennial kingdom.**

Dispensationalism asserts that the Old Testament prophecies and the Messianic kingdom *must be interpreted literally and in the Jewish way*, otherwise it would not be possible for these prophecies to be literally fulfilled! Somewhere in the future the Old Testament order (temple, priests, sacrifices, festivals, tribes, etc) needs to be re-established in order to enable the Old Testament prophecies to literally go in fulfilment! Only a literal, national, Jewish understanding of the kingdom is the correct one. Thus, dispensationalism must cling to the literal interpretation of the Bible as the only correct way of interpretation. That is also why dispensationalism believes in a literal future kingdom that would last 1000 literal years.

#### **b. Dispensationalism teaches the following about the millennial kingdom.**

- First there will be literal and frightening topographical changes in the land of Palestine (Ezekiel 38:19).
- Mount of Olives will literally split in two and form a valley from east to west (Zechariah 14:4).
- Mount Zion will literally be raised above all the surrounding mountains (Isaiah 2:2). The rest of Palestine will change into a great and fruitful plain (Isaiah 35:6-7).<sup>40</sup>
- There will be an earthly Jerusalem, from where Christ would reign over the earthly Davidic kingdom (Isaiah 2:3-4). There will also be a Heavenly Jerusalem that hovers above the earthly Jerusalem, from where Christ together with the Church will reign. The earthly Jerusalem will be 2200 kilometres long, 2200 kilometres wide and 2200 kilometres high and has the literal shape of a pyramid (Revelation 21:16).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> John Walvoord, *The millennial kingdom*, 320-321; Dwight Pentecost, *Things to come*, 509-510; Charles Ryrie, *The basis of premillennial faith*, p 147-148

<sup>41</sup> Dwight Pentecost, *Things to come*, 578-580; John Walvoord, *The millennial kingdom*, p 327-328, 334; John Walvoord, *The church in prophecy*, p 162

- The surface area of the land of Palestine would be enlarged and would be divided among the twelve tribes of Israel (Ezekiel 47:13 - 48:29).
- The surface area of the temple would also be enlarged. The temple of Ezekiel would be rebuilt (Ezekiel chapter 40-48).
- The Old Testament priesthood and Levites would be restored. Blood sacrifices would again be brought (Ezekiel 42:13; 43:18-27; 44:15-16; 45:13-25; 46:3-4,11-15; Zechariah 14:21)!
- From under the temple a literal stream of water would flow and become constantly wider and deeper. It would flow south through Jerusalem and after about one kilometre split in two: half would flow to the Mediterranean Sea and half to the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:1-6; Zechariah 14:8). The Dead Sea would only have fresh water teeming with fish and would be surrounded by vegetation (Ezekiel 47:7-12).<sup>42</sup>
- The earthly Jerusalem would be the centre of the government of the world. The nation of Israel would be elevated high and all the Gentile nations would be subject to Israel and serve Israel (Isaiah 2:3-4; Zechariah 14:14,16-17).<sup>43</sup>

## **PART 8. THE FIRST PRESUPPOSITION OF DISPENSATIONALISM DISPROVED: THE STRICT SEPARATION OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH**

### **1. Dispensational theology is a theology of the dividing of the Bible**

#### **a. Dispensationalism teaches that God has two peoples with two programmes.**

J. N. Darby (1800-1882) is the father of modern dispensationalism. In 1827 he meditated on Isaiah 32:15-20 and Ephesians 2:4-7. Darby taught that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 gave the Church (the New Testament believers) a place in Christ *in heaven* with many heavenly blessings (Ephesians 2). But the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel would give Israel a place *on earth* with many earthly blessings. He concluded that the heavenly blessings are for the Church and the earthly blessings are for Israel! This led to Darby's doctrine of the two peoples of God: "Israel is *God's earthly people* and the Church is *God's heavenly people*."<sup>44</sup> This separation of the Church from Israel led to Darby's other doctrine: the parenthetic period: "The Church period is an insertion (interpolation, intermezzo) into God's earthly programme with Israel.

#### **b. Dispensationalism teaches that the Bible must be divided.**

Scofield wrote a booklet, "Rightly *Dividing* the Word of Truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) 'being ten outline studies of the more important *divisions* of Scripture)(date unknown). Scofield defended *God's two programmes: God's programme with Israel and God's programme with the Church. In this way the Bible and its contents were radically divided in:*

- Jew and Gentile or Israel and the Church
- seven dispensations in biblical history
- Christ's first coming (for the Church) and Christ's second coming (for Israel). The two comings of Christ point to the beginning of two separated dispensations
- two physical resurrections: the first for believers and the second for the wicked point to the end of these two separate dispensations
- five judgements, of which three are final judgements:

#### **c. Dispensationalism teaches the radical division of Israel and the Church also in the New Testament.**

Dispensationalists teach that references in the New Testament about the Old Testament refer only to Jews. They argue that the Old Testament names used for the New Testament Church only refer to Jewish believers in the New Testament Church and not to the New Testament Church itself. Thus, dispensationalists carry their distinction between Israel and Church radically through the New Testament period. They also argue that when the word 'kingdom' is related to the Church it only refers to 'the kingdom in mystery or secret form' (Matthew 13:11) or to 'God's providence'.

<sup>42</sup> John Walvoord, *The millennial kingdom*, p 309-315,320; Dwight Pentecost, *Things to come*, p 509-511

<sup>43</sup> Dwight Pentecost, *Things to come*, 495-507; John Walvoord, *The millennial kingdom*, p 299-304

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Payton Fuller, *The hermeneutics of dispensationalism*, 1957, p 38-41

## 2. Covenant theology is the theology of the unity of the Bible

### a. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the New Testament (shadow and realities)

*God's people in the Old Testament, Israel, is extended in the New Testament to become God's people called out from every nation, language, clan and culture. The Church of the New Testament is Israel of the Old Testament that has come to maturity.*

The Jewish believers and the Gentile believers have both been chosen to be God's sons and daughters before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

The prophecies in the Old Testament about the coming of Christ, his sacrifice of atonement, his fulfilment of the law, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the extension of God's kingdom to include Gentile believers have all been fulfilled in the New Testament period. The Old Testament institutions were 'shadows and types' of the New Testament 'realities' (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1)

Although the New Testament speaks much about the spiritual realities and heavenly blessings of the Church (Ephesians chapters 1 to 3), it also speaks much about the earthly realities, responsibilities and blessings of the Church (Ephesians chapters 4 to 6). Christians have been given the cultural commission to fill the earth with people in the image of God and to subdue, preserve and rule over the earth and its resources (Genesis 1:28; Romans 15:4). Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). Christians must set examples of Christian marriages, Christian families and Christian labour relationships on earth (Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9). Christians must utilize their spiritual gifts to serve others, to quip Christians to serve practically and to build up the Church on earth (1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:12). And Christians have been given the great commission to make people of all nations into mature and active followers of Christ on earth (Matthew 28:19).

### b. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Matthew (the kingdom).

At Christ's first coming the kingdom had already come. Unbelieving Jews will be cast out of this kingdom, while believing Gentiles from everywhere in the world will inherit the kingdom (Matthew 8:11-12).

The kingdom will be taken away from Jewish leaders who reject Jesus Christ and it will be given to any Jew or Gentile who will bear the fruit of the kingdom (Matthew 21:42-44).

And at Christ's second coming everything that causes sin and all who do evil will be weeded out of his present existing kingdom on earth (Matthew 13:41).

### c. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles in John (the flock).

During the Old Testament period there was mainly one sheepfold, Israel (cf. Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34). At Christ's first coming Christ called and led his Jewish sheep out of that sheepfold and then proceeded to call and lead his Gentile sheep out of the many other sheepfolds in the world. Christ *continues and extends* his flock to include sheep from all the Gentile nations. God's people consisting of believing Jews and believing Gentiles become *one flock with one Shepherd* (John 10:16).

### d. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Romans (the full number).

Romans 9. Although Israel possessed special privileges during the Old Testament period, these privileges did not make Israel God's true, spiritual and chosen nation. The natural and national Israel with all its privileges is not the same as the spiritual Israel (Romans 9:4-6)! People become God's true spiritual children, not by physical descent, but only by God's sovereign promise (Romans 9:6-9). People become God's true spiritual children, not by doing the works of the law, but only by God's sovereign election in eternity and his irresistible calling in time (Romans 9:10-13; 8:29-30; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; 2 Timothy 1:9-10). People become God's true and spiritual children, not by their own (free) will and effort, but only by God's sovereign mercy and undeserved grace (Romans 9:14-18; cf. 8:7-8). Both believing Jews and believing Gentiles belong to God's one people (Romans 9:24-26). Because of the disobedience and unbelief of Israel only the believing remnant of the natural and national nation of Israel is being saved (Romans 9:27-33).

Romans 10. From Christ's first coming there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (Romans 10:12-13). The ceremonial law that had made a separation between Jews and non-Jews had been fulfilled (Matthew 5:17) and was therefore cancelled (Colossians 2:14) and permanently abrogated (Efeziërs 2:15)! The holy places (temple), holy people (priests), holy times (Jewish festivals) and holy actions (circumcision, sacrifices) will never again have any significance before God! Jews and Gentiles are saved (justified) only by

hearing the gospel and believing in Christ (Romans 10:14-18). This gospel had also been preached to Israel during the Old Testament period (Romans 3:21; Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 4:2; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Romans 11. God has not rejected the true and spiritual Israel of the Old Testament period! The true and spiritual Israel is never identical with the whole natural and national nation of Israel. True and spiritual Israel consists only of true believers. In his sovereign wisdom and grace God has saved a remnant of believing Jews in every generation of Jews throughout the whole Old Testament period (Isaiah 1:9; 10:20-22)! But in justice God hardened the hearts of the other Jews who continued in unbelief and disobedience (Romans 11:1-10; Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:10-15) (cf. also Romans 1:24-32 with respect to the hardening of Gentiles). God uses the believing Jews (e.g. the apostles and others) to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles and lead them to salvation (cf. Matthew 28:19). And God uses these Gentiles to proclaim the gospel to Jews and lead them to salvation (cf. Acts 17:4,12; Revelation 3:9). If God used the transgressions of Israel to save many Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:44-48), how much more would God use the salvation of Jews (like the disciples of Jesus and Paul) to save many more Gentiles (Romans 11:11-15)?

The 'Root' of the olive tree is not a symbol of the natural nation of Israel, but rather a symbol of the Seed of the patriarchs (Genesis 22:18), Jesus Christ himself (Galatians 3:16), in his covenant relationship to his people (cf. Romans 5:17-19). The one 'olive tree' is also not a symbol of the natural nation of Israel, but rather a symbol of God's believing people – here in the New Testament a symbol of 'the one flock of Jesus' (John 10:16) or a symbol of 'the one new man' (Ephesians 2:15), of 'the one people of God', 'the one household of God' or 'the one temple of God in which God lives by his Spirit' (Ephesians 2:19-22) – e.g. the one Church of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The 'natural olive branches' are a symbol of Jews that believe in Christ (whether during the Old Testament period or the New Testament period) and 'the wild olive branches' are a symbol of the Gentiles that believe in Christ (also whether during the Old Testament period or the New Testament period). Jews and non-Jews that do not believe in Jesus Christ, are symbolically broken off the olive tree, that is, they do not belong and have never belonged to the olive tree (cf. John 15:5-6; cf. 3:3)! But Jews and non-Jews that believe in Jesus Christ are symbolically grafted into the olive tree, that is, they come to belong to the Body of Christ forever (Romans 11:16-24; cf. John 3:16).

The 'mystery' (Romans 11:25) is God's plan in which he uses the Jews to save the Gentiles and the Gentiles to save the Jews! God uses *the partial hardening* of Israel to save Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:44-48) until the full number of saved Gentiles has come in (by Christ's second coming)(Romans 11:25). And God uses the saved Gentiles to make a remnant of Jews chosen by grace from every generation (Romans 11:5) jealous and to save them (Romans 11:13-14). *And in this way (so, thus)* God will save all Israel (by Christ's second coming)(Romans 11:26).

Some Bible translations of Romans 11:25-26 read: "Israel has experienced *a temporary hardening* until the full number of Gentiles have come in. *And then* all Israel will be saved". These translation have been made by people with dispensational sympathies and suggest that God still has a programme with Israel after the Church has been removed from the earth and suggests that every single Jew would be saved! In the light of the Greek original of the New Testament this translation is untenable! The Greek words can only be translated with '*a partial hardening*' and '*in this way*'.<sup>45</sup>

The salvation of 'the full number'<sup>46</sup> of elected Jews (Romans 11:12,26) and the full number of elected Gentiles (Romans 11:25) will chronologically take place at the same time, namely, at Christ's one and only second coming (John 5:28-29; 6:39-40). After that it will not be possible for anyone to still come to faith and be saved (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; 13:5; cf. Matthew 25:10-12; Luke 16: 27-31). 'All Israel' (Romans 11:26a) means the same as 'the full number of Israel' (Romans 11:12) and consists of the total of all 'the remnants' of Jews in every generation in history that will come to faith (cf. Romans 11:4-5). It can never mean 'literally every Jew that has ever lived' or 'literally every Jew at some point in the future', because both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak of Jews that are rejected because of their unbelief and disobedience (Romans 9:27,29-33; 10:16,19-21; 11:7-10; Hebrews 3:12 to 4:2).

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<sup>45</sup> οτι προσωρις απο μερους τω Ισραηλ γεγονεν (vira) αχρι ου πληρωμα των εθνων εισελθη (vsaa), και ουτως πας Ισραηλ σωθησεται (vifp)

<sup>46</sup> το πληρωμα

The purpose of Christ's first coming was to turn Israel from their godlessness and save them from their sins (Romans 11:26b-27; Mark 1:15).

Paul writes shortly after Christ's first coming and says that God's plan is that not only Gentiles find mercy, but from NOW on also Jews would find mercy (through the preaching of the gospel). Many Jews are NOW (as Paul was writing) still 'enemies' of Christians because they oppose the Christians, but 'beloved' of God because they will come to faith through the preaching of the gospel. God would honour his covenant with the patriarchs, because his undeserved gift of grace and his irresistible calling (of Jews and Gentiles) are irrevocable (Romans 11:28-29; 8:29-30; cf. Isaiah 14:24,27). Through the disobedience of Jews many Gentiles are NOW coming to faith. But through God's mercy to Gentiles also many Jews are NOW coming to faith (Romans 11:30-32)!

e. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Galatians (immaturity to maturity).

The 'gospel' was preached during the Old Testament period and is being preached during the New Testament period. The way of salvation (justification) is the same for people living during the Old Testament period and people living during the New Testament period, namely, through faith (Galatians 3:6-9). During the Old Testament period people believed in the Messiah *that still had to come* and during the New Testament period people believe in the Messiah (Jesus Christ) *that has already come* (Galatians 3:16).

The covenant of grace, which God made with Abraham, already existed 430 years before Moses and the law that was given to Moses. God's law does not abrogate God's covenant! The law has never been a means to be justified (to be saved)! God's law was *added* to the covenant in order to cause people to know what sin is and to realise that they fall short and need a Saviour (Galatians 3:16-18). God's law drove people to Christ in order to find salvation by faith (Galatians 3:23-25). And God's law taught them the way to live as God's covenant (saved) people (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). During the Old Testament period God's *immature children* were held prisoner under the guardianship of the law. But during the New Testament period they have become God's *mature sons and daughters*. Through Christ's completed work of salvation they have gained the full rights of son's and daughters within God's one family (consisting of believers from the Jews and believers from the non-Jews)! Christ has made atonement for their sins and has redeemed them from the guardianship of the law (Galatians 3:23 to 4:7)!

From Christ's first coming onwards there is no longer any difference between a Jew and a Gentile. Both are Abraham's 'seed' or 'children' and both are heirs of all God's promises (Galatians 3:26-29; 2 Corinthians 1:20). The believers from the Gentile nations are now also citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:24-27; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:8-16; 12:22-24; 13:14; Revelation 3:12). Gentiles (and Jews) who boast in the cross of Jesus Christ and have become a new creation are 'the Israel of God', that is, are the true people of God (Galatians 6:14-16)! After Christ's first coming, his perfect work of salvation and his fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17), there is no longer a future period in which God needs to fulfil any promise to Israel.

f. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians (excluded to included).

In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul compares the covenant status of Gentiles under the old covenant (the Old Testament) with the covenant status of Gentile believers in Christ under the new covenant (the New Testament).

During the Old Testament period Gentiles (believers) lived in the midst of Israel, but were foreigners with respect to the covenant (Ephesians 2:12). For example, they could not participate in the Passover.<sup>47</sup> But from Christ's first coming onwards Gentile believers are no longer foreigners with respect to the covenant. Jewish believers and Gentile believers are now both on completely equal terms 'members of God's household' (Ephesians 2:19-22; Numbers 12:7; Hebrews 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:15).

The Gentile believers are no longer "excluded from citizenship in Israel" (Ephesians 2:12). They are now "fellow citizens with God's people" (Ephesians 2:19)! They are now "heirs together with Israel", "members together (with Israel) of one Body (the Body of Christ), and "sharers together (with Israel) in the promise in Christ" (Ephesians 3:6), that is, all the Old Testament promises made to Israel are now in and through Jesus Christ also "Yes" for Gentile believers (2 Corinthians 1:20)!

The two groups of believers, Jewish believers and Gentile believers, have in Christ been recreated to become "one new man" (Ephesians 2:15-16). This passage emphasises both the *continuity* of God's Old Testament

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<sup>47</sup> Exodus 12:45, Septuagint translation

people (Church, Judges 20:2) as well as the *extension* of God's people to include the Gentile believers as God's people (Church, Matthew 16:18). *The New Testament Church is the Old Testament Israel that has come to maturity in Christ. Christ is the Root of God's covenant people.*

g. The relationship of Jews and Gentiles in Hebrews (the city that is to come).

The Old Testament ceremonial law was the shadow of things to come. The New Testament Christ is the reality which those shadows depicted (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

The Old Testament city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God, was the focus of the believers during the Old Testament period (Hebrews 11:10,13-16). It is also the focus of believers during the New Testament period (Hebrews 13:14; cf. Galatians 4:21-31). Not only the believers in the Old Testament (Hebrews 11:14-16), but also the believers in the New Testament (Hebrews 13:14) have no enduring city here on this present passing world! All Old Testament and New Testament believers are pilgrims on their way to God's kingdom in its final perfect phase. Only at Christ's second coming will they both share in the New Jerusalem on the new earth. Their spiritual identity can never be this present world with its governmental, social and cultural institutions. It cannot be the earthly city of Jerusalem or the present land of Israel. The spiritual identity of believers in Christ can only be the city that is to come (the Heavenly Jerusalem at the present time that becomes the New Jerusalem in the future)!

The citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem constitute the spirits of righteous men made perfect (that includes the Old Testament believers who had already died) (cf. Hebrews chapter 11) and New Testament believers that have already died. Together they constitute the present Triumphant Church. The citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem also constitute the Church of the firstborn whose names are registered in heaven (that refers to the New Testament believers who are still living on the earth). They constitute the present Militant Church (Hebrews 12:22-23). The Heavenly Jerusalem is also called 'the better and heavenly country' which God was preparing (Hebrews 11:13-16). 'The Promised Land' in the Old Testament was a symbol of the whole new earth after the second coming of Christ (Romans 4:13). Hebrews 11:39-40 clearly teaches that the believers of the Old Testament will only together with the believers of the New Testament inherit the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12,14)!

h. The relationship of Jews and Gentiles in Revelation (the New Jerusalem).

At Christ's second coming this Heavenly Jerusalem will descend onto the new earth as the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem will consist of the full number of believers from both Jews and Gentiles. The New Jerusalem is prepared as a bride (Revelation 21:2). When the angel shows John the bride he gets to see the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-10), which consists of both the Old Testament believers and the New Testament believers (Revelation 21:12,14)! The Heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual mother of all true believers (Galatians 4:26). The New Jerusalem is a symbol and symbolically has twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them (Revelation 21:12-13) and also twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles on them (Revelation 21:14). Also the New Testament Church is called "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1) and has the apostles as foundation (Ephesians 2:20).

i. Other Old Testament names of God's people for the New Testament Church.

All these names show that Israel has *not been replaced* by the Church, but rather that Israel is being *continued and extended* to include the Gentile believers in the Church.

The Church is *the spiritual circumcision*. Jews do not belong to the true spiritual Israel if they are only physically circumcised. In God's eyes only Jews that are spiritually circumcised (born again by the Spirit) are true Jews. Only they will receive God's praise (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:11-16; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11-12).

The Church is *the temple of the Living God* through his Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:16).

The Church is *the twelve tribes of Israel* (James 1:1; cf. Luke 22:30; Galatians 6:16; Revelation 7:4).

The Church is *God's elect people dwelling in the dispersion* (diaspora) – a technical term that originally referred to Jews living amongst the Gentiles (1 Peter 1:1).

The Church is *God's chosen people* (Deuteronomy 10:15) and *God's royal priesthood or kingdom and priests* (Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

## Conclusion.

There is no biblical ground for separating God's Old Testament people from God's New Testament people.

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## **PART 9. THE SECOND PRESUPPOSITION OF DISPENSATIONALISM DISPROVED: THE PARENTHETIC PERIOD**

### **1. Is the Church an unexpected insertion or the continuation and extension of Israel?**

a. Dispensational theology asserts that the New Testament Church is an unexpected insertion into God's Old Testament programme with Israel. Dispensationalism *assumes* that all God's Old Testament prophecies are only meant for Israel and can only be fulfilled in Israel. Dispensationalism further assumes that out of necessity there must be a future period (a 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation) in which all these Old Testament prophecies to Israel could be literally fulfilled. Thus dispensationalism finally assumes that the New Testament Church (the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation) is a parenthesis (an insertion, interpolation, intermezzo, gap) that separates God's prophetic programme with Israel in the Old Testament (the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation) from God's continued prophetic programme with Israel after the Church has been removed from the earth (the 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation). The Church is an unexpected insertion in God's original plan with only Israel. Dispensationalists absolutely need this construction otherwise there would be no future dispensation in which God's prophecies to Israel could be *literally* fulfilled.

[**Remark.** If it can be pointed out that the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in another way than dispensationalists allege the whole theological system of dispensationalism collapses!]

b. Covenant theology asserts that the New Testament Church is a continuation and extension of God's Old Testament programme with Israel. The Church is Israel that has come to maturity. The Law and Prophets (the Old Testament revelation) has been fulfilled at Christ's first coming (Matthew 5:17). The shadows and types in the Old Testament revelation has become the realities in the New Testament revelation (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1).

Covenant theology teaches the following about the Old Testament prophecies:

Some Old Testament prophecies are not fulfilled, because God's conditions for the fulfilment of these prophecies were broken (Jeremiah 18:1-12; Ezekiel 33:11-16).

Some Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled at Christ's first coming and in the New Testament period. Examples: Christ (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; cf. Matthew 1:22; 2:5,15,17, etc), salvation through grace (cf. Isaiah 55:1; 1 Peter 1:9-12), the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29; cf. Acts 2: 17-21), rebirth (Ezekiel 36:25-27; cf. John 3:3-8), God's people extended to the nations (Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 56:1-8; cf. Acts 47-48).

Other Old Testament prophecies will be completely fulfilled at Christ's second coming and the eternal period. Examples: the covenant in its final phase (Revelation 21:3), the kingdom in its final phase (Revelation 11:15), the resurrection from the dead (Job 19:15-17; Psalm 49:15; Hosea 13:14; Isaiah 25:6-8; 26:19; Daniel 12:3,13; cf. John 5:28-29).

Covenant theology asserts that what the Old Testament teaches about Israel with a covering over the eyes (2 Corinthians 3:14-16) must be explained in the full light of the New Testament revelation where the covering over the eyes has been removed! Materials outside the Bible may not be added into the biblical revelation (1 Corinthians 4:6) and materials for example from the books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah in the Old Testament revelation may not be interpolated into the book of Revelation in the New Testament revelation (Revelation 22:18-19).

### **2. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:16-21)**

a. The outpouring of the Spirit is fulfilled for Jews and Gentiles.

Dispensational theology asserts that the Old Testament prophets were completely ignorant about the future Church period and that they believed that the Messianic kingdom would immediately follow the coming of

the Messiah. Therefore dispensationalists argue that Joel's prophecy with regard to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit could only refer to a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit on only Jews. This outpouring would then have to take place during the future tribulation period or millennial kingdom after the Church has been removed from the earth.<sup>48</sup>

Covenant theology asserts that according to the apostle Peter (who was a Jew) the prophecy of Joel 2:28 is fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21)! Although the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believing Jews, Peter immediately said that this prophecy was promised to all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:39). This is a reference to the Gentiles, who would also believe and be baptised with the Spirit (Acts 11:14-18).

b. The outpouring of the Spirit is the baptism with the Spirit.

Dispensational theology does not connect the future outpouring of the Spirit on the Jews with the baptism of the Spirit at all. It connects it only to certain earthly blessings for Israel in their future Jewish nationalistic kingdom (Isaiah 32:15-20).<sup>49</sup>

Covenant theology teaches that the prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit in Ezekiel 36:25-30 is much clearer than the prophecy in Isaiah 32:15-20. The outpouring of the Spirit would first result in the regeneration of individuals (Ezekiel 36:25-27), cause them to be a part of God's covenant people (Ezekiel 36:28) and then result in earthly blessings (Ezekiel 36:29-30).

The outpouring of the Spirit in Acts chapter 2, which is the fulfilment of the prophecy in Joel 2, is called 'a baptism with the Spirit' in the book of Acts (Acts 1:5; 10:44-48; 11:14-18), an event that first results in regeneration (Titus 3:4-8) and causes both Jewish and Gentile believers to become a part of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) and then results in earthly blessings in the present time (Matthew 6:25-34) and in the whole inheritance promised during the Old Testament period (2 Corinthians 1:20-22).

c. The outpouring of the Spirit and the great signs in the heaven above and the earth below.

Dispensational theology argues that Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit has not yet taken place, because the great signs in the heavens and earth have not yet taken place: blood and fire and billows of smoke; the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood.

Covenant theology teaches that these signs are taking place "before the day of the Lord", that is, *before Christ's second coming*.

The Old Testament repeatedly uses figurative expressions like these to serve as warnings for the coming judgements of God: over Babylon (Isaiah 13:9-13), over Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7-8), over Edom (Isaiah 34:4-5). The fall of these godless world empires was poetically compared to the darkening of the sun.

At his first coming Christ baptised people with the Spirit and with the fire that refines and purifies or with the fire of judgement (Matthew 3:10-12; Malachi 3:1-2; cf. 4:1-6). At his crucifixion there was darkness, an earthquake, graves opened and people came to life (Matthew 27:45-53). Between Christ's first and second coming the apocalyptic events will consist of wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilence, fearful events (droughts, tornados, tsunamis, floods) and great signs from heaven (Luke 21:10-11). All such apocalyptic signs do not remain limited to the last day!

Thus, the signs in Joel's prophecy are no basis to assert that his prophecy has not gone into fulfilment. *The great signs in the heaven above (in the universe) and on the earth below (in nature) are repeatedly indications of God's coming revelations and actions with respect to salvation or judgement in both the Old Testament and the New Testament periods.* These signs occurred at the revelation of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16-19), at the liberation of Jerusalem and its citizens out of the hands of Babylon after the exile (Isaiah 13:6-13; 29:1-6), at the judgement of the enemies of God's people (Isaiah 34:2-5), after the enthronement of Jesus Christ to rule as Saviour and Judge (Revelation 4:5 to 5:14), at the answering of the prayers of Christians on earth (Revelation 8:5), at the revelation of the struggle in heaven behind the struggle

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<sup>48</sup> Dwight Pentecost, Things to come, 1958, p 271, 486

<sup>49</sup> Merrill Unger, New Testament teaching on tongues, 1971, p 26

on earth (Revelation 11:19 to 12:17) and at Christ's second coming (Revelation 6:12-17; 16:18; Matthew 24:29-31).

The Old Testament prophets saw the events in the future as mountain ranges in the distance, without being able to judge the distance between each mountain range. Thus the prophet Ezekiel saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as an event that would immediately follow the return from exile from Babylon and the restoration of the land (Ezekiel 39:27-29). Likewise, the prophet Joel saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as an event associated with Israel's liberation from the exile in Babylon (cf. Isaiah 13:6-13; 29:1-6; 34:2-5 above). And yet the New Testament revelation shows that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place more than 500 years after Israel's return from exile in Babylon!

### **3. The rebuilding of David's fallen tent (Amos 9:11-12 and Acts 15:13-18)**

#### **a. Dispensational theology.**

Dispensationalists say that Amos 9:11-12 does not refer to the Gentile Church period, but rather to the Jewish Messianic period that would come after the Gentile Church period and especially during the millennial kingdom. Scofield describes this explanation of Acts 15:14-18 as "dispensationally ... the most important passage in the New Testament."<sup>50</sup>

*Dispensationalist especially emphasise the words "at first" (Acts 15:14) and "after this" (Acts 15:16) and separate them from their immediate context, Acts 15:15, in order to create two periods or dispensations!* They say that James explains God's programme first with the Gentiles and after that with the Jews as follows: "First" (during the parenthesis Church period) God would gather a people out of the Gentiles for himself. "After that" (during the tribulation period and millennial kingdom) God would resume his delayed programme with Israel.

The words, "from the Gentiles a people for his name" (Acts 15:14) refer to the Gentiles during the parenthesis period (6<sup>th</sup> dispensation). And the words, "all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called" (Acts 15:17) refer to the Gentiles during the millennial kingdom (7<sup>th</sup> dispensation).

Walvoord says, "...it seems that 'after these things I will return' refers to the return of Christ after the period of Gentile prominence which began in 606 B.C. and is destined to continue until the second coming. It is after these things - that is, after the judgment of Israel, their scattering, and discipline - that Christ will return and build again the tabernacle or tent of David.... The divine order therefore is judgment on Israel and blessing upon the Gentile first (e.g. during the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation), to be followed by judgment on Gentile and blessing on Israel (e.g. the 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation). This is not only the order of the Old Testament, but it is the order of this portion in Acts ..."<sup>51</sup>

#### **[Remarks.**

Precisely Acts 15:15, which Walvoord avoids, shows very clearly that James was making *a statement* in Acts 15:14-15 that God before concerned himself about (looked for) winning a people from among the Gentiles<sup>52</sup> and that in Acts 15:16-18 he proved his statement with *a quotation* from the Old Testament (Amos 9:11-12)! James says that the words of the Old Testament prophets are in agreement with this and then quotes one of these prophets (Amos). The other prophets are Moses (Genesis 22:18), Isaiah (Isaiah 49:6; 56:3-8) and Daniel (Daniel 2:44). Moreover James says that God's plan to include the Gentiles in his people was known for ages (Acts 15:18; Isaiah 45:21; cf. Ephesians 1:4). Dispensationalists cannot see or do not want to see that *the Gentiles in the quotation* (Acts 15:17) are the same as *the Gentiles in the statement* (Acts 15:14)! *Dispensationalists try to drive their principle of contradistinctions as far as possible in order to avoid admitting that certain expressions refer to the same realities. Thus they avoid admitting that the Bible is a unity instead of a multiplication of dispensations!]*

#### **b. Covenant theology.**

James makes the statement that Peter explained that God *at first or before* (earlier than the ministry of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles) had purposed to win a people out of the Gentiles for himself in Acts 15:14. James says that the prophets in the Old Testament are in agreement with this statement (Acts 15:15)

<sup>50</sup> Scofield, The Scofield reference Bible", p 1169 notes

<sup>51</sup> Walvoord, Israel in prophecy, p 91-93

<sup>52</sup> Συμμεων εξηγησατο > εξηγεομαι (viam) καθως πρωτον ο θεος επεσκεψατο > επισκεπτομαι (to seek, to concern himself with) (viam) λαβειν (vnaa) εξ εθνων λαον τω ονοματι αυτου

and he quotes the words of Amos from the Greek translation of the Old Testament to prove his statement (Acts 15:17-18).

Acts 15:14. The Greek word ‘how’<sup>53</sup> introduces indirect speech: “Simon explained *how* God before (Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey to the Gentiles) concerned himself with (or resolved to) winning out of the Gentile nations a people for his name” (Acts 15:7).

James said that Peter was NOT referring to God’s so-called programme with the Gentile Church before Christ’s so-called first return, as dispensationalists assert). But Peter was referring to the event with respect to the Gentiles in the past, when God revealed to Peter his purpose to win the Gentiles (Acts chapter 10 and 11) *before* Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey to the Gentiles (Acts chapter 13 and 14)! God himself had already before the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15 decided the issue with respect to the Gentile nations (Acts 15:7-11)! God had broken the unwillingness of the Jewish Christians to proclaim the gospel to the Gentile nations by giving the Gentile Cornelius a vision to fetch Peter and the Jew Peter a vision to go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel to them! Three times God had taught Peter not to regard the Gentiles as impure or unclean when God had made them pure (Acts 10:15,28)! Peter preached that God does not show favouritism (to Jews), but accepts men from every nation (Jews and Gentiles) who fear him and do what is right (Acts 10:34-35). He preached that all the prophets of the Old Testament testify about the Messiah (Christ) that everyone (including Gentiles) who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (through his accomplished work of salvation)(Acts 10:43).

Acts 15:15. “The words of the prophets are in agreement with this.”

What the apostle Peter asserted with respect to the Gentiles nations is exactly what the Old Testament prophets asserted with respect to the Gentile nations! James says that God’s plan with respect to the Gentile nations was NOT an afterthought of God, as dispensationalists argue, namely that God introduced the Gentile Church period (6<sup>th</sup> dispensation) only after Israel (the 5<sup>th</sup> dispensation) had rejected Christ’s offer of the kingdom at his first coming.

The Church is *NOT* an unexpected last minute insertion in the midst of God’s eternal plan with Israel! The apostle Peter earlier made reference to the Old Testament prophets who prophesied that God would bless all the Gentile nations in the world through ‘the Seed’ of Abraham, that is, through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:24-26; cf. Genesis 22:18)! Also the apostle Paul referred to the Old Testament prophets who prophesied that Jesus Christ would bring the light of salvation to all the Gentile nations (Acts 13:27,47; Isaiah 49:6). Now also James quotes Amos 9:11-12 to prove that the Old Testament prophets prophesied that God would take from the Gentiles a people for himself (Acts 15:14-15).

Acts 15:16. “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent, that is, ‘its torn down parts’ and I will erect her again.”<sup>54</sup> The words “after this”, e.g. after the shaking of the temple and the exile to Babylon about which the prophet Amos prophesied in Amos 9:1-10, God would return to rebuild the ruins (the remnant) of David’s fallen tent. The Greek words “after this” in the Greek New Testament is not literally the same as the Hebrew words “in that day”<sup>55</sup> or the same as the words of the Greek translation of the Old Testament<sup>56</sup>, but they have the same meaning, namely, after the exile and dispersion of Israel among the Gentile nations (Amos 9:9-10).

If Amos did have knowledge about the so-called Gentile Church period before the rebuilding of the future Jewish kingdom, his knowledge would contradict the parenthetic theory of dispensationalism, which asserts that the Old Testament prophets knew nothing of God’s plan with the Gentile nations.

However, if Amos had no knowledge of the so-called Gentile Church period before the rebuilding of the so-called future Jewish kingdom, then his words “after this” (that is, “after the Gentile Church period”) cannot refer to the Gentile Church period! So whatever way dispensationalists argue, Acts 15:14-18 defeats their argument!

The word “return” does not refer to Christ’s second coming, as dispensationalists argue. The word does not even occur in the Hebrew or Greek Old Testament texts! But in the New Testament text it gives good sense and is used by James as an introductory suggestion that God’s favour returns to Israel in that Israel is restored after the exile.

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<sup>53</sup> καθως

<sup>54</sup> μετα ταυτα αναστρεψω > αναστρεφω (vifa) και ανοικοδομησω > ανοικοδομεω (vifa) την σκηνην Δαυιδ την πεπτωκυιαν > πιπτω (vpra), και τα κατεσκαμμενα > κατασκαπτω (to tear down)(vprp) αυτης και ανορθωσω > ανορθωω (vifa) αυτην

<sup>55</sup> bajom hahu

<sup>56</sup> εν τη ημερα

The words “rebuild the fallen tent of David” refers to the shabby situation of the royal house of David at the time this prophecy would go into fulfilment. It would be a time when the theocracy of Israel with king and palace had collapsed. Also the prophet Isaiah refers to this time in Isaiah 11:1-2. When only a root or trunk of the royal house of David remains, the Messiah would come with the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:1; Luke 2:4-5; 3:22).

Acts 15:17. “that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, that is (and)<sup>57</sup>, all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called, says the Lord, who does these things.”<sup>58</sup>

Amos 9:11-12 is quoted in Acts 15:16-17 and is a promise of restoration of David’s dynasty. The prophecy is given in the earthly-national form. In 2 Samuel 7:11-16 the prophet Nathan prophesies that when the Messiah comes (at his first coming), the messianic period or time of salvation would dawn.

The Hebrew text of Amos 9:11-12 speaks *from the perspective of God’s Old Testament people*: “so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name.” ‘Edom and all the nations’ represent all the Gentile nations. The restored people of God would repossess the surrounding nations, as was the case under king David and king Solomon (1 Kings 6:21). Edom was the archenemy of Israel (cf. Isaiah 34:1-5), was conquered by David, but rebelled during the exile against Israel. When the Messiah comes, he would again take the Gentile nations into possession (cf. Psalm 2:8).

The Greek New Testament text of Acts 15:16-17 says exactly the same, but *from the perspective of the Gentile nations*. “The remnant of people, that is, all the Gentile nations, would seek the Lord”. These words certainly do not refer to Israel that seeks the Lord, as the Scofield Reference Bible suggests! The New Testament text adds the word ‘Lord’<sup>59</sup> (e.g. Jesus Christ) in order to clarify whom the Gentile nations would seek.

The words “over whom my name has been called” refers to a spiritual struggle in which God conquers the Gentile nations! The same expression was used of Israel to indicate that Israel was God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 28:9-10; Isaiah 63:19; Jeremiah 7:10-11; 14:9; cf. Deuteronomy 12:5; Jeremiah 15:16; 33:2). The essential meaning of the text is that Christ’s first coming is accompanied by the spiritual conquering of the Gentile nations (cf. Psalm 2:7-8)! The Gentile nations are not conquered by military action, but by their active seeking of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 2:3; 11:10)!

Acts 15:18. “that have been known for ages.”<sup>60</sup> All the works of God are known to God from the beginning. Acts 15:15 already said that God’s plan with respect to the Gentile nations was not an afterthought, but was known and prophesied by the Old Testament prophets. Acts 15:18 is an even stronger statement that God’s plan with respect to the Gentile nations was never an afterthought, but had been known by God from the beginning, from eternity (cf. Ephesians 1:4)!

Dispensationalism asserts that God’s plan with respect to the Gentile nations was a new innovation in God’s original programme with Israel. God devised his plan with the Gentiles much later, only after Israel had so-called rejected the kingdom offered to them. Only then did God plan the Gentile parenthesis (inserted) programme in the middle of his original plan with Israel.

Covenant theology sticks with the whole biblical revelation and asserts that God’s plan with respect to the Gentile nations was known to God from eternity, and was made known by God to his Old Testament people from the very beginning of the world. Many centuries before the existence of Israel God’s plan with respect to all the Gentile nations was known and revealed to the very first people (Genesis 3:15) and long before the calling of Jacob to the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 22:17-18). Acts 15:18 completely rejects the parenthesis theory of dispensationalism!

Acts 15:19. “It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”<sup>61</sup> The Gentile believers do not join the old Israel that demanded physical circumcision (Acts 15:1), but directly join God’s Old Testament people as God’s congregation, God’s community, God’s Church, in which the Old Testament ceremonial laws have been fulfilled, cancelled and abrogated. Acts

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<sup>57</sup> The word ‘and’ is exegetically or explanatory: it means ‘that is’

<sup>58</sup> ὡς ἀν ἐκζητησῶσιν. ἐκζητεῶ (vsaa) οἱ καταλοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον, καὶ (that is) πάντα τὰ ἐθνη ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικεκληται (vnp) τὸ ὄνομα μου ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς

<sup>59</sup> The word ‘Lord’ in Greek is κύριος and is not only the Greek translation for the Old Testament Hebrew LORD (JahWeH), but also the divine title of the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>60</sup> γινώστα ἀπ’ αἰῶνος

<sup>61</sup> διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω (vnp) μὴ παρενοχλεῖν > παρενοχλεῶ (vnp) τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν.

The present tense indicates “stop annoying” the Gentiles with your demand that they should keep the law and be circumcised!

15:14,17 and 19 clearly proves that the prophet Amos and the Jerusalem Church meeting spoke about God's purpose with the Gentiles. Gentiles would turn to God in great numbers. The prophecy of Amos clearly went into fulfilment beginning at Christ's first coming!

Scofield describes this prophecy in Acts 15:14-18 as "dispensationally ... the most important passage in the New Testament."<sup>62</sup> He was right, but not in the sense he meant! The correct explanation of Acts 15:14-19 clearly shows that this prophecy of an Old Testament prophet with respect to the Old Testament Israel (Amos 9:11-12) is explained in the New Testament (Acts 15:14-19) as fulfilled in the New Testament Church!

This prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 will therefore NOT be fulfilled in a so-called future millennial kingdom, but is now being fulfilled throughout the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming (cf. Matthew 24:14; Romans 11:28-32)! The symbolic number 1000 in Revelation 20:1-7 refers to exactly this same New Testament period!

#### **4. The prophecies about Gentiles in the Old Testament (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6 and Acts 13:44-48)**

##### **a. Dispensational theology.**

If dispensationalists admit that there are prophecies about the Gentile nations in the Old Testament, they allege that all these prophecies refer *directly* to the Gentile nations in the so-called future millennial kingdom and only *indirectly* to the Gentile nations in the New Testament so-called parenthesis period. "The fact of Gentile participation in the millennium is promised in the prophetic Scriptures."<sup>63</sup>

##### **b. Covenant theology.**

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament about the blessings for Gentiles during the Messianic period.

**Genesis.** All nations (including the nation of Israel that did not yet exist at that time) would be blessed in the Seed (Jesus Christ)" (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:16).

**Psalms.** God the Father would make the Gentile nations the inheritance and possession of God the Son (Psalm 2:7-8). God's kingdom would extend to include the Gentile nations on earth (Psalm 22:27-30). The Messianic King would rule from sea to sea and from the River (Euphrates, regarded as the border of Israel) to the ends of the earth (Psalm 72:8-11,17).

**Isaiah.** God's Word would go out from Jerusalem and all the nations would stream to Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-5; cf. Acts 1:8; Hebrews 13:14). Jesus Christ (the Root of Jesse) would stand as a banner for the nations and they would rally to him (Isaiah 11:9-10). Even the earlier hostile nations that had enslaved God's people would rally to him. Egypt and Assyria, would be a blessing on earth (Isaiah 19:24-25). Jesus Christ would bring justice to the nations and the nations living far away would wait for his teaching (Isaiah 42:1-4). The people out of the Gentile nations would join God's people because they see that the true God is only with them (Isaiah 45:14). Jesus Christ himself is called the true 'Israel' (Isaiah 49:3), the One in whom God's people reach their complete and perfect destination. Jesus Christ himself would restore the remnant of God's chosen Old Testament people and bring salvation to all the Gentile nations on earth (Isaiah 49:6-7). All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of God (Isaiah 52:10). God's Old Testament people, symbolised as 'God's wife', would extend enormously to the Gentile nations (Isaiah 54:1-3). The New Jerusalem that would one day symbolise God's complete people or complete Church, would serve as the ideal of God's people or Church on this earth throughout the whole New Testament period (Isaiah 60:3-5,10-16). The God of the Bible would reveal himself to the Gentile nations who did not ask for him, and he would allow himself to be found by those who did not seek him, because his Old Testament people had obstinately followed their own imaginations and had provoked God with their idolatry (Isaiah 65:1-2; Romans 10:20-21). God would send some of the remnant of his Old Testament people (e.g. the apostles) to the Gentile nations to proclaim his glory to them (Isaiah 66:19; cf. Matthew 28:19).

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<sup>62</sup> Scofield, The Scofield Reference Bible", p 1169 notes

<sup>63</sup> Pentecost, Things to come, p 508

Jeremiah. The Gentile nations would come from the ends of the earth to the God of the Bible because they would loathe their worthless idols or false gods (Jeremiah 16:19).

Amos. God's Old Testament people would continue and extend to include the believers from all the Gentile nations (Amos 9:11-12).

Zechariah. Many Gentile nations would join with the God of the Bible and become his covenant people (Zechariah 2:3-13)! They would recognise the real believers in God's Old Testament people and go with them (Zechariah 8:20-24). Note how the New Testament apostles were all Jewish believers that proclaimed the gospel and made disciples to the end of the known world.

Malachi. The name of the God of the Bible would be great among the Gentile nations all over the earth (Malachi 1:11).

The apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:47 as a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy. *Thus, from Christ's first coming onwards the prophecies with respect to the Gentile nations are going into fulfilment!* Jesus Christ is the Light of the Gentile nations and he uses Paul and other Christian labourers to cause the Old Testament prophecies to go into fulfilment.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied that there comes a time that God's Old Testament people, Israel, would enlarge her tent in order to include the believers of the Gentile nations (Isaiah 54:1-3). God prophesied and promised that the children that would come as a result of God's sovereign promise would be much more than the children that would come by natural increase (cf. Romans 9:8). *The Church in the New Testament would be much larger than natural Israel!* Paul refers to this prophecy in Galatians 4:21-27 and points out that the Church is the fulfilment of this prophecy. *Thus, from Christ's first coming, the New Testament Church is the continuation and extension of God's Old Testament people, Israel!*

The prophet Malachi prophesied that a time would come that God's name would be great among the Gentile nations from the east to the west (Malachi 1:11). This future involvement of the Gentile believers on earth is seen in terms of how Israel served God during the Old Testament period: with incense and pure offerings. Jesus Christ refers to this prophecy in Matthew 8:11-12 and says that from his first coming this prophecy has been going into fulfilment. *Thus from Christ's first coming the New Testament Church serves the same God as the Old Testament Israel and in the same way, but then not with the shadows of the Old Testament revelation (offerings and incense), but with the realities of the New Testament revelation (the sacrifice of Christ and genuine prayers)* (Hebrews 10:1; cf. 1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 8:3-4).

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## **PART 10. THE THIRD PRESUPPOSITION OF DISPENSATIONALISM DISPROVED: THE COVENANT PROVES THE ETERNAL SEPARATION OF ISRAEL FROM THE BRIDE**

Dispensationalism struggles to give God's covenant a place within their system of dispensations. All three dispensational theories about God's covenant run aground.

### **1. Is Israel always inferior and separated or equal and perfected together?**

#### **a. Dispensational theology.**

Dispensationalists allege that only people who are saved after Pentecost (Acts 2) belong to the New Testament Church. The Old Testament saints (Israel) will not be made perfect together with the New Testament saints (the Church). The Old Testament saints through all ages remain *inferior to and separated from* the New Testament saints (the Bride of the Lamb).

**[Remark.** Hebrews 11:39-40 teaches that the Old Testament saints will be perfected on a complete equal basis as the New Testament saints and not separate from the New Testament saints!]

#### **b. Covenant theology.**

The Bible clearly shows that God's Old Testament people and God's New Testament people are together God's one people. It shows that there is *continuity and unity* between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It shows that the believers from the Old Testament period and the believers from the New

Testament period are united together in the Church, the Body of Christ or the Bride of the Lamb. This continuity and unity is grounded in the covenant of God.

The covenant of God *begins* in the Old Testament with Adam. God made a *covenant of works* with Adam: if Adam obeys God's command, he would not lose eternal life (Genesis 2:15-17; cf. Leviticus 18:5). After Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, they lost eternal life and were cast out of Paradise where the tree of life stood. Then God made a *covenant of grace* with Adam and Eve: God promised that the Seed of the woman (the Messiah) would crush the head of Satan, but at the price of being bitten in the heel (Genesis 3:15).

The covenant of grace was *officially established* with Abraham: God promised to bless all the nations in the world (including Israel) in the Seed (the Messiah) (Genesis 12:3; 15:5-6,18-19; 17:7-8; 22:17-18). God reconfirmed the covenant of grace with Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15) and Moses (Exodus 6:3-8; Leviticus 26:9-12) and David (2 Chronicles 17:7-14; Jeremiah 33:19-26).

The covenant of grace established in the Old Testament period would become *the new covenant* (Jeremiah 31:31-34) that would become a reality at the first coming of Christ (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Hebrews 8:6-13). The new covenant clearly includes the believers out of the Gentile nations (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

The covenant of grace reaches its *final perfection* at Christ's second coming, when the complete number of believers from all the nations will be God's nations and God will live with them on the new earth (Revelation 21:3; 14-16).

"When the dispensationalist attempts to warp Scripture to fit his system, the Biblical data on the new covenant is among the most unyielding and uncooperative."<sup>64</sup>

## 2. Is the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 for Israel or for the Church?

### a. Dispensational theology.

Dispensationalists allege that the prophecy of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31:31-34 does not refer to the New Testament because it has been made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

[**Remark.** If it can be shown that the Church is the continuation and extension of Israel, then Jeremiah 31:31-34 does refer to the New Testament Church!]

Dispensationalists say that the prophecy of Jeremiah refers to "the time of trouble for Jacob" (Jeremiah 30:7) and identify this period with the future tribulation period. They also identify Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week of years (cf. Daniel 9:24-27) with this tribulation period.

[**Remark.** Jeremiah chapter 30 and 31 is a collection of prophecies that were made just before and just after the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. "The time of trouble for Jacob" refers to the exile to Babylon and not to the so-called future tribulation period. Compare this second prophecy (Jeremiah 30:4-7) with the first prophecy Jeremiah 30:1-3, the third prophecy (Jeremiah 30:8-9) and the fourth prophecy (Jeremiah 30:10-11).]

### The premise of all dispensationalists.

"There is one general point of agreement (between dispensationalists): the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 *must and can be fulfilled only* by the nation Israel and not by the Church."<sup>65</sup>

"The new covenant as revealed in the Old Testament concerns Israel and *requires* fulfilment in the millennial kingdom."<sup>66</sup>

"The new covenant is millennial."<sup>67</sup>

"If the church fulfils this covenant, she may also fulfil the other covenants made with Israel and *there is no need for an earthly millennium.*"<sup>68</sup> (sic!)

"If the church is fulfilling Israel's promises as contained in the new covenant or anywhere in the Scriptures, then (*dispensationalism*) *premillennialism is condemned.*" (sic!)<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Grover Gunn, *Dispensationalism today, yesterday and tomorrow*, 1985, p 189

<sup>65</sup> Pentecost, *Things to come*, p 124

<sup>66</sup> Walvoord, *The millennial kingdom*, p 210

<sup>67</sup> Ryrie, *The basis of the premillennial faith*", p 111

<sup>68</sup> Pentecost, *Things to come*, p 116

**[Remarks.**

The above mentioned dispensationalists first state their absolute premise: the eternal separation between Israel and the Church. Then they conclude that the Old Testament prophecies and the Old Testament covenant demand a future period in which these prophecies must go into fulfilment!

However, if the premise of dispensationalists is wrong, then even dispensationalists acknowledge that their system of dispensationalism with its millennial kingdom falls apart! Thus according to Pentecost and Ryrie (both students from DTS) dispensationalism stands or falls with the relationship between Israel and the Church.

Ryrie's last remark is in fact the truth! God's real and spiritual Israel in the Old Testament is continued and extended in the New Testament to include the believers out of the Gentile nations and thus becomes the Church. This fact abrogates the necessity of a second return of Jesus Christ and abrogates the necessity of a millennial kingdom. And thus, dispensationalism collapses!]

**b. Covenant theology.**

The New Testament facts pose insuperable difficulties for dispensationalists.

Hebrews 8:6-8; (7:22; 9:15; 10:29; 13:20). The inspired writer directs these words to Christians and teaches that Christ is "the Mediator of a *better covenant*, which is legislated on better promises"<sup>70</sup> and then quotes *the new covenant* of Jeremiah 31:31-34 as this better covenant!<sup>71</sup> He calls the Mosaic Law with its blood sacrifices (Exodus 24:3-8) *the first covenant* (Hebrews 8:7) or *the old covenant* (Hebrews 8:6) and in contrast with this what God promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 *the new covenant* (Hebrews 8:8) or *the second covenant* (Hebrews 8:7). Thus, the new covenant of which the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah speaks is the covenant that Christ mediates!

Hebrews 10:14-18. The writer directs these words to Christians as the climax of his argument that the Old Testament sacrifices are discontinued in the New Testament. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 serves as proof that the blood sacrifices has been ended in the New Testament period. This is ironic, because the dispensationalists refer the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 to Israel during the millennial kingdom period, in which they allege blood sacrifices would again be made (Ezekiel 43:18-27; 45:13-25; 46:3-15)! When dispensationalists argue that these blood sacrifices are not atonement sacrifices for sin, but only remembrance sacrifices, they abandon their premise about the literal interpretation of the Bible, because in Ezekiel these sacrifices are literally called 'sacrifices of atonement'! Thus, the new covenant of which the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah speaks is the covenant that is based on Christ's atonement sacrifice on the cross that fulfilled and abrogated all animal sacrifices of the old covenant for ever!

Hebrews 12:22-24. These words are addressed to Christians and applied to Christians. Various Old Testament concepts as 'Mount Zion', 'Jerusalem', the blood of Abel' and 'the Church of the firstborn' are directly connected to 'the new covenant' of which Jesus is the Mediator!<sup>72</sup> Thus, the new covenant of which the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah speaks is the covenant that belongs to the New Testament Church! Even the dispensationalist Walfoord admits that this 'new covenant' in Hebrews 12:24 refers to the Church, but then he is thinking of a different 'new' covenant, because another word for 'new' is used, which he interprets as 'recent' (thus not related to the Old Testament 'new' covenant of Jeremiah). However, in the New Testament Greek there is no difference between the two words for 'new'<sup>73</sup>, because in Ephesians 4:23 and Colossians 3:10 they are synonyms of each other!

2 Corinthians 3:6. These words apply the new covenant of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:33) directly to the New Testament Church period in which the Holy Spirit writes the word's of God on hearts of Christians and not on stone tables as during the Old Testament Israel period (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:3). Paul calls himself and Timothy "servants of the new covenant"<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Ryrie, The relationship of the new covenant to premillennialism, 1947 unpublished thesis DTS, p 31

<sup>70</sup> και κρείττονος εστιν (vira) διαθηκης μεσιτης, ητις επι κρειττοσιν επαγγελιας νενομοθετησαι > νομοθετω (virp)

<sup>71</sup> διαθηκην καινην

<sup>72</sup> και διαθηκης νεας μεσιτη Ιησου

<sup>73</sup> καινην and νεας

<sup>74</sup> και ικανωσεν > ικανωω (to qualify, to be competent > to empower, authorise)(viaa) ημας διακονους καινης διαθηκης,

Luke 22:20. These words are directed to Christ's disciples when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was thereafter celebrated by the Church (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18-26). Christ said, "This cup is *the new covenant* in my blood, which is poured out for you."<sup>75</sup> With these words his disciples could only think of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 that replaced the old covenant of the law, otherwise Jesus would have deliberately misled them.

### 3. The first attempt of dispensationalism to explain 'the new covenant': These dispensationalist say that there are two new covenants

#### a. Expositors.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, John F. Walvoord (the first two presidents of DTS).

#### b. The theory of two covenants.

In agreement with the method of dispensationalists to split up as many as possible biblical terms and their meaning in the Bible, these expositors teach that there are two new covenants: one for Israel and one for the Church. Even within the context of one chapter of the Bible they teach two different covenants in two different dispensations! They interpret Hebrews 8:6 as a reference to the new covenant for the present Church period (6<sup>th</sup> dispensation) and Hebrews 8:7-13 as a reference to the new covenant for the future Israel in the millennial kingdom (7<sup>th</sup> dispensation)!

"There are *two new covenants* presented in the New Testament: the first with Israel in reaffirmation of the covenant promised on Jeremiah 31 and the second made with the church in this age ... The references in the Gospels (Luke 22:20) and in Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 10:29 and 13:20 would refer to the new covenant with the church, Hebrews 8:7-13 and 10:16 would refer to the new covenant with Israel, and Hebrews 12:24, would refer, perhaps, to both ..."<sup>76</sup>

Moreover dispensationalists argue that it was anyhow impossible for the prophet Jeremiah to know anything about the New Testament period!

#### c. The theory of two covenants is not popular.

This explanation is most in agreement with classical dispensationalism, but is the most difficult to defend and therefore the most unpopular with dispensationalists today.

##### [Remarks.

If the writer of Hebrews had been a consistent dispensationalist he would not have taught that Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the Church period (cf. Hebrews 8:6). If he was a dispensationalist and held to the two-covenant theory, he could have avoided confusion by calling the Mosaic covenant the 1<sup>st</sup> covenant, the Church new covenant the 2<sup>nd</sup> covenant and the Jewish millennial new covenant the 3<sup>rd</sup> covenant. Instead dispensationalists allege that the writer to the Hebrews calls the Mosaic Old Testament covenant the 1<sup>st</sup> covenant and the Jewish millennial new covenant the 2<sup>nd</sup> covenant. The writer of Hebrews did not count the Church new covenant, even though he calls it 'the better covenant' in Hebrews 8:6.

As proved above, the inspired writer of Hebrews directs the words in Hebrews 7:22, 8:6-13, 9:15, 10:16 and 13:20 to Christians and teaches that Christ is "the Mediator of a *better covenant*, which is legislated on better promises" and then quotes *the new covenant* of Jeremiah 31:31-34 as this better covenant! He calls the Mosaic Law with its blood sacrifices (Exodus 24:3-8) *the first covenant* (Hebrews 8:7) or *the old covenant* (Hebrews 8:6) and in contrast with this what God promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 *the new covenant* (Hebrews 8:8) or *the second covenant* (Hebrews 8:7). The writer of Hebrews does not refer to any future new covenant for Israel at all! Thus, the new covenant of which the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah speaks is the covenant that Christ mediates!]

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ου γραμματος αλλα πνευματος

<sup>75</sup> Τουτο το ποτηριον η καινη διαθηκη εν τω αιματι μου, το υπερ υμων εκχυνομενον > εκχυνω (to shed)(vppp)

<sup>76</sup> Pentecost, Things to come, p 124; Walvoord, The millennial kingdom, p 214. Pentecost struggles and fails to prove his point.

#### 4. The second attempt of dispensationalism to explain ‘the new covenant’:

These dispensationalist say that there is only one new covenant. The Church of the New Testament is related only to the blood of the new covenant, but not to the new covenant itself

##### a. Expositors.

John N. Darby (the father of modern dispensationalism), Harry Ironside (a very popular dispensational writer), and E. Schuyler English.

##### b. The theory of one covenant only.

Darby teaches that there is only one new covenant and that is with Israel and not with the Church! All the references to ‘the new covenant’ in the New Testament refer to the new covenant with Israel, namely, to the millennial kingdom, with which the Church has nothing to do! At his first coming as the Mediator of the Jewish, earthly, nationalistic, new covenant, Jesus offered the theocratic political kingdom to Israel and he shed his blood to establish this covenant. However, when Israel rejected Christ as the Messiah, this kingdom was withdrawn from Israel and delayed until the future millennial kingdom.

In the mean time the Church period was inserted between Christ’s offer of the Jewish kingdom to Israel and Christ’s establishment of the future Jewish millennial kingdom for Israel. This new plan of God, the parenthetical New Testament Church, was nowhere prophesied in the Old Testament. God began to gather a heavenly people for himself out of all the Gentile nations in the world. That heavenly people is the Church. Although the blood of Jesus was shed in order to inaugurate the Jewish new covenant kingdom, there remained *enough efficacy* in his Messianic sacrifice to save many individuals from among the Gentile nations in order to establish the New Testament Church and to bless them with heavenly blessings. Christ assumed the office of Mediator to mediate the Jewish covenant, but during the Church period his mediatory office is available for the spiritual benefit of Christians even though Christians are totally unrelated to the new covenant with Israel.

Ironside says that the new covenant is made with God’s earthly people, Israel, and not with God’s heavenly people, the Church. The blood of the new covenant however insures not only earthly blessings for his earthly people, but also heavenly blessings for his heavenly people.<sup>77</sup>

Schuyler-English teaches that the blood of Jesus is not only the basis of the new covenant with Israel, but also the source for all the spiritual blessings for Christians – they are seated with Christ in heaven (Ephesians 2:6). He writes: “...fundamentally, the Gentiles are not a covenant-people, neither is the Church made up of a covenant-people ... The Church, then, is not under the new covenant; the Church, is however, a beneficiary of the new covenant in its heavenly, spiritual and eternal operation.”<sup>78</sup>

##### c. The theory of one covenant only is not popular.

Most dispensationalists have seen the weaknesses of Darby’s theory of one covenant only and have rejected it. “Most [dispensational] premillenarians (Darby excepted) would agree that a new covenant has been provided for the church, but not the new covenant for Israel.”<sup>79</sup>

##### **[Remarks.**

On the basis of Jeremiah 31:31-34, dispensationalists reserve the term ‘the new covenant’ only for Israel in the millennial kingdom. Their whole theology stands or falls with this. Consequently they attempt to explain away *the same term* used in the New Testament in connection with the Church!

Darby’s theory makes the parenthetic (inserted) Church period an *incidental and secondary* part of God’s plan in the Bible. Israel and Jews are God’s main plan in the Bible and the Church and Gentile Christians are no more than an afterthought of God in his eternal plan. He says that the purpose of all the prophecies about atonement in the Old Testament was to establish the Jewish new covenant and kingdom, to which Christians are unrelated. Only Israel will inherit the new covenant and the future millennial kingdom. But as we have seen before, the Bible does not teach or even allude to the parenthetic Church period.

<sup>77</sup> Harry A. Ironside, Notes on the Prophecy and Lamentations of Jeremiah, “The Weeping prophet”, Neptune, N.J. Loizeaux Brothers, 1906, p 163

<sup>78</sup> E. Schuyler-English, Studies in the Epistles to the Hebrews, 1955, p 226-227

<sup>79</sup> Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, p 214

And yet Darby's theory makes the status of Israel for all eternity *inferior* to the status of the Church! He says that while Israel is the main heir of the new covenant and receives the full benefit of the blood of Jesus, the Church only receives *the secondary benefits* of the blood of Jesus. And yet he maintains that the spiritual position of Israel on earth will always be inferior to the spiritual position of the Church in heaven, as inferior as the earth is below the heavens!

The New Testament gives no support to Darby's suggestion that Christians are related to the basis (the blood) and the benefits (the blessings) of the new covenant, but not to the new covenant itself! Before conversion from heathenism the Gentiles were "foreigners to the covenants of the promise", but now after conversion they have been brought near through the blood of Christ and are no longer foreigners to the covenants (Ephesians 2:12-13,19)! Christians today are members of the same covenant that was made with Israel in the Old Testament! Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6), which is the new covenant for believing Jews and believing Gentiles in the present time (Ephesians 2:11-22)!

The apostle Paul was an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the Church of God (1 Corinthians 1:1-2). He considered himself a servant, not only of the blood of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 (as dispensationalists allege), but of the new covenant itself (2 Corinthians 3:6)! Consequently, dispensationalists are wrong when they separate the Church from the new covenant! The apostle Paul teaches that when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper he said, "The cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25; cf. Luke 22:20). Consequently, dispensationalists are wrong when they separate the blood of the covenant from the new covenant! Dispensationalists deliberately separate the blood of the covenant from the new covenant, because they want to maintain their premise of the absolute separation between Israel and the Church. The Bible proves their arguments wrong and thus is dispensational theology wrong!

"To say that we (Christians) are under the benefits of the (new) Covenant without actually being under the covenant is to clandestinely admit what is boldly denied."<sup>80]</sup>

## **5. The third attempt of dispensationalism to explain 'the new covenant': These dispensationalist say that the new covenant is primary for Israel and only secondary for the Church**

### a. Expositors.

C. I. Scofield in Scofield Reference Bible, Charles C. Ryrie, and Dwight J. Pentecost.

### b. The theory of one covenant with a primary and a secondary application.

The theory most widely accepted among dispensationalists is Scofield's. In his reference Bible notes, Scofield simply applies the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 both to the Church and to Israel with no explanation about how this is accomplished. The one new covenant has a two-fold application; the second application places the Church under the new covenant and views the Church as partially fulfilling the new covenant.

Griffith Thomas says, "It will be observed that the covenant is said to be made 'with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah', that is with the whole Jewish nation. There is no doubt that this is the primary designation and purpose of the covenant. .... It is well known that the New Testament antitype of the Old Testament types is not the Christian Church but the Kingdom (the millennial kingdom) which is still future .... But we Christians have the spiritual reality of this covenant, which, while made with Israel, is for our benefit as well, through grace, and so we distinguish between the primary interpretation to Israel and *the secondary (spiritual) application* to the Church today. We now enjoy in the power of the Holy Spirit all the blessings of the new covenant, and yet there will be still further and fuller manifestations in the future for Israel, according to God's promise (Romans 11:25-32)."<sup>81</sup>

Ryrie criticises Scofield's covenant blending. Ryrie distinguishes three views:

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<sup>80</sup> Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1970, p 264

<sup>81</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, Hebrews: A devotional study, Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961, p 106-107

- The amillennialist completely blurs the meanings of the two words “Israel’ and ‘Church’, so that the Church takes over the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel.
- The covenant premillennialist blends the meanings of the two words ‘Israel’ and ‘Church’ without amalgamating them.
- The dispensationalist keeps the two words ‘Israel’ and ‘Church’ distinct, thus recognizing the two purposes of God.<sup>82</sup>

Ryrie says, “If the Church is fulfilling Israel’s promises as contained in the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) or anywhere else in Scripture (the New Testament), then (dispensational) premillennialism is weakened.” If there were two aspects to the one new covenant, the amillennialist has every right to say of this (Scofield’s) view that it is “a practical admission that the new covenant is fulfilled in and to the Church.”<sup>83</sup>

Walfoord criticises Scofield’s spiritualizing. Scofield’s theory contradicts the dispensational hermeneutic, which is, never to spiritualise or to allegorise. He says, “Spiritualization of the ... word ‘Israel’ would involve in Webster’s definition of spiritualization: ‘to take in a spiritual sense, -- opposed to literalize.’ In other words, if Israel should mean something else than Israel, e.g. the Church in the New Testament composed largely of Gentiles, this would be spiritualization.”<sup>84</sup>

Pentecost criticises Scofield’s allegorising. In Scofield’s theory the new covenant not only has a primary, realistic aspect with an earthly application, but also a secondary oblique reference to the Church, a spiritual aspect with a heavenly application. ‘The Church, however, can not be placed under Israel’s covenant.’<sup>85</sup>

Dispensationalists have recognized the weakness in Scofield’s theory, namely, that the Church fulfils the Jewish prophecy partially and thus can be partially identified with Israel! Dispensationalists remain much divided and very confused. They are unable to reconcile the New Testament data of the new covenant with their dispensational presuppositions!

d. The theory of one covenant with a primary and a secondary application is nevertheless most popular among dispensationalists.

## **6. Summary of the theories with respect to the new covenant**

a. The first dispensationalist theory says there are two new covenants: one for the present Church and one for the future Israel (Lewis Sperry Chafer and John F. Walvoord).

However, *these dispensationalists seem to know more than the New Testament writers and yet cannot explain why Hebrews 8:6-13 does not speak of three covenants!* They say that the first covenant is the Mosaic covenant and the second covenant is the new covenant with Israel to be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom. Why does the inspired writer of Hebrews not say that the new covenant with the present Church is the third covenant?

Instead, the inspired writer directs these words to Christians and teaches that Christ is “the Mediator of a better covenant and then quotes *the new covenant* of Jeremiah 31:31-34 as this better covenant! He calls the Mosaic Law *the first covenant* (Hebrews 8:7) or *the old covenant* (Hebrews 8:6) and in contrast with this what God promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 *the new covenant* (Hebrews 8:8) or *the second covenant* (Hebrews 8:7). Thus, the new covenant of which the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah speaks is the covenant that Christ mediates!

b. The second dispensationalist theory says that there is only one new covenant with Israel, with spiritual blessings for the Church (Darby and Schuyler-English). They say that all the references to ‘the new covenant’ in the New Testament refer to the new covenant with Israel, namely, to the millennial kingdom, with which the Church has nothing to do! The new covenant guarantees the earthly blessings for Israel, but the blood of the covenant guarantees the heavenly blessings for the Church.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1965, p 95-96

<sup>83</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, p 118

<sup>84</sup> John F. Walfoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p 64

<sup>85</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p 124

Exegetically they attempt to split hairs. *To say that Christians receive the blessings of the new covenant without standing under the new covenant, is to secretly admit what they openly deny!*

c. The third dispensational theory says that there is one new covenant with two applications: one for the present Church and one for the future Israel (C. I. Scofield and Griffith Thomas). They say that the Church is a partial fulfilment of the new covenant, but the future millennial kingdom will be the complete fulfilment of the new covenant.

However, if the Church fulfils the Jewish prophecy partially, Israel can be partially identified with the Church.

The dispensationalists are remarkably divided and confused and unable to reconcile the New Testament data about the new covenant with their dispensational presuppositions.

“Since the two-covenant view, although it is consistent dispensationalism, has not found wide acceptance among dispensationalists, because of its obvious exegetical failings, leading dispensationalists are found to be seriously at odds over the problem. All are agreed that the Church must not fulfil any of Israel’s promises, but the method of preserving the dichotomy with regard to the new covenant is elusive. On the one hand, some (dispensationalists) recognize the exegetical casuistry involved in trying to *retain the blessings of the (new) covenant* apart from any vital relationship to the (new) covenant, and thus posit a second (new) covenant. On the other hand, others (other dispensationalists) recognize the exegetical impossibility of a second (new) covenant and prefer to ignore the casuistry. In either case, the (dispensational) position is basically untenable and points up rather dramatically the hermeneutical dilemma of dispensationalism in attempting to reconcile scripture to a basic presupposition.”<sup>86</sup> ‘The basic presupposition’ is the radical separation between Israel and the Church.

d. The non-dispensational view: the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is fulfilled in the Church that consists of believing Jews and believing Gentiles (all covenant theologians).

“The New Testament data on the new covenant fits well with Reformed theology. No bending is necessary; no artificial exegesis is required; no hair splitting distinctions are needed; no double talk necessary (e.g. the new covenant is ministered to the Christian but made with Israel). Since the New Testament Church is the continuation of the Old Testament kingdom programme and is spiritual Israel in this age and the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies, there is no problem in directly relating the Jeremiah 31 new covenant to the Church in this as is done by the New Testament writers. The new covenant relates directly to physical Israel only insofar as Jews accept Christ and are grafted back into the olive tree of spiritual Israel, which is the Church (Romans 11:26-27).”<sup>87</sup>

The Scriptural data on the new covenant is for the dispensational builders a stone that fits poorly into their theological structure. They cannot agree how best to cement it into their system in a fitting manner. In contrast for the Reformed theologians, this stone has become a capstone in his system of interpretation.<sup>88</sup>

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## **PART 11. THE FOURTH PRESUPPOSITION OF DISPENSATIONALISM DISPROVED: THE LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE**

Dispensationalism demands that the Bible must be interpreted literally.

But the Bible demands its own method of interpretation:

The Bible is interpreted in a literally *and in a non-literal way*.

The New Testament interprets the Old Testament in *different ways*.

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<sup>86</sup> William Everett Bell, A critical evaluation of the pretribulation rapture doctrine in Christian eschatology, p 190

<sup>87</sup> Ian H. Murray, The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971, p 72-74, and John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968, 2:91-103

<sup>88</sup> Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover Gunn, Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow, Footstool Publications, Memphis, Tn, 1985, p 216

## 1. A particular method of interpretation of the whole Bible (e.g. the literal hermeneutic) must be rejected

### a. Dispensationalism claims that the literal interpretation of the Bible is the only correct key for interpretation.

Dispensational theology demands consistent literalism. Walfoord says, “History is history, not allegory. Facts are facts. Prophesied future events are just what they are prophesied. Israel means Israel, earth means earth, heaven means heaven.” “A literal promise spiritualized is exegetical fraud.”<sup>89</sup>

Dispensationalism claims that their most important presupposition is the literal interpretation of the Bible. They say that this logically leads to the separation of Israel and the Church and the parenthetic 6<sup>th</sup> Church dispensation between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Israel dispensations.

However, because differing degrees of figurativeness and literality can be found in dispensational interpretations, the opposite is more true:

*Dispensationalism really believes that their most important presupposition is the separation of Israel and the Church! Therefore dispensationalists insert the parenthetic 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation and are forced to use and maintain the literal interpretation of the Bible as much as possible.*

Dispensational theology believes that different words or terms in the Bible must necessarily point to different things! Dispensationalists first create seeming contradistinctions by means of their literal manner of interpretation and then try to solve the problem they have created by means of their doctrine of dispensations. For example, literally ‘Israel’ means something different than ‘the Church’. Therefore dispensationalists conclude that Israel and the Church must therefore be completely different and must be kept separate. The problem dispensationalists create is then that God has two peoples! Dispensationalists then try to solve this problem by designating Israel to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> dispensation and the Church to 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation. In this way they can harmonise seeming contradistinctions or even seeming contradictions in the Bible!

#### **[Remarks.**

Dispensationalists are themselves not consistent literalists. For example, they do not interpret ‘the olive tree’ (Romans 11:17,24) literally as ‘an olive tree’, but as ‘Israel’!

Dispensationalists disregard the fact that the Bible is not consistent literal. For example, in Romans 9:6 the first ‘Israel’ is literal Israel (the physical, national nation of Jews), but the second ‘Israel’ is God’s spiritual people, the believers. The second ‘Israel’ is not the same as the first “Israel”, because in the context God Himself calls many people who are ‘not physical, national Jews’, but ‘Gentiles’: “my people”, “my loved one” and “sons of the living God” (Romans 9:24-26)!

Dispensationalists disregard the fact that the Bible calls Israel ‘the Church’<sup>90</sup> (Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:28) and the Church ‘the Israel of God’<sup>91</sup> (Galatians 6:16).

The Bible is its own interpreter and rejects the dispensational presupposition that it must be interpreted literally!]

Dispensationalists believes that literally interpreted, there is a contradistinction between: the Old Testament *Law* and the New Testament *grace*; between the Old Testament kingdom of Israel and the New Testament kingdom of heaven; between the Old Testament earthly promises made to Israel and New Testament heavenly promises made to the Church.

In God’s covenant with Abraham dispensationalists emphasize the earthly blessings of God and conclude that God had promised the whole land of Palestine literally ‘for ever’ to Israel.

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<sup>89</sup> John F. Walfoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p 129-130, 200

<sup>90</sup> Greek: εκκλησια

<sup>91</sup> τον Ισραηλ του θεου

b. Dispensationalism claims that the literal interpretation of the Bible is the only stronghold against liberalism.

Only a literal interpretation of the Bible can stop imagination running wild. Because the Bible speaks about God's 'hands and arms' God must literally have a body.<sup>92</sup>

The 'horses and swords' in Ezekiel 38 and 39 are literally horses and swords coming from Russia to attack Israel in the future.

[**Remark.** Ezekiel does not mention Russia!]

c. Dispensationalism claims that the literal interpretation of the Bible is the only correct one because the Old Testament prophecies must be literally fulfilled.

Dispensationalists claim, "There is no non-literal fulfilment of these prophecies in the New Testament."<sup>93</sup>

The dispensationalist's main criticism of covenant theologians is that they 'spiritualise' or 'allegorise', that is, they are not consistently literal. This criticism is most often launched when covenant theologians apply the prophecies about Israel in the Old Testament to the Church in the New Testament.

Dispensationalists accuse covenant theologians by saying, "Nondispensational interpreters (of the covenant theology school) have been guilty of *reading back* (and sometimes *forcing back*) the teaching of the New Testament into the Old, especially in order to try to substantiate their doctrine of salvation in the Old Testament .... Covenant theology allows for and even demands this *reading back* of the New Testament into the Old."<sup>94</sup>

[**Remarks.**

The New Testament interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23 is a non-literal fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy. Likewise, the New Testament interpretation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:14-18 is a non-literal fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy. The New Testament revelation about the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies is the only way to determine how the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled or will be fulfilled! Enforcing a literal method of interpretation on the whole Bible is going much further than what has been written in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6)!

To give a biblical truth a symbolic meaning when the Bible demands a literal understanding would be wrong. E.g. 'the resurrection of Jesus' is not a symbol, but a literal historical fact. Likewise, to give a biblical truth a literal meaning when the Bible demands a symbolic understanding would also be wrong. E.g. 'the four beasts that come out of the sea' (Daniel 7:3) are not literal beasts that come out of the sea, but are symbols for four kingdoms that will rise from the earth (Daniel 7:17), from the unruly sea of nations (cf. Revelation 17:15). The Bible is its own interpreter and rejects the enforcement of any specific method of interpretation!

Dispensational interpreters have been guilty of *reading back* (and sometimes *forcing back*) the Old Testament shadows into the New Testament realities (cf. Colossians 2:17) in order to try to substantiate their doctrines of the separation of Israel and the Church, and the parenthetic 6<sup>th</sup> Church dispensation and the 7<sup>th</sup> Jewish millennial dispensation! These differences between dispensational theologians and covenant theologians can only be resolved when both submit themselves to the methods of interpretation which the Bible itself employs!]

## [2. The Bible teaches its own method of interpretation](#)

a. The Old Testament is the shadow and type, but the New Testament is the reality and the antitype.

The Old Testament truths were types or shadows of the New Testament realities (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1).

The Old Testament law reveals the shadow of the truth. The New Testament gospel reveals the truth itself!

For example, the Old Testament animal sacrifices are types for the necessity of the atonement of sin. The New Testament sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is the real atonement of sins. And for example, the Old

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<sup>92</sup> F. J. Dake, Dake's annotated reference bible, 1965, NT p 280

<sup>93</sup> C. C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism today, 1969, p 86

<sup>94</sup> C. C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism today, p 34

Testament prophecy prophesied that the Servant of the Lord would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5). The New Testament gospel reveals the fulfilment: Jesus Christ died on a cross to take away sins and to bring us to God (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). Jesus Christ came to *fulfil the Old Testament Law and the Old Testament Prophets* (Matthew 5:17).

b. The Old Testament is still covered, but the New Testament takes the cover away.

In order to understand the Old Testament revelation one needs the light of conversion or rebirth of the New Testament revelation. Only when a person believes in Jesus Christ the cover lying over the Old Testament revelation is taken away (2 Corinthians 3:14-15)! A non-Christian, a theologian or even a nominal Christian cannot understand or rightly interpret the Old Testament unless he is born again!

c. God spoke to us in the Old Testament. But God speaks his final word to us in the New Testament revelation.

The Old Testament revelation prophesied that Jesus Christ would be the Greatest and the Last Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15,18; Acts 3:22; Hebrews 1:1-2). All people must listen to him and obey him. Only he reveals the unfathomable, invisible and unapproachable God (John 1:18; Matthew 11:25-27). Only he reveals God's final perspective of all things (John 3:11-13; Matthew 13:11)! God spoke in the Old Testament prophets through the Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:10-12) and God speaks his final revelation in the New Testament through Christ and his Spirit (Hebrews 1:1-2; John 12:50; 16:13-15). Not the Old Testament revelation, but the New Testament revelation is God's final and complete word to all people!

d. The Old Testament prophets need the full light of the New Testament apostles.

The Old Testament prophets knew much less about God's plan than the New Testament apostles (Luke 10:24)! The Old Testament prophets did not understand or grasp the complete plan of God, but they did know about the first coming of Christ, his suffering on the cross, his glorious resurrection and enthronement in heaven and the grace and salvation that would come to God's future people consisting of Jews and Gentiles (the Church). The Old Testament prophets knew that they were not merely serving the Old Testament Israel, but the New Testament Church (1 Peter 1:9-12)!

The Spirit had revealed, not to the Old Testament prophets, but to the New Testament apostles 'the mystery' namely: that through the proclamation of the gospel the Gentile believers would become heirs together and on an equal basis with Israel, that is, with the believers from Israel (cf. Galatians 3:26-29); that Gentile and Jewish believers would together be members of one Body (cf. Ephesians 2:11-22); that they would become sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20); and that they would be members of God's chosen people (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10).

The New Testament apostles interpreted the Old Testament prophets, not simply in a literal way, but in the way the Holy Spirit directed them: sometimes in a literal way and other times in a non-literal way. It is simply not true that the apostles read the New Testament back into the Old Testament! What is true is that the apostles understood and interpreted the Old Testament revelation in the much fuller light of Christ (cf. John 8:37-47), that is, of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). "The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is explained in the New Testament" (Augustine). Thus, Christians must understand and interpret the Old Testament revelation (prophecies) in the light of the New Testament revelation and not try to interpret the New Testament revelation in the light of the Old Testament revelation (prophecies)!

### **3. The different ways in which Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament**

The Old Testament prophecies are sometimes interpreted in a literal way and other times in a non-literal way in the New Testament. The Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament in five different ways:

a. The literal or direct fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament.

Matthew 2:5-6 (Micah 5:1). The Messiah was literally born in Bethlehem.

Other Old Testament prophecies that are interpreted literally in the New Testament:

Matthew 12:18-21 (Isaiah 42:1-4), Matthew 21:4-5 (Zechariah 9:9), Matthew 22:43-45 (Psalm 110:1), Matthew 24:30 (Daniel 7:13-14, Zechariah 12:10-14). Hebrews 1:5 (Psalm 2:7). Hebrews 5:6 (Psalm 110:4).

b. The typological fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament.

Matthew 2:15 (Hosea 11:1). Hosea refers to the exodus of Israel out of Egypt as a type of the exodus of Israel out of Babylon. Matthew refers to the exodus of Israel out of Egypt as a type of the exodus of the Messiah out of Egypt. *Israel is thus a type of the Messiah!* God had determined that the Servant of the Lord (Jesus Christ) would be the fulfilment of everything God had intended his people Israel to be (cf. Isaiah 49:3,6)!

Other Old Testament prophecies that are interpreted typologically in the New Testament:

Matthew 11:5b (Isaiah 61:1), Matthew 13:35 (Psalm 78:2), Matthew 16:27 (Psalm 62:12), Matthew 21:9 (Psalm 118:26-27), Matthew 21:42 (Ps 118:22), Matthew 26:31 (Zechariah 13:7), Matthew 27:34 (Psalm 69:21), Matthew 27:35 (Psalm 22:18), Matthew 27:39 (Psalm 22:7), Matthew 27:43 (Psalm 22:8), Matthew 27:46 (Psalm 22:1), Hebrews 1:8-9 (Psalm 45:6-7), Hebrews 2:5-8 (Psalm 8:4-6), Hebrews 2:12 (Psalm 22:22), Hebrews 10:5-6 (Psalm 40:6-8).

c. The analogical fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament.

Matthew 2:18 (Jeremiah 31:15). In the Old Testament Rachel, the mother of Joseph (the representative of the northern kingdom of Israel) and Benjamin (the representative of the southern kingdom of Judah) mourned and wept because her children (descendants) were taken from Rama in Israel (on the border between the two kingdoms) to Assyria and Babylon respectively. In the New Testament the mothers of Bethlehem wept and mourned because their children were murdered by Herod. The second event is analogical to (looks like) the first event.

Other Old Testament prophecies that are interpreted analogically in the New Testament:

Matthew 1:23 (Isaiah 7:14), Matthew 4:1-4 (Deuteronomy 8:1-3), Matthew 10:35-36 (Micah 7:6), Matthew 11:5a (Isaiah 35:5-6), Hebrews 2:13 (Isaiah 8:17-18).

d. The fulfilment of the sense of an Old Testament prophecy in the New Testament.

Matthew 2:23 (the sense of the Old Testament prophets). A ‘Nazarene’ is someone who comes from the town of Nazareth. While Bethlehem was the famous city of David, Nazareth was an insignificant small town with insignificant people. Although Matthew 2:23 is not a specific prophecy in the Old Testament, the words “what was said by the prophets (plural)” points to what the prophets understood about the Messiah. The Messiah would be despised and rejected (cf. Psalm 22:6-8; 69:8,20,21; Isaiah 11:1; 9:7; 53:2,3,8; Daniel 9:26).

e. The Christological fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament.

Hebrews 1:10-12 (Psalm 102:25-27). What is ascribed to the LORD in the Old Testament is ascribed to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in the New Testament.

Other Old Testament prophecies that are interpreted in an Christological way:

Matthew 27:9-10 (Zechariah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 18:2). Hebrews 1:6 (Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Dead Sea Scrolls).

#### 4. The different degrees of literal fulfilment accorded to Old Testament prophecies

a. The nations in the Old Testament.

The dispensationalist Walvoord believes that the Old Testament nations would again come into existence literally in the future millennial kingdom, but they would be subjected to Israel.<sup>95</sup>

**[Remarks.** The Old Testament revelation speaks of nations that no longer exist today: the Ammonites (Isaiah 11:14; Daniel 11:41), the Assyrians (Micah 5:5; Isaiah 19:23-25), the Edomites (Isaiah 11:14; 63:1-6; Joel 3:19; Amos 9:11-12; Daniel 11:41) and the Moabites (Isaiah 11:14; Daniel 11:41).

Isaiah 19:23-25 prophesies that “in that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria” and that Egypt would be God’s people, Assyria God’s handiwork and Israel God’s inheritance. “One wonders if ‘Israel means Israel’, why Assyria does not mean Assyria and Egypt does not mean Egypt. The answer, obviously, is that plain common sense militates against any interpretation that

<sup>95</sup> Walvoord, The nations in prophecy, 1967, p 160-169

sees a necessary revival of ancient peoples who passed off the scene of history thousands of years ago. No Christian would deny that God could once again bring together an Assyrian empire or a Philistine nation if he chose to do so, but few expositors, dispensationalists included, look for such an occurrence”<sup>96</sup>]

b. The families in the Old Testament.

Dispensationalists claim that Zechariah chapter 9 to 12 support the dispensational system. Zechariah 12:11-14 mentions the families of David, Nathan, Levi and Shimei. Isaiah 66:21 and Malachi 3:3 mention the tribe of Levi and Ezekiel 44:15 and 48:11 mention the sons of Zadok in the tribe of Levi. Ezekiel 48 and Revelation 7 mention the 12 tribes of Israel. According to dispensationalists all these people and tribes will again exist literally in the end-time.

[**Remark.** “So long as any prophecies were depending for their fulfilment on the separate existence of tribes and families in Israel, the distinction betwixt them was preserved; and so also, were the genealogical records, which were needed to attest the fulfilment (cf. Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). These prophecies terminated in the Son of Mary, the branch of the house of David, and the lion of the tribe of Judah; but with this, and all other old things, ceased – a new era, independent of such outward and formal differences, began. Hence, we find the apostle discharging all from giving heed to endless genealogies (cf. 1 Timothy 1:4), as of no longer of any avail in the church of God; and the providence of God shortly after sealed the word by scattering their genealogies to the winds, and fusing together in one undistinguishable, inextricable mass, the surviving remnants of the Jewish family. Now prophecy is not to be verified by halves; it is either wholly true, in the sense in which it ought to be understood, or it is a failure. And since God’s providence has rendered the fulfilment of the parts referred to manifestly impossible on the literal principle of interpretation, it affords conclusive evidence, that on this principle such prophecies are misread. In what it calls men to believe, it does violence to their reason; and it commits the word of God to expectations, which never can be properly realized.”<sup>97</sup>]

c. The blood sacrifices in the Old Testament.

Dispensationalists claim that Ezekiel 40 to 48 teaches that the millennial temple would be rebuilt and blood sacrifices would again be brought during the millennial kingdom. But dispensationalists continue to say that these blood sacrifices are no longer atonement sacrifices, but remembrance sacrifices, the so-called equivalent of the Lord’s Supper during the millennial kingdom.

[**Remark.** Ezekiel 42:13; 43:18-27; 45:15-22 very clearly teach that these sacrifices would be sacrifices for the atonement of sin. When dispensationalist quote Hebrews 10:1-4 and point out that these sacrifices could not and did not literally atone sins during the Old Testament period, but were *a type or foreshadowing* of the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross, they drop their literal method of interpreting the Bible and choose for the biblical method of interpreting the Bible: that is, *to explain the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament!* That is exactly what the covenant theologians do! When however covenant theologians quote Hebrews 10:10-18 as proof that there is no longer any sacrifice for sin (and thus also no sacrifices in a so-called millennial temple), the dispensational theologians accuse the covenant theologians that ‘they are reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament.’]

d. The weapons in the Old Testament.

Dispensationalists claim that Ezekiel 38 and 39 point to an attack from Russia on Israel in the end-time. The soldiers would then in the future literally use “shields, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears” (Ezekiel 39:9) – mainly made of wood, because it would supply the Israelites seven years of fuel (Ezekiel 39:10). Walvoord sticks to this literal interpretation; otherwise the literal method of interpretation of dispensationalism would be compromised. However, the popular dispensational writer Hal Lindsey (a graduate at the time Walvoord was president of DTS) is less literalistic than Walvoord. He writes about ‘the locusts’ in Revelation 9:1-12, “God might utilize in his judgements some modern devices which the Apostle John was at a loss for words to describe nineteen centuries ago! In the case just mentioned, the locust might

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<sup>96</sup> William Everett Bell, A critical evaluation of the pretribulation rapture doctrine in Christian eschatology, p 160-169

<sup>97</sup> Patrick Fairbairn, Prophecy viewed in respect to its distinct nature, its special function, and proper interpretation., 1865, 1967, p 276-277

symbolize an advanced kind of helicopter.” The locusts “might be Cobra helicopters that spray nerve gas from their tails.”<sup>98</sup>

**[Remarks.**

Nevertheless, dispensational writers complain strongly against the teaching of covenant theologians that the Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming Church period in terms of the Old Testament religious system with which God’s Old Testament people were familiar.

Dispensational writers are inconsequent! If the prophet could have prophesied a future war with modern weapons in terms of the primitive weapons with which ancient Israel was familiar, then the prophet could also have prophesied the future Church period in terms of the Old Testament religious system with which God’s Old Testament people was familiar!]

e. The bulls that surround the Messiah at his crucifixion.

Psalm 22:12 says, “Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.” Most dispensational interpreters say that these ‘bulls’ refer to ‘people’ who persecuted Jesus Christ at the time of his crucifixion. Thus dispensationalists interpret Psalm 22:12 figuratively and not literally and referring to his first coming.

Psalm 2:6 says, “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” Dispensationalists claim that Jesus Christ would not inaugurate his prophesied messianic (millennial) kingdom before he literally begins to rule on Mount Zion in Jerusalem on this present earth! Thus dispensationalists interpret Psalm 2:6 literally and not figuratively and referring to his second coming and not his first coming.

**[Remarks.**

Dispensationalists generally use the literal method of interpretation. But when it does not suite them they drop this method (Psalm 22:12)! Therefore the dispensational hermeneutic is no longer: “Interpret the Bible as literally as possible”, but rather: “*Interpret the Bible literally only when it agrees with our theories (presuppositions)!*”

For example: When their complete separation of Israel from the Church is threatened, they maintain the literal hermeneutic (Psalm 2:6)! In spite of the fact that the New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is enthroned at his ascension into heaven at his first coming (Ephesians 1:20-23) and that Mount Zion and the Heavenly Jerusalem are already literal realities in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24), dispensationalists continue to teach that Christ would only accept his kingship at his so-called second return! In spite of the fact that Jesus Christ has already all authority and power on this present earth (Matthew 28:19; John 13:3; Revelation 12:5), dispensationalists continue to teach that Jesus would only become the King in the so-called future millennial kingdom on this present earth at his so-called second return!

The editors of the Scofield Reference Bible acknowledge that the blood sacrifices in Ezekiel “do not need to be interpreted literally but may be validly regarded as a general prophecy of future worship in terms of the Old Testament economy with which the original recipients of the prophecy were familiar!”<sup>99</sup>

If this principle may apply in the interpretation of the prophet Ezekiel, why may it not be applied in the interpretation of the other prophets? Why may God’s Old Testament people Israel together with its ceremonial system of worship not be seen as a preparation, foreshadow and type of the New Testament realities in Christ (cf. Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1; John 2:19-21; 4:23-24)?

It is very clear that the first two presuppositions of dispensational theology (the separation between Israel and Church, and the parenthetic Church period) determine their third presupposition (the literal method of interpretation) and not vice versa!]

f. The New Jerusalem.

Dispensationalists believe that the New Jerusalem will be literally 2200 kilometres square and high on the new earth (Revelation 21:16)! Dispensationalists maintain that: “Biblical prophecy must be interpreted literally *whenever possible*.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hal Lindsey, There’s a new world coming: “A prophetic odyssey”, 1973, p 16 and 138-139

<sup>99</sup> C. I. Scofield, editor, The New Scofield Reference Bible, 1967, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, p 888

<sup>100</sup> Paul Lee Tan. The interpretation of prophecy, p 157-160

**[Remarks.**

The question is not whether God is able to build a city with such dimensions, but rather: “What is God’s intention with these symbols and figures in biblical prophetic and apocalyptic literature?”

Did God use such gigantic dimensions in order to prevent people giving these figures a literal interpretation? Or do these figures have *symbolic significance* just as other figures in the Bible?

For example, the number 144 000 is compiled from 3x4 x3x4 x10x10x10. The number 3 represents the Triune God; the number 4 represents the four compass directions of the earth; the number 12 represents first the sum total of his saved Old Testament people and secondly the sum total of his saved New Testament people; and the number 10x10x10 (1000) represents God’s complete number in earthly affairs (the fullness). Thus, the number 144 000 is *a symbol* that God’s work on earth would literally result in the salvation of the absolute full number (the fullness) of his chosen people from both the Old Testament period and the New Testament period: a complete and full number (cf. Romans 11:25-26; John 17:12). That number will not be literally 144 000, but symbolically an uncountable great number (Revelation 7:9)!

And for example, the cubic form (Revelation 21:16) is a symbol of the presence of God in the midst of his people (1 Kings 6:20; cf. Ezekiel 48:35; Matthew 28:20; Revelation 21:3,22,23)!

Does the context in Revelation 21 help us to determine whether this measurement should be taken literally or symbolically? Revelation 21:9-10 makes it very clear that the New Jerusalem is a symbol of the bride of the Lamb, that is, a symbol of the people of God in their absolute full number, a symbol of the Triumphant Church in the Old Testament and the New Testament.]

**5. The truth in the Bible as God intended it to be is the only sure method of combating liberalism and sectarianism**

Dispensationalism claims that consistent literalism is the key to the correct understanding of the Bible and the last bulwark against liberalism.

**[Remarks.**

‘Consistent literal’ means something different to different dispensationalists. Every dispensationalist utilizes his own degree of literalness and figurativeness in his interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies.

Covenant theologians say that: *‘the Bible interprets the Bible’*. Jesus Christ and the apostle Peter interpret the Old Testament Psalm 118:22-23 figuratively in Matthew 21:42 and in Acts 4:11. The apostle Matthew interprets the Old Testament Isaiah 7:14 figuratively in Matthew 1:23. The apostle Paul interprets the Old Testament Hagar and Sarah figuratively in Galatians 4:21-31. James interprets the Old Testament Amos 9:11-12 figuratively in Acts 15:14-18. And Jesus Christ interprets the Old Testament city of Jerusalem figuratively as Sodom and Egypt in Revelation 11:8. *The way the New Testament interprets the Old Testament is the normal way to understand biblical words and biblical prophecies. The Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament and not necessarily literally!*

In all normal use of language the interpreter must adhere to the laws of interpretation of each different genre as legal literature, historical literature, historical literature, poetic literature, wisdom literature, historical literature, teaching literature or apocalyptic literature.

‘Liberalism’ means the freedom of thinking or the freedom of interpretation, not being professional or technical in the rules of interpreting the Bible. Traditional liberals reject miracles and supernatural realities and thus spiritualise or allegorise the Bible. That is wrong and must be rejected!

But traditional fundamentalists have gone to the other extreme – they reject symbolic or figurative descriptions of reality and thus literalise the Bible. That is also wrong and must be rejected!

Thus both traditional liberals and traditional fundamentalists are ‘liberal’ in their approach to Bible interpretation. Both put their own theological presuppositions above the Bible that lead to twisting the Bible truth!

The only bulwark against this ‘liberal’ approach to the Bible is to submit to the teachings of the Bible, correctly interpreted under submission to the Holy Spirit, as the only rule of faith and conduct and as the final arbitrator in all matters of doctrine (faith) and ethics (behaviour) and then to do your utmost best to understand the Bible as God intended you to understand it.]

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## **PART 12. THE EXPOSITION OF NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE PASSAGES THAT OSTENSIBLY SUPPORTS DISPENSATIONALISM<sup>101</sup>**

### **a. Dispensationalism (Chiliasm or Pre-millenarianism)**

‘Chiliasm’ is derived from the numeral 1000<sup>102</sup> and refers to a belief in a future literal 1000 year kingdom (the millennial kingdom) between two successive physical resurrections. ‘Pre-millenarianism’ refers to the belief that Christ’s second coming would take place *before* this millennial (1000 year) kingdom. ‘Dispensationalism’ refers to the theology that ‘divided’ human history into seven distinct time periods (dispensations): five in the past (the Old Testament period), one in the present (the New Testament period) and one in the future (the 1000 year or millennial kingdom). Dispensational theology teaches two resurrections (Revelation 20:4-6) that divide the eschatological future after Christ’s second coming in two parts: a temporary provisional millennial era (the kingdom of Christ) and an eternal absolute era (the eternal kingdom of God).

Dispensational theology takes the Old Testament Scriptures in a realistic manner, with simple faith, not asking whether the fulfilment of these things is even logically conceivable. It disregards the fact that the Old Testament itself points to the spiritualizing of most of the things in question. Dispensationalism is a daring literalizing and concretizing of the substance of ancient revelation. *It created the delusion that eschatology and Chiliasm are interchangeable.* Dispensationalists believe that their belief is the only correct one, because they claim that spiritualizing the Old Testament would mean that there would be no literal second coming of Christ and no literal fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. Eschatology and dispensationalism are for them synonyms.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament already points to the figurative or spiritual significance of things. *Dispensationalism can only be maintained by ignoring the fundamental principles of biblical exposition.*

### **b. The motive for two kingdoms is the existence of two different eschatological ideals**

The underlying motive for separating the eschatological future in two parts (the millennial kingdom of Christ and the eternal kingdom of God) is probably a compromise between two completely different eschatological ideals: an ancient *national-political eschatology* that would take place on earth and centres in the destination of Israel on the one hand; and the *transcendental-cosmic eschatology* that looks to the transformation of the whole universe and introduces a reality that transcends the present reality on earth.

The elements of these two completely different eschatological ideals are irreconcilably kept together in the older parts of the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees. Both books are part of Jewish apocalyptic literature from around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Or these two completely different eschatological ideals receive an appearance of coherence by emphasizing the one ideal and obscuring the other ideal without refuting it outright.

### **c. A systematic attempt within Jewish theology to harmonize these two completely different eschatological ideals (the two kingdoms)**

Two successive periods.

In most cases these opposites are not removed, but covered up by emphasizing only one of the two ideals. Obviously in time a systematic attempt to harmonize these two completely different eschatological ideals would arise. That happened when these two irreconcilable eschatological ideals were divided into *two*

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<sup>101</sup> Based on: The Pauline Eschatology, Geerhardus Vos, M.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1961

<sup>102</sup> χιλιοι

*successive periods in the future!* The writers believed that the national-political and earthly expectation would first go into fulfilment, but only during a temporary period. Thereafter the transcendental, eternal and cosmic expectation would come.

#### Eschatology in the Old Testament prophets.

These two aspects already exist during the period of the Old Testament prophets. On the one hand the end-time events would take place with the coming of the Messiah King. On the other hand the end-time events would come through the appearance and action of God himself. The two concepts ‘Messianic kingdom’ and ‘kingdom of God’ stand next to one another in the Bible without being contradictory and without any attempt to harmonise them with each other. Thus, we do not have to go to Babylonia or Persia to explain the origin of the two kingdoms. The two kingdoms are also not the result of apocalyptic dissatisfaction with the world.

#### Eschatology within Jewish theology.

Within Jewish theology the easiest way to harmonise these two aspects was to let these two aspects follow one another: *first the Messianic kingdom and after that the kingdom of God.*

The picture of the provisional Messianic kingdom in the books of Enoch, Jewish Sibyl (book 3) or Psalms of Solomon is not chiliastic at all: the Messianic kingdom is not described as a kingdom of peace and prosperity and the kingdom of God is not described as a kingdom that is incomparable with this earth.

*The typical chiliastic description only appears for the first time in the Apocalypse 4 Ezra (70 - 140 A.D) and in the Apocalypse of Baruch (70 - 140 A.D.). Both were written AFTER the New Testament (and thus after Revelation 20:1-7)!*

The Apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra) 7:28 says that God’s Son, the Christ, when revealed “will dispense joy for 400 years to those that remain”.

The Apocalypse of Baruch 29:1-8 says: “When the Messiah begins to reveal himself, Behemoth and Leviathan likewise appear, and are given as food to the remnant; the earth produces ten-thousand fold; a vine will have 1000 branches, every branch 1000 clusters, every cluster 1000 grapes, and every grape will yield one kor of wine; winds will proceed from God and will carry to the people the fragrance of aromatic fruit, and at night clouds will distil healing dew; the heavenly supplies of manna will be let down and they will eat of them in those years, because they have reached the end of the ages.”<sup>103</sup>

The Apocalypse of Baruch 74:1 says: “In these days the reapers will not have to exert themselves, and those that build will not have to toil, for of themselves all works will have progress together with those who labour thereon with much rest.”

It is precisely in these latest Apocalypses that the final state appears at the farthest remove from the conditions of earthly existence even in an idealised form. It is not a perfection of the present life, but a transposition of life into the supernatural key that is expected. The two kingdoms are not merely successive, but *antithetical* in character.

#### **d. A systematic attempt by dispensational theology to harmonise these two different eschatological ideals**

The apostle Paul wrote his letters between 50 and 65 A.D. The Pauline eschatology in point of time lies between the older Jewish apocalyptic documents (the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) and the later Apocalypse of Ezra and the Apocalypse of Baruch (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) in which the messianic kingdom assumes the complexion usually called “chiliastic” in the specific sense of the word.

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<sup>103</sup> This is the passage from which Papias is believed to have borrowed his well-known description of the Chiliastic state, quoted by Irenaeus, v,33,3.

It is not surprising, therefore, that attempts should have been made to bring the apostle Paul in line with the general apocalyptic development in this matter. Effort by theologians has been exerted to make Paul teach the future coming of some such temporal kingdom as the Jewish sources assume.<sup>104</sup>

It is alleged that Paul expects *a twofold resurrection*, one of a certain class of dead at the parousia (the second coming), and one of the remaining dead at the end of all, and that he places *a glorious provisional reign of Christ (the millennial kingdom) between these two resurrections*.

This theology does not fit into the development of doctrine in Jewish Apocalyptic, because in both the Apocalypse of Ezra and the Apocalypse of Baruch the resurrection is not yet divided. The one and only resurrection from the dead remains fixed at its accustomed place immediately before the final judgement.

*What these dispensational theologians therefore teach is not in continuity with Jewish apocalyptic development of doctrine, but overtakes it and passes on beyond it.*

#### **e. Pauline eschatology**

In Jewish eschatology the Messiah must still come somewhere in the future, but in Christian eschatology the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has already come! With the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead the resurrection is *already a fact* for Christ and a definite promise for Christians.

And the Messianic kingdom between the past resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of all people is also *a present fact!* While in Jewish and dispensational theology the Messianic kingdom is still a future reality, in Pauline theology it is not a future expectation, but *a realised present reality!*<sup>105</sup>

It is completely unlikely that Paul supports a dispensational theology or dispensational eschatology, because Paul's teaching about the parousia (the one and only second coming of Christ), the general resurrection of the dead and the general final judgement leaves no room for any intermediate period of protracted duration!

Even more important is the that Paul conceives of the present Christian state, ideally considered, as lived on so high a plane that nothing less or lower than the absolute state of the eternal consummate kingdom of God appears worthy to be its sequel (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:13-14). An intermediate condition (e.g. a millennial kingdom) falling short of the perfect heavenly life would be an anticlimax! No matter with what concrete elements or colours the assumed chiliastic (millennial) kingdom is described, for Paul and for Christians that believe in *the completed work of salvation by Jesus Christ at his first coming* such a kingdom has nevertheless no significance and no attraction at all!

#### **f. Testing the exegetical basis on which dispensationalists believe their theory rests**

The adherents of dispensational theology base their theory mainly on the following New Testament passages: 1 Corinthians 15:22-28, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Thessalonians 1:4-12, Philippians 3:10-14 and Revelation 12:1-18 and 20:1-7. Here follows their arguments and a thorough exposition of these Bible passages.

### **[I] EXPOSITION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28**

The biblical text. (20) But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep. (21) For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. (22) For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (23) But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruit; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (24) Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. (25) For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (27) For "he has

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<sup>104</sup> Dispensational theologians like Grimm, Q.f.W.Th, 1873, pp 380-411; Schmiedel, in Holtzmann's Handkommentar II, p. 196; Kabisch, Die Paulinischen Vorstellungen van Auferstehung und Gericht und ihre Beziehung zur Jüdischen Apocalypse, pp. 111-112; Bousset, Die Religion des Judenthums, p. 331

<sup>105</sup> Also the apostle John in Revelation 20:1-7 does not teach premillennialism and also not amillennialism, but *inaugurated millennialism*, e.g. a symbolic period of thousand years that has already been initiated or entered! John Gilmore, Probing Heaven, Baker Bookhouse Company, 1991.

put everything under his feet” (Psalm 8:6). Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. (28) When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

## 1. The resurrection (verse 21).

### a. Dispensational theology.

Dispensationalists assume that the physical resurrection takes place in two phases. The first phase is the resurrection of all believers in Christ at Christ’s first return (the rapture) before the beginning of the millennial kingdom. The second phase is the resurrection of the wicked after the millennial kingdom and before the eternal kingdom.

### b. Covenant theology.

Paul does not teach two physical resurrections. He clearly teaches one resurrection of the dead: “The resurrection (singular) comes also through a man”<sup>106</sup> (21).

Moreover, Paul does not speak of the resurrection before ‘the kingdom of Christ’, but of the resurrection before ‘the kingdom of God’ (24,50).

## 2. The word ‘all’<sup>107</sup> (verse 22).

### a. Dispensational theology.

Dispensationalism teaches that the word ‘all’ (22) must be taken in an absolute literal sense twice: *all people that have ever lived* die in Adam, and *all people that have ever lived* are resurrected (made alive) in Christ. This is *absolute universalism*. “Those who belong to Christ” (23) are then only a part of all those who will be resurrected in Christ.

Meyer and Godet hold to the literal meaning of the word ‘all’ and have to weaken the word ‘in Christ’ to include both those who belong to Christ (believers) as those who do not belong to Christ (unbelievers). Meyer says that the unbelievers are also resurrected ‘in Christ’ because Christ is the ground of physical resurrection (they are saved from physical death, not from eternal death). Godet says that the unbelievers are also resurrected ‘in Christ’ because Christ has to condemn them at the final judgement (they are saved from physical death in order to be condemned to eternal death).

[**Remark. Rebuttal of Meyer en Godet.** With the apostle Paul the words ‘in Christ’ are always connected to ‘salvation, justification’ and never with ‘condemnation’. Also the words ‘made alive’ mean more than physical resurrection’. They mean ‘spiritual resurrection and rebirth’ (cf. Ephesians 2:5). Therefore the words “all made alive in Christ” refer first of all to the spiritual resurrection or rebirth of believers in Christ, then to their physical resurrection and finally to their eternal inheritance!<sup>108</sup>

Grimm also holds to the literal meaning of the word ‘all’ and has to strengthen the words ‘made alive’ to include both physical resurrection and spiritual resurrection. All people that were still unbelievers at Christ’s return must be and will be physically resurrected and spiritually resurrected after the millennial kingdom. Grimm thus proclaims that all people will have a second chance to be saved and he proclaims universal salvation! He gives the words “that God may be all in all”<sup>109</sup> (28) a universal meaning.

[**Remark. Rebuttal of Grimm.** The Bible clearly teaches the eternal damnation of unbelievers (cf. Matthew 25:46; 1 Corinthians 6:10).

The words “that God may be all in all” (28) does not demand an absolute universal meaning. The second word ‘all’ is neuter so that the meaning is, “that God may be all, *not in all people, but in all that happens in the universe*, because in verse 24 the evil spiritual forces had opposed him in his triumphant march forward.

<sup>106</sup> επειδη γαρ δι ανθρωπου θανατος, και δι ανθρωπου αναστασις νεκρων

<sup>107</sup> ωσπερ γαρ εν τω Αδαμ παντες αποθνησκουσιν (v1pa), ουτως και εν τω Χριστω παντες ζωοποιηθουνται (v1fp)

<sup>108</sup> The Pauline Eschatology, Geerhardus Vos, p 238

<sup>109</sup> σταν δε υποταγη > υποτασσω (vsap) αυτω τα παντα, τοτε [και] αυτος ο υιος υποταγησεται (v1fp) τω υποταξαντι (vpa) αυτω τα παντα, ινα η ο υιος [τα] παντα εν πασιν

The word “destroyed”<sup>110</sup> (26) does not mean ‘annihilate’, but rather ‘make ineffective, powerless’ (cf. Luke 13:7), bringing its power and influence to an end. For example, ‘death’ (viewed as a demon) is no longer permitted to kill people! After the physical resurrection ‘physical death’ will be made completely impossible! Death and all other antichristian powers and unbelievers are not annihilated, but are removed out of God’s kingdom (Matthew 13:41) and cast into hell (Revelation 20:14; 21:8).

There is no contradiction in the fact that all antichristian beings will remain condemned and the fact that God has become the absolute conqueror!<sup>111</sup>]

#### b. Covenant theology.

Text: (22) “For as *in Adam all die*, so *in Christ all will be made alive*.” The words ‘in Adam’ refer to the word ‘die’ and the words ‘in Christ’ refer to the words ‘made alive’ (cf. Romans 5:16-19). Moreover, the words refer not only to physical death and physical resurrection, but also to the spiritual death and spiritual resurrection (rebirth)! Just as spiritual death, physical death and eternal death take place ‘in Adam’ from creation until recreation, likewise spiritual life, physical life and eternal life take place ‘in Christ’ (cf. John 11:25-26) from the creation until recreation.

The word ‘all’ in the Bible can have different meanings, dependent on the context! The word ‘all’ has no absolute universal meaning in the following descriptive passages: Not all members of the human race sought Jesus (Mark 1:37); were amazed at what Jesus had done (Mark 5:20); held that John was a prophet (Mark 11:32); were wondering whether John might be the Messiah (Luke 3:15-16); or went out to Jesus (John 3:26). The word ‘all’ means ‘all the people referred to in the context.

Charles believes that the word ‘all’ is qualified by the words ‘in Adam’ and ‘in Christ’. All people connected to Adam (by natural birth – all natural people) die physically. Likewise all people connected to Christ (by rebirth – all believers) are made alive (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The contrast is between natural people (unbelievers) and believers.

However, the whole context of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is about the resurrection of *believers*. This passage makes no statement about the unbelievers.<sup>112</sup>

Vos believes that the word ‘all’ does not stand alone at all, but is joint to the words ‘in Adam’ and ‘in Christ’. Not the word ‘all’ by itself (as dispensationalists say), but ‘all’ jointly with ‘in Adam’ and ‘in Christ’ has the emphasis. The words ‘in Adam all’ are qualified by the word ‘die’ and the words ‘in Christ all’ by the words ‘made alive’. The contrast is between dying and being made alive. There is no dying outside of Adam and there is no quickening apart from Christ! This passage has nothing to do with abstract universalism (of dispensationalism). This is the correct explanation.

### 3. The word ‘turn’<sup>113</sup> (verse 23).

The Greek word ‘tagma’ may mean ‘group’, ‘division’ (as in the military) or it may mean ‘order’, ‘turn’ (as in a sequence).

#### a. Dispensational theology.

Dispensationalists put all emphasis on the first meaning: ‘group’, ‘division’. Some dispensationalists (Larkin) distinguish *three groups* that would be resurrected at different times: the firstfruit (Christ and some Old Testament saints) at Christ’s resurrection; then believers (those who belong to him) at Christ’s first return; and finally, the unbelievers (because the word ‘all’ includes them) at the end of the millennial kingdom when Christ has subjected all his enemies. But generally dispensationalists distinguish *two groups*: believers at the so-called first physical resurrection at Christ’s first return, and unbelievers at the so-called second resurrection after the millennial kingdom and just before the judgement before the great white throne (Revelation 20:4-6).

#### b. Covenant theology.

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<sup>110</sup> καταργεω

<sup>111</sup> The Pauline Eschatology, Geerhardus Vos, p 238-240

<sup>112</sup> The Pauline Eschatology, Geerhardus Vos, p 238-240

<sup>113</sup> εκατος δε εν τω ιδιω ταγματι. απαρχη Χριστος, επειτα οι του Χριστου εν τη παρουσια αυτου

The word ‘each’ in his own ‘turn’ (Greek: *tagma*) (23) makes it *impossible to exclude Christ from his turn*. This meaning of the word ‘tagma’ in this context can therefore not be ‘group’ or ‘division’ (as dispensationalists allege, because Christ does not constitute a group), but must be ‘order’ or ‘turn’, because Christ is the ‘firstfruit’, that is, ‘the first’ (in a series of two that are physically resurrected)!

The second part of the physical resurrection will be all believers at Christ’s second coming. All unbelievers will also be resurrected at the same time, but they are not the subject of discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 (cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)!

The *inclusion* of Christ in this ‘order or sequence’ of physical resurrections, *excludes* the dispensational need to find a second physical resurrection (of unbelievers) after the first physical resurrection of believers!

#### 4. The words ‘then’<sup>114</sup> (verse 23-24).

##### a. Dispensational theology.

Dispensationalists maintain that although this second physical resurrection is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, the words in verse 23 and 24 *necessitate* a physical resurrection of a second group of people! They base it on the following argument: Just as the words “*then* when he comes” (23) refers to the physical resurrection of the first group at Christ’s first return, likewise the words “*then* the end will come” (24) *must* refer to a physical resurrection of the second group at the end of the millennial kingdom and the beginning of the eternal kingdom!

And just as there is *a very long period of time* between the physical resurrection of Christ and the physical resurrection of the first group (the believers)(already more than 2000 years) (23), likewise there *must* be a very long period of time between the physical resurrection of this first group (believers) and the physical resurrection of the second group (unbelievers) (at least 1000 years of the millennial kingdom) (24)!

The end, when Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father, takes place after Christ has destroyed all dominion, authority and power (24). This fact *must* point to a long period of time after the physical resurrection of the first group. Dispensationalists call this long period the millennial kingdom, during which Christ would be engaged in destroying these inimical powers (cf. Psalm 2:9; Revelation 19:15)!

##### b. Covenant theology.

The word ‘then’ is an adverb that expresses *sequence* of events with or without a time-interval. For example: there was a sequence of putting off clothes and *then* immediately washing feet (John 13:4-5) and there was a sequence of appearances of the resurrected Jesus with no mention of a time-interval (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5-7). Likewise in 1 Corinthians 15:23-24: there is a sequence of events: first, there was the physical resurrection of Christ (23a); *then* there will be the physical resurrection of those who belong to him (23b)(and the physical resurrection of all other people simultaneously, John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15); and *then* the end will have arrived (24). There is no reference to any time intervals!

Jesus puts the physical resurrection of believers and unbelievers *simultaneously* ‘*at one time*’, not at two times separated by a long period of 1000 years (John 5:28-29; cf. Acts 24:15). Jesus teaches that the physical resurrection is simultaneous with the final judgement of believers and unbelievers (John 5:28-29; cf. Matthew 25:31-33) and on ‘the last day’ (John 6:39-40; cf. 11:24)! And the apostle Paul puts the physical resurrection of believers (this would make them blameless) when ‘Jesus is revealed’, ‘at the end’ and ‘on the day of the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 1:7-8)<sup>115</sup>. Then Jesus will appear and the judgement of the living and the dead will take place (2 Timothy 4:1). At the liberation of our bodies also the liberation of the whole creation will take place (Romans 8:18-24). The very last enemy Jesus will conquer by making powerless and ineffective is *not* the antichristian forces of the dispensationalists (at the end of their so-called millennial kingdom) (24), but physical death, which includes the physical death of believers (26). He will conquer their death by their resurrection (21,23)(cf. Revelation 20:11-15)! All this will happen ‘on the last day’ and then there will not be any room for a long period (e.g. 1000 years) to destroy the dominions, authorities and powers. Thus, the words ‘then the end will come’ do not allow dispensationalists to insert a long time-interval of 1000 years before this end arrives!

<sup>114</sup> εἶτα το τέλος, οταν παραδιδω (vspra) την βασιλειαν τω θεω και πατρι, οταν καταργηση (vsaa) πασαν αρχην και πασαν εξουσιαν και δυναμιν

<sup>115</sup> την αποκαλυψιν του κυριου ημων Ιησου Χριστου, ....και βεβαιωσει > βεβαιωω (to establish) (vifa) υμας εως (temporal conjunction: until) τελους (the end) ανεγκλητους (without accusation, blameless) εν τη ημερα του κυριου ημων Ιησου [Χριστου].

## **5. The word ‘the end’** (verse 24).

### **a. Dispensational theology.**

Dispensationalists say that the word ‘the end’ refers or must refer to the end of the series of resurrections with large intervals in between: the resurrection of Christ, and at least 2000 years later the resurrection of believers at Christ’s first return, and at least 1000 years later the resurrection of unbelievers at ‘the end’. They force the word ‘the end’ into the service of their second physical resurrection of unbelievers after the millennial kingdom even when that end does not refer to any physical resurrection, but to handing over the kingdom to God the Father.

### **b. Covenant theology.**

The word ‘the end’ has absolute force and cannot be construed as merely the end of the present age, because the end of the present age is Christ’s second coming! Christ’s second coming is introduced with the word ‘then’<sup>116</sup> and ‘the end’ is thereafter introduced with the word ‘then’<sup>117</sup>. The word ‘the end’ can have strict teleological significance as the goal to which the entire process of redemption has been moving. And the word ‘the end’ can have chronological significance as the end of all ages, including the present New Testament age, the great eschatological finale which leads from this present age to the coming age. The word ‘when’<sup>118</sup> (24) favours the last sense: the absolute end is ‘when’ (24b) Christ has subjected (past tense) all dominion, authority and power during this present New Testament period and ‘when’ (24a) Christ hands over (present tense) the (already present) kingdom to God the Father.

Also verse 25 and 26 favours the last sense: it is not said that Christ will reign (future tense) in a future millennial kingdom until he has destroyed all antichristian powers (the dispensational view), but that he must reign (present tense) until he has made all these antichristian powers powerless and ineffective (the covenant view)(25). It is not said that the last enemy to be destroyed is these antichristian powers in the millennial kingdom (the dispensational view), but that the last enemy to be made powerless and ineffective is physical death at Christ’s second coming (the covenant view)(26). Then death and Hades and unbelievers will forever be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). And then believers will inherit the kingdom of God in its final perfect phase (1 Corinthians 15:50-54; cf. Matthew 25:34; Revelation 11:15).

Thus, the word ‘the end’ does not refer to the end of a series of resurrections (as dispensationalists allege), also not to Christ’s second coming (the close of this present age). ‘The end’ is not Christ’s second coming (the parousia), but occurs at Christ’s second coming (the parousia). ‘The end’ refers to the absolute end, the end of all ages of God’s history of salvation within human history, the end of Christ’s eschatological reign in the universe and on the earth, the end of Christ’s work as Mediator of God’s creation, redemption and perfection.

## **6. The beginning and end of Christ’s eschatological reign** (verse 25-28)

The words ‘until’<sup>119</sup> (25) and ‘the last’<sup>120</sup> enemy (26) indicate that the battle against the antichristian powers up to the last enemy, death, is going to take some time. The question is: “When does Christ *begin* his reign in which he conquers these enemies?”

### **a. Dispensational theology.**

Dispensationalists allege that Christ’s eschatological reign only begins *at Christ’s future second return* when he would bind Satan. Dispensationalists *insert a 1000 year period* between Christ’s so-called future second return and ‘the end’ during which they allege Christ reigns with an iron rod over the nations and only destroys the antichristian powers at the end of the 1000 years.

Dispensationalists thus teach that ‘the kingdom of Christ’ (read: the millennial kingdom) begins at Christ’s second coming (more precisely: Christ’s second return) and ends a 1000 years later when Christ finally conquers all antichristian powers and especially Satan. They teach that when the righteous are resurrected

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<sup>116</sup> επειτα

<sup>117</sup> ειτα

<sup>118</sup> οταν

<sup>119</sup> αχρι ου

<sup>120</sup> εσχατος

(the Christians at Christ's first return and the Jewish saints by Christ's second return), they would inherit *the millennial kingdom of Christ*.

b. Covenant theology.

The beginning of Christ's eschatological reign.

If Christ's eschatological reign begins at a point *before* Christ's second coming, no intermediate period between Christ's second coming and 'the end' is necessary and 'the end' can follow shortly after Christ's second coming!

Christ's eschatological reign began *before* Christ's second coming, at Christ's first coming when he bound Satan (Matthew 12:28-29; John 12:31-32; Colossians 1:13; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 12:5-10) and when he was the first to be resurrected from the dead (Revelation 1:5a). It was then that Christ *began to reign* on this present earth as the King of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5b) in the present (inaugurated or realised) kingdom (Revelation 12:10). The kingdom is already a reality on this present earth (cf. Mark 1:15; 4:11,26-34; 10:14-15,23; 12:28-34; Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3-8; Romans 14:17-18).

God the Father had subjected everything under Christ *at Christ's first coming* (27) (Matthew 28:3; John 13:3; Ephesians 1:20-22). Throughout the whole New Testament period Christ reigns and is making all antichristian powers powerless and ineffective (25). At the end of the New Testament period at Christ's second coming, he will make the last enemy, death, powerless and ineffective (26). Then the absolute end has arrived (see point 5).

The end of Christ's eschatological reign.

At the absolute end Christ will subject to God the Father, not his Sonship of God, but *his office as Mediator* between God and man. He will have finished his work as Mediator (of the creation, salvation and judgement), protecting his people on earth and conquering the ungodly and wicked, and will lay it at the feet of God the Father, so that God may be all in all (28). There will be no opposition in heaven or on earth any more. In the new heaven (universe) and on the new earth God's dominion will be universal and universally accepted. God will possess all, reign over all and be acknowledged by all.

1 Corinthians 15:28 does not teach that Christ will lay down his Kingship, because after Christ's second coming Christ will reign as King *together* with God the Father on his throne (Revelation 22:1,3). The kingship and kingdom of Jesus Christ is an *eternal* kingship or kingdom (2 Samuel 7:13; Isaiah 9:7; 2 Peter 1:11)!

Christ's eschatological reign *ends* when he has conquered the last enemy, death. This happens at the physical resurrection at Christ's second coming (21,23)! At 'the last trumpet' (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Matthew 24:30-31) believers who have died will be physically resurrected and believers who still live on earth will be changed. Physical death will be dethroned and believers will be clothed with the imperishable and with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:42-44;50-54). Then, when he has completed the final judgement and the renewal of everything (the universe, the new earth and all believers of the Old and New Testament periods) he will hand the (present, inaugurated or realised) kingdom of the New Testament period to God the Father and the eternal kingdom begins (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). After 'this absolute end' there will never again be any crisis anymore!

Covenant believers teach that the biblical context, 1 Corinthians 15:50, clearly says that it is not 'the eschatological kingdom or kingship of Christ', but '*the eternal kingdom of God*' that begins at Christ's second coming and the physical resurrection of believers!

Thus, from a chronological standpoint the eschatological kingship or kingdom of Christ *begins* at Christ's first coming and Christ's resurrection from the dead as the firstfruit (23a). And from a chronological standpoint this eschatological kingship or kingdom of Christ *ends* at Christ's second coming. Then Christ will have conquered all the antichristian powers (24-25) *and physical death* of those who belong to him (23b,26). Then he will have conducted the final judgement in the air (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15). Then he will have renewed everything (Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19-23; Revelation 20:11-15). And then he will have handed this eschatological kingship or kingdom to God the Father. The righteous, that is, God's

Old Testament and New Testament people, will have inherited *the eternal kingdom of God* (that is, the new heaven and new earth in which God together with Christ on the throne reigns over everyone and everything for ever and ever).

1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 speak only of the physical resurrection of *believers*! John 5:28-29, Acts 24:15 and Revelation 20:11-15 speak of the physical resurrection of *believers and unbelievers* at the same time!

There is nothing in the teachings of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 or in his other letters to hinder us in dating this period of eschatological conquest from Christ's first coming through his death and resurrection. At his first coming he bound Satan (Matthew 12:28-29; John 12:31-32) and his death on the cross disarmed and in principle dethroned all powers and authorities (Colossians 2:15; cf. Luke 10:18). Throughout the whole New Testament period Christ reigns and these powers are unable to separate even one believer from God's love for them (Romans 8:37-39; cf. Matthew 24:24; John 17:12)!

'The Lordship'<sup>121</sup> of Christ and 'the kingship or kingdom'<sup>122</sup> of Christ are equivalent, because the enthronement of Christ in Philippians 2:9-11 has exactly the same results as the handing over of the kingdom to God the Father in 1 Corinthians 15:24. While Philippians 2:9-11 denotes *the beginning* of Christ's kingship or kingdom on earth, 1 Corinthians 15:24,28 denotes *the end* of this kingship or kingdom of Christ on earth.

Thus the kingship or kingdom of Christ within human history stretches between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. Then he has completed his reign as Mediator. And the kingship or kingdom of God beyond this present human history, thus in eternity, begins at Christ's second coming. But this does not mean that Christ no longer reigns, because he reigns for all eternity together with God the Father on his throne (Revelation 22:1,3) and his reign remains eternal (2 Samuel 7:13; Isaiah 9:7; 2 Peter 1:11)!

## **[II] EXPOSITION OF 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18**

The biblical text. (13) Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like *also* the rest of men, who have no hope. (14) We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so (we believe) that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. (15) According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (18) Therefore, encourage each other with these words.

### **1. The ignorance and grief of the Thessalonian believers** (verse 13).

#### **a. Dispensational theology.**

The presupposition of dispensationalism is that there would be two physical resurrections separated by the millennial kingdom and that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *could not be understood without the insertion of the millennial kingdom in the explanation!* Dispensationalists argue that the believers living in Thessalonica did not doubt the physical resurrection from the dead, because Paul had taught this very clearly everywhere. For the believers it was not a question whether there would be a physical resurrection or not, but rather whether they would participate in the first physical resurrection and all the blessings of the millennial kingdom or not.

Dispensationalists argue that although the millennial kingdom is not mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4 *the state of mind* of the Thessalonians believers proves that they believed in the millennial kingdom! Dispensationalists put all the emphasis on the subjective awareness and mood of the Thessalonian believers. While the Gentiles did not believe in the resurrection, the believers did. While the Gentiles grieved because they had no hope, the believers also grieved, but not because they did not believe in the resurrection. They

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<sup>121</sup> κυριότης

<sup>122</sup> βασιλεία

grieved because they doubted whether they would participate in the so-called first resurrection and the blessings of the millennial kingdom.

[**Remarks.** If the Thessalonian believers had grieved because they doubted whether they would participate in the so-called first resurrection and blessings of the millennial kingdom, Paul would have used two arguments to comfort them: First: he would have pointed out that they had no reason to grieve, because against the utter hopelessness of the Gentiles who did not believe in a resurrection at all, the relative hopelessness of the Thessalonian believers is out of place, because they believed they would be resurrected! Second: he would have told them that the actual position of the Thessalonian believers was much better than they expected, because their resurrection would coincide with Christ's first return! But we find no trace that Paul had two such thoughts in his answer to the Thessalonians!

Two facts in the original Greek make it impossible to believe that Paul and the Thessalonians were dispensationalists:

Verse 13 says that the Thessalonian believers grieved *'as also'* the Gentiles grieved.

Verse 14 begins with the word *'because'* and gives the real reason of their grief.]

#### b. Covenant theology.

Paul makes no presupposition whatsoever. Everywhere in his letters he proclaimed the one and only physical resurrection from the dead. And yet there were people in Corinth who doubted the physical resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). In the same way there were people in Thessalonica who were ignorant about the physical resurrection itself. The Thessalonian believers were *ignorant*, because they did not know the truth about the physical resurrection of the dead!

Paul and his co-workers put no emphasis on the Thessalonians' subjective state of mind, but on their own objective conviction about the physical resurrection. The text does not say that the believers grieved *as the Gentiles* grieved, but rather that the believers grieved *as also the Gentiles* grieved. Thus, the Thessalonian believers grieved for the same reason as the Gentiles! Both groups grieved, because they had no hope at all. And they had no hope, because they were ignorant about the resurrection from the dead. They did not believe in the resurrection, because they did not know about the resurrection! If they had had true knowledge of the resurrection, they would have had hope! And if they had hope, they would not have grieved!

Thus, the presupposition of dispensationalists is wrong! The *doubt* of the Corinthians was probably more of an intellectual theoretical nature and Paul brought forward strong arguments in 1 Corinthians 15 to prove the physical resurrection of dead believers. The *ignorance* of the Thessalonians was probably more of a primitive nature, because Paul did not attack their ignorance, but rather comforted and encouraged them. Paul supplied two objective assurances that show that he and his co-workers were not thinking of two separate physical resurrections separated by a 1000 years, but were speaking of the one and only physical resurrection that will take place at Christ's one and only second coming.

## **2. The truth about the physical resurrection** (verse 14).

#### a. Dispensational theology.

Dispensationalists allege that the Thessalonian believers only had doubts about the point of time of their own resurrection. They did not doubt whether there was a resurrection, but doubted whether they would participate in the so-called first resurrection before the millennial kingdom so that they would be able to participate in the millennial kingdom.

#### b. Covenant theology.

Verse 14 begins with the word *'because'* and gives two biblical reasons why the Thessalonians need not grieve. If the ignorance and grief of the Thessalonian believers concerned the point of time of their resurrection, Paul would have answered: "The resurrection would take place not later than Christ's first return or at Christ's first return." But Paul does not say that. Instead he gives them his personal conviction about the resurrection itself and then only adds the time when that resurrection would take place.

Strictly logical speaking Paul's conditional clause: "We believe that Jesus died (departed) and rose again" (14a) should have the following consequent clause: "We also believe that (the bodies of) the departed

believers will be resurrected.” But Paul melts two assurances together in his conditional clause: Instead of saying: “God will resurrect (the bodies of) the believers that have fallen asleep through Jesus” and “God will bring (the souls of) these departed believers with Jesus”, he says: “God will bring with Jesus (the bodies and souls of) those who have fallen asleep in him” (14b).

### **3. There is no precedence at the resurrection of believers** (verse 15).

#### **a. Dispensational theology.**

The word ‘precede’<sup>123</sup> means ‘to arrive earlier at a goal than somebody else’. Dispensationalists pull this word out of its context to prove that Paul without saying it believed that there would be two groups of people that would arrive at different times at the resurrection crisis. ‘The believers’ would be resurrected at the so-called first physical resurrection before the millennial kingdom and ‘the unbelievers’ would be resurrected at the so-called second physical resurrection after the millennial kingdom. Thus, the believers would ‘precede’ the unbelievers in the resurrection!

#### **b. Covenant theology.**

Paul used the word ‘precede’ correctly, without introducing any unspoken belief (namely, the two alleged physical resurrections of dispensationalism). The word ‘precede’ has got nothing to do with unbelievers, but with believers that have already died and believers that are still living! Paul teaches that the believers who had already died would not be one moment behind the believers that were still living at the resurrection of the dead. Both groups of believers will arrive in Christ’s presence at his one and only second coming at the same moment! The still living believers will not ‘precede’ the already dead believers!

### **4. The one and only second coming and resurrection** (verse 16).

#### **a. Dispensational theology.**

Dispensationalists speak about the physical resurrection of believers and of unbelievers – two physical resurrections: the believers (the Church) would be resurrected at the so-called first physical resurrection at Christ’s so-called first return in order to inherit eternal life. The unbelievers would be resurrected more than 1000 years later at the end of the millennial kingdom in order to inherit eternal damnation.

#### **b. Covenant theology.**

The text in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 does not speak about two separate second comings of Christ. Paul speaks about ‘*the*’ second coming (15). This one and only second coming will not be invisible and inaudible to unbelievers (as dispensationalists allege), but will be very visible and audible to everyone on earth (16).

The text in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 also does not speak about two separate physical resurrections at all. Paul does not speak about the physical resurrection of unbelievers at all! He speaks only of the resurrection of believers that had already died (16). And Paul also speaks of the immediate transformation of believers that still live at Christ’s second coming (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:50-57)!

### **5. The biblical rapture is different than the traditional rapture** (verse 17).

#### **a. Dispensational theology.**

Dispensationalists believe that after the believers have been physically resurrected they would be caught up in the clouds in a way that is invisible and inaudible to unbelievers. And then they would remain together with Christ in heaven until Christ’s so-called second return to establish the millennial kingdom on earth.

#### **b. Covenant theology.**

The Bible however teaches that the following events will take place on the Day of the Lord (the last day):

- The one and only second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will take place (Matthew 24:27-31; Revelation 14:14-20; 19:11-21).

- The departed believers will be physically resurrected (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Also the unbelievers will be resurrected at the same time (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), but that is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 or in 1 Thessalonians 4.

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<sup>123</sup> φθάνω

- The still living believers will be transformed (1 Corinthians 15:50-57; Philippians 3:21).
- Only the resurrected and transformed believers will be gathered by the angels (Matthew 13:43; 24:30-31) and caught up in the clouds in order to meet Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and welcome and adore Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:10) at his one and only second coming (Matthew 24:2 24:40a,41a; Matthew 25:10).
- Only the unbelievers will remain behind on earth and not participate in the welcome given to Christ in the air (Matthew 24:40b,41b; Matthew 25:11-12).
- But later on that same last day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3) the angels will drive the unbelievers that were left behind on the earth before Christ's judgement throne in the air and the final judgement of believers and unbelievers will take place. Unbelievers will be cast into the fiery lake (Matthew 13:41-42; 25:41-46a; Revelation 21:8), but believers will inherit the kingdom in its final perfect phase: that is, the new heaven and the new earth (Matthew 13:43; 25:31-40,46b).
- When the final transformation of believers and the final judgement of unbelievers take place (Revelation 20:12-15), also the final judgement of the old earth and the renewal of this earth to become the new earth will take place (Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19-23; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11).
- After the one and only second coming of Christ, the one and only physical resurrection, the one and only final judgement the universe and the earth will be renewed and Christ will descend with believers as the New Jerusalem onto the new earth (Revelation 21:1-2).

### **[III] EXPOSITION OF 2 THESSALONIANS 1:4-12**

The biblical text. (4) Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. (5) All this is evidence that God's judgement is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (6) God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. (7) and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. (8) He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord, and from the majesty of his power (10) on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (11) With this in mind we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfil every good purpose (of yours) and every act prompted by (your) faith. (12) We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **1. A separate resurrection for believing martyrs or only one resurrection for everybody?**

##### **a. Dispensational theology.**

This passage deals with the physical resurrection of believers that have become martyrs. According to dispensationalists this passage refers to the persecution and oppression during the tribulation period before the millennial kingdom. At the revelation or the so-called second return of Christ the believing martyrs would be physically resurrected from the dead and enter into the millennial kingdom. Thus dispensational theology, which teaches the so-called first return of Jesus 7 or 3½ years before the millennial kingdom, poses three physical resurrections:

- First. The physical resurrection of believers from the Church period. They will be resurrected at the so-called first return of Christ (the parousia or coming) 7 or 3½ years before the so-called second return of Christ (the apokalupsis or revelation) (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- Second. The physical resurrection of believers that have become martyrs during the tribulation period. They will be resurrected at the so-called second return of Christ at the beginning of the millennial kingdom (2 Thessalonians 1:4-12).
- Third. The physical resurrection of the unbelievers at the end of the millennial kingdom before the great white throne (1 Corinthians 15:24).

##### **b. Covenant theology.**

This passage says nothing more than that suffering and glory are inseparably bound together. The persecution and oppression are not specifically those of believing martyrs. There is no biblical warrant to pose a separate physical resurrection for believing martyrs. Such a teaching does not occur in the Bible!

## 2. Different resurrection days or the day of the Lord?

### a. Dispensational theology.

The physical resurrection of believing martyrs would happen on the so-called second return of Christ ('the apokalupsis' or revelation) (2 Thessalonians 1:7). That would be *after* the so-called first return of Christ ('the parousia' or coming), when allegedly the believers in the Church would already have been physically resurrected. Both the so-called first return of Christ and the so-called second return of Christ would not be the final day in the history of this present earth. The last day would only come 1000 years later.

### b. Covenant theology.

The day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:2) is the one and only final day in the history of this present world. On this day the coming (Greek: parousia) of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1) or the revelation (Greek: apokalupsis) of Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:7) and the final judgement will occur. The words 'parousia' and 'apokalupsis' are interchangeable and refer to one and the same event: the one and only second coming of Christ (compare Matthew 24:39-41 with Luke 17:30-31)!

On that final day in the history of this present world Christ will come on the clouds in the sky, all believers in Christ and all unbelievers that have died will be physically resurrected (John 5:28-29; 6:39-40; 11:24-26; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:11-15) and all believers in Christ that are still living will be physically transformed (1 Corinthians 15:50-57). On that final day all the resurrected and transformed believers in Christ will be caught up into the clouds to meet Christ, that is to welcome Christ and to marvel at him (2 Thessalonians 1:10; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Later on that same final day the angels will also drive all unbelievers before Christ's throne in the sky in order to judge and punish all people who do not know the God of the Bible and who do not believe in the gospel about Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; cf. Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15). And also on that last day the old earth and the old universe will be judged with fire and will be completely renewed (Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:4,7-13; Revelation 21:1-2).

## 3. The millennial kingdom or the kingdom of God

### a. Dispensational theology.

Verse 5 promises the millennial kingdom to the believing martyrs after the so-called second return of Christ. The word 'calling' in verse 11 is regarded as in an objective sense: God's calling them to the millennial kingdom.

### b. Covenant theology.

Verse 5 does not refer to a millennial kingdom, a kingdom in between that is limited to 1000 years, but to the kingdom of God, which is the eternal kingdom of God the Father (and God the Son) after the one and only second coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)!

## **[IV] EXPOSITION OF PHILIPPIANS 3:10-14**

The biblical text. (10) I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (11) and so, somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (12) Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (13) Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

## A reward for martyrdom or the prize for a holy life?

### Dispensational theology.

"Becoming like him (Christ) in his death" (10) is interpreted as undergoing martyrdom. The motive for martyrdom is "to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (11). Dispensationalists say that Paul is thinking here of a special resurrection of Christians that have suffered martyrdom for Christ. Believing martyrs would be rewarded with a special physical resurrection long before the general resurrection of other believers at the so-called first return of Christ (parousia)! (Compare this view of dispensationalists with the view of dispensationalists of Revelation 20:4-6).

### Covenant theology.

Paul expects that his soul (spirit) and not his body would be with Christ immediately after his physical death (Philippians 1:23). The ‘being with Christ’<sup>124</sup> is not further qualified and therefore has the same meaning as Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”<sup>125</sup> When Christians die physically, their souls (spirits) will immediately be with Christ in heaven.

The ‘being with Christ’ in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is further qualified by its context ‘thus or so’<sup>126</sup> and means that after Christ’s second coming Christians with their souls (spirits) and bodies will always be with Christ (whether still in the air at his second coming or on the new earth after the final judgement and the renewal of all things).

The context of 2 Corinthians 5:8 is *before* Christ’s second coming and the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is *after* Christ’s second coming.

Philippians 3:20-21 says, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And *we* eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform *our* lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Paul expects that not only his body, but also the bodies of other believers (he speaks of ‘we’ and ‘our’) will be physically resurrected only at Christ’s second coming.

In Philippians 3:11-12 Paul says that he wants “to attain the resurrection from the dead.”<sup>127</sup> He states that he had not yet attained that goal and that he was not yet perfect. But he was pursuing that goal and reaching out to take hold of that goal. It is clear that the requirement for attaining the resurrection from the dead is *not martyrdom, but growth in holiness* toward greater Christlikeness, which among other things is brought about by persecution and oppression (Philippians 3:7-11). Paul is not speaking of a special privilege for a special class of Christians. He is teaching the same in Romans 8:17, “Now if we are (God’s) children, then we are (God’s) heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” He is also teaching the same in 2 Timothy 2:12, “If we endure, we will also reign with him.”

The words “and so somehow”<sup>128</sup> to attain the resurrection from the dead (11) emphasises the responsibility of Paul to live a holy life. The resurrection from the dead is on the one hand an objective assurance on the basis of the justification by Christ (Philippians 3:20-21) and on the other hand a subjective endeavour by means of living a holy life (Philippians 3:10-11). The resurrection from the dead is a gift from God and at the same time an attainment of the Christian. If Paul strives to attain the spiritual resurrected life (to personally know Christ, to share in his holy living and to experience the power of his resurrection) (10-11) then we have no right to say that Paul cannot strive to attain the physical resurrected life at Christ’s second coming. “The prize for which God has called me” (14) indicates the experience of the physical resurrected life to which God is calling Christians heavenward. Paul strives to attain this future experience or state. All genuine mature Christians should also have this view of the physical resurrection and this same aspiration (15-16).

## **[V] EXPOSITION OF REVELATION 12:1-18 AND 20:1-7**

See exposition in the commentary on the book of Revelation. In summary:

### a. Dispensational theology.

There will be two physical resurrections separated by more than 1000 years.

‘The first resurrection’ is the *physical* resurrection of only Christians at Christ’s so-called first return. It is the final stage for Christians.

‘The second resurrection’ is implied and is the *physical* resurrection of only the non-Christians at the end of the millennial kingdom.<sup>129</sup> ‘The second death’ is their *physical* plunge into hell.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>124</sup> συν Κυρίῳ εἶναι (vnpa)

<sup>125</sup> ἐκδημησαί > ἐκδημεῖω (to leave one’s country, to go abroad, to immigrate)(vnaa) ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἐνδημησαί > ἐνδημεῖω (to be at home with)(vnaa) πρὸς τὸν Κύριον

<sup>126</sup> οὕτως

<sup>127</sup> εἰ πῶς καταντησῶ > κατανταῶ (to reach, to arrive at a destination)(vnaa) εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν

<sup>128</sup> εἰ πῶς

<sup>129</sup> John F. Walvoord, “The Rapture Question”, 1979, p 208

b. Covenant theology.

There is a spiritual resurrection of only Christians, but also one physical resurrection of Christians and non-Christians at Christ’s second coming.

‘The first death’ is implied and is the physical death of both Christians and non-Christians. ‘The first resurrection’ (20:4-6) is not a physical, but a spiritual event, namely, *the translation (conveyance)* of the souls of only Christians into Christ’s presence at the moment they die as a consequence of their initial spiritual regeneration during their lives on earth. They enter the intermediate stage between physical death and physical resurrection.

‘The second resurrection’ is implied and is the one and only resurrection from physical death of Christians and non-Christians at the same time at Christ’s one and only second coming. ‘The second death’ is *the descent* of the bodies and souls of only non-Christians into hell after the final judgment day as a consequence of their remaining spiritually dead and unrepentant during their lives on earth.

**[VI] THE CONTRADICTIONS IN DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY**

Dispensational theology contains contradictions with regard to the physical resurrection from the dead!

**1. Dispensationalists read their theological presuppositions into the text of the Bible**

a. Dispensationalists read two different second comings (returns) of Christ into the Bible. ‘The parousia’<sup>131</sup> (the so-called first return of Christ) would take place before or in the middle of the tribulation period. ‘The revelation’<sup>132</sup> (the so-called second return of Christ) would take place before the millennial kingdom. In dispensational theology both so-called ‘returns’ of Christ do *not* take place at the end of the history of this present world!

b. They read different physical resurrections from the dead into the Bible. Believers (in the Church and in the tribulation period) will be physically resurrected before the millennial kingdom, but all unbelievers will only be physically resurrected after the millennial kingdom. Dispensationalists have different theories about the unbelieving Gentiles that also live during the millennial kingdom period.

c. They read a literal millennial (1000 years) kingdom of Christ on earth into the Bible. However, Revelation 20:1-7 does not mention a kingdom and the 1000 years refer to the period that begins with Satan being bound and ends with Satan being loosened, the final battle, the general resurrection, the general final judgement and the renewal of all things.

**2. Contradictions about who will participate in which physical resurrection**

Note the following contradictions that are taught by dispensational theology:

<b>Bible</b>	<b>who are resurrected?</b>	<b>when are they resurrected?</b>	<b>what event follows?</b>
1 Corinthians 15:23	<u>all</u> <i>believers</i> (all who belong to Christ) (23)	at Christ’s <i>first</i> return (before the millennial kingdom) (23)	(the millennial kingdom is implied)(24-25) <i>God’s eternal kingdom</i> (28)
1 Corinthians 15:24-28	(all <i>unbelievers</i> ) (26 implied)	(at <i>the end</i> of the millennial kingdom) (24 implied)	
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	<u>all</u> <i>believers</i> that have died before Christ’s first return (13-16)	at Christ’s first return (15)	always be with <i>Christ (in heaven)</i> (17)
2 Thessalonians 1:4-12	all <i>believers</i> that have become martyrs during tribulation period after Christ’s first return	at Christ’s <i>second</i> return (before the millennial kingdom) (7)	(the millennial kingdom is not mentioned) <i>God’s eternal kingdom!</i> (5)
Philippians 3:10-12	all <i>believing martyrs</i> in the Church period before Christ’s first return (10-11)	(at a time <i>before</i> Christ’s first return!)	

<sup>130</sup> Larkin, Revelation pp 176-180

<sup>131</sup> παρουσία, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Matthew 24:26-31

<sup>132</sup> αποκαλυψις, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Luke 17:30-35

Revelation 20:4,6	all <i>believing martyrs</i> during the tribulation period after Christ's first return and before the millennial kingdom (4)	at Christ's <i>second</i> return at the beginning of the millennial kingdom (4)	<i>Christ's millennial kingdom</i> (4,6), followed by <i>God's eternal kingdom</i> (21:1-2)
Revelation 20:5	all <i>unbelievers</i> (5)	at the <i>end</i> of the millennial kingdom (11-15)	<i>the fiery lake of burning sulphur</i> (eternal death, 15)

a. The physical resurrection of only believing martyrs or of believers?

According to dispensationalists Philippians 3:10-14 teaches that there would be a special physical resurrection of only believers that are martyrs of the Church at a time *before Christ's first return*.

And according to dispensationalists 2 Thessalonians 1:4-12 teaches that there would also be another special physical resurrection of believers that are martyrs of the tribulation period *at Christ's second return*.

But Philippians 3 does not speak about martyrdom at all. It speaks about the requirement of growing in holiness toward greater Christlikeness, which among other things is brought about by persecution and oppression. And 2 Thessalonians 1 does not speak about believing martyrs during the so-called tribulation period of dispensationalism, but about believers in the congregation of Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians 1:1) who were troubled by unbelievers.

b. The physical resurrection of believers and unbelievers at separate times or together?

According to dispensationalists 1 Corinthians 15:23 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16 teach that the physical resurrection of *all believers* of the Church would be *at Christ's first return*. And that 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and Revelation 20:11-15 teach that the physical resurrection of *all unbelievers* would be *after the millennial kingdom*.

But Jesus in John 5:28-29 and Paul in Acts 24:15 teach that the physical resurrection of *all people* (believers and unbelievers) would be *at his one and only second coming*. Moreover, John in Revelation 20:11-15 clearly includes the physical resurrection of both believers and unbelievers, because unbelievers will be thrown in the lake of fire, while believers whose names are written in the book of life will inherit eternal life (cf. Matthew 25:46).

### 3. Contradictions within the eschatology of dispensational theology between Paul and John

#### **Paul in 1 Corinthians 15**

- a. The first resurrection is the physical resurrection of *Christ* (23a)
- b. The second resurrection is the physical resurrection of *all believers* (23b)
- c. The kingdom of Christ (after the second resurrection) is viewed as a kingship *in heaven* (25)
- d. The kingdom of Christ lasts for *an undetermined period of time* (24)
- e. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of *war* (24-28)
- f. The conflict lasts *during his whole period of rule* (25)
- g. The end of the kingdom of Christ is indicated by his victory over *death* (26)
- h. The kingdom of Christ is followed by the kingdom of *God* (24,28)

#### **John in Revelation 20**

- a. The first resurrection is the physical resurrection of all *believers* (actually: martyrs)(4-6)
- b. The second resurrection is the physical resurrection of all *unbelievers*
- c. The millennial kingdom (the kingdom of Christ) is viewed as a future kingship *on earth* (4-6)
- d. The millennial kingdom lasts for *only 1000 literal years* (4,6)
- e. The millennial kingdom is a kingdom of *peace* (1-3)
- f. The conflict takes place *only at the end of his rule* (7-10)
- g. The end of the millennial kingdom is indicated by his victory over *Satan* (7-10)
- h. The millennial kingdom is followed by the rule of *God and the Lamb* on the new earth (22:3)

### 4. Conclusion

We must conclude that the above Bible passages do NOT contain any dispensational or chiliastic teaching! In some of these Bible passages dispensationalism is completely irreconcilable with the teaching of the apostle Paul.

## **PART 13. THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

### **1. The two kingdoms**

#### **a. Dispensational theology.**

Dispensational theology teaches a kingdom of Christ that would be *a future reality* on earth (*the millennial kingdom*).

It teaches that this future millennial kingdom would be followed by *the eternal and transcendental kingdom* of God.

#### **b. Pauline theology.**

However, the apostle Paul teaches that the kingdom of Christ is *already a present reality* (it is *the inaugurated or realised kingdom*).

He teaches that the present kingdom of Christ will be followed by *the eternal kingdom* of God (1 Corinthians 15:25,28).

### **2. The Bible teaches the kingdom of God in its present phase and in its future phase**

The present kingdom of God is God's kingship through the Mediator Jesus Christ and lasts from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. The eternal kingdom of God is the same kingdom, but then in its final perfect phase after Christ's second coming.

a. Jesus Christ distinguishes between *the present (inaugurated, realised) kingdom* of God (Matthew 4:17; 6:10,33; 11:12; 12:28-30; 13:11,19,31-33,38,41,44-52; 16:19; 18:1-4; 19:12; 20:1-16; 21:31,43; 22:1-14; 23:13; 24:14; Luke 9:62; 17:20-21; John 3:3,5; 18:36-37) and *the eschatological (future) eternal kingdom* of God (Matthew 8:11-12; 20:21-23; 25:10,14,21,34; 26:29).

b. The apostle Paul also distinguishes between *the present kingdom* of God (Acts 20:24-25; 28:23,31; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:20; 15:24-25; Colossians 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12) and *the eschatological eternal kingdom* of God (Acts 14:21-22; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 15:24,28,50; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; Titus 3:18). The apostle Paul teaches that these two phases of God's kingdom form an unbroken continuity (1 Corinthians 15:24).

c. Jesus Christ teaches that *the present salvation and the present kingdom* are identical and exist at the same time (Matthew 19:23,25; Mark 10:23,26).

d. The apostle Paul also teaches that *the present salvation and the present kingdom* are identical and exist at the same time (Acts 20:24-25; 28:23,31; Colossians 1:13).

e. Possessing eternal life is the first down payment of the eternal kingdom of God (cf. John 3:3-8). Because Christians already now experience the blessings and joys of the present kingdom of God (Christ) (Romans 14:17), they reach out to the eternal kingdom of God, knowing that it certainly is coming (Acts 14:22).

### **3. The Bible does not carry the distinction between the expressions 'kingdom of Christ' and 'kingdom of God' through**

#### **a. Sometimes the kingdom of God is presented as a future reality.**

Christians are called to the kingdom of God (1 Thessalonians 2:12), suffer because they are counted worthy of the kingdom of God (2 Thessalonians 1:5) and will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5).

#### **b. Sometimes the kingdom of God is also presented as a present reality.**

The kingdom of God is a matter of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power (1 Corinthians 4:20). In these passages the kingdom of God and the present kingship or rule of Christ are identified with one another (cf. Luke 17:20-21).

c. The eternal kingdom of God is also *the kingdom of Christ*.

The future eternal kingdom of God is also called the kingdom of Christ (Ephesians 5:5; 2 Peter 1:11).

And the future and eternal kingship of Christ coincides with his appearance unto the final judgement (2 Timothy 4:1).

#### **4. The Bible makes no separation between the militant kingdom and the triumphant kingdom**

a. The present militant kingdom and the eternal triumphant kingdom.

The apostle Paul makes no distinction between the present militant kingdom of Christ and the eternal triumphant kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. After completion of his task at the second coming Christ hands the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

b. Christ as militant Conqueror and God as militant Conqueror.

The apostle Paul makes no distinction between Christ and God as the militant Conqueror. In the militant kingdom Christ conquers his enemies one after the other (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). But in Colossians 1:13 God is the militant Conqueror. In the triumphant kingdom all enemies and war has forever been banned (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).