

A Guide to the Doctrine  
of  
Dispensationalism

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# A Guide to the Doctrine of Dispensationalism

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## PREFACE

This booklet is an extract from Chapters 11 and 12 of *Not by Bread Alone, An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*. The hardback copy of the complete book is available through (Amazon.com) and via free download from Westcliff Press's website, [www.webtheology.com](http://www.webtheology.com).

Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Core Christianity need not involve agreement with the dispensational method of Bible interpretation. However, in-depth theological study and the correct interpretation of many Bible texts require agreement that God no longer works by the Law administration (dispensation) but has transitioned to the Church administration (dispensation). When Christ returns he will set up His Kingdom or millennial administration (dispensation).

Acceptance of these basic dispensational administrations is necessary for deeper Bible study. Dispensational changes not only affect end-time events but also the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (which dramatically changed from Law to the Church at Pentecost). Furthermore, views about the Church and church-state relations can depend upon interpreting the Bible dispensationally. Those who accept a change from the Law to the Church would not parallel the Old Testament system with a contemporary "priesthood." All New Testament believers are priests. Furthermore, arguments addressed to a secular society on contemporary ethics would be more effective if one qualified them with a clear dispensational change. The Law required burning witches and stoning homosexuals, but the Church is not under the Law. Failure to mention such important dispensational distinctions is almost universal, and needlessly results in the world giving little credence to Christian rhetoric. While dispensational theology might seem irrelevant to many, ignorance of it has produced negative results in both Bible interpretation and ministry in the modern world.



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## **The Doctrine of Dispensationalism**

## Evidence for Dispensationalism

Anyone who does not bring a sacrifice to church or celebrate the feast of tabernacles by living in huts made of palm branches is, in practice, a dispensationalist, although in theory he might deny it. The evidence that God has worked by various administrations or systems of management is conclusive.

### 1. Law vs. Grace, or Judaism vs. the Church

Scriptures clearly speak of the abrogation of the Law of Moses. It has been rescinded and is no longer binding upon believers unless a given point is repeated in Scripture pertaining to the Church. That is why we no longer have a temple, a priesthood, sacrifices or other rituals of Judaism.

To say that the Law of Moses has been set aside is not the same as affirming its destruction (Psalm 119:89; Matthew 5:17). While the Church is not under the Law, this does not mean the Law has been destroyed or that Christians disparage the Old Testament. Because God does not change in His attributes, everything that the Old Testament taught about God's nature is still valid (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Old Testament verses and Old Testament stories may be used to either prove or apply truths that were carried over into (i.e., repeated in) the Scriptures for the Church (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:16). The Law of Moses still proves man's guilt (Romans 3:19-20; 1 Timothy 1:8 ff.). The Law also contains many unfulfilled prophecies and teaches about God's dealings with gentile nations. Furthermore, the Old Testament is rife with ideas that may not be strictly binding upon the whole Church but might serve as a source for developing personal convictions in areas of Christian liberty (e.g., not lending at interest to a poor believer). Dispensationalists do not disregard the Old Testament. They just use it properly. See 1 Timothy 1:8: *ōī* the Law is good, if one uses it **lawfully**.

There is little excuse for failure to grasp the change from Law to Grace. It is one of the fundamental teachings of the New Testament.

For the **Law** was given **through Moses**; **grace** and truth were realized through **Jesus Christ** [John 1:17].

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are **not under law**, but under **grace** [Romans 6:14].

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made **to die to the Law** through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God [Romans 7:4].

For Christ is **the end of the law** for righteousness to everyone who believes [Romans 10:4].

But if the ministry of death, in **letters engraved on stones**, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if that which **fades away** was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory [2 Corinthians 3:7-8, 11].

Therefore **the Law** has become **our tutor** to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, **we are no longer under a tutor** [Galatians 3:24-25].

[B]y **abolishing** in His flesh the enmity, which is **the Law** of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace [Ephesians 2:15].

[H]aving **canceled** out the certificate of debt consisting of **decrees** against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross [Colossians 2:14].

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a **change of law** also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of Him, "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." For, on the one hand, there is a

**setting aside of a former commandment** because of its weakness and uselessness (for **the Law** made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God....so much the more also **Jesus** has become the guarantee of a **better covenant** [Hebrews 7:11-19, 22].

For if that **first covenant** had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a **second**....When He said, "A **new covenant**," He has made the **first obsolete**. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear [Hebrews 8:7, 13].

## 2. The Coming Kingdom

It is surprising that anyone could read the Bible and not believe that it promises a future earthly Kingdom centered in the nation of Israel. Scriptural evidence is more than conclusive. God has changed administrations from Law to the Church, and He will one day change from a church administration to that of a political kingdom with Christ sitting on the Davidic throne in Jerusalem.

God promised that the land of Palestine would belong to Abraham's seed eternally. The word **eternal** occurs both in the original promise and in reaffirmations of it in coming centuries. **This promise of a land to Abraham's seed must be kept**. Israel **will** have a Kingdom.

[F]or all **the land** which you see, I will **give it to you** and to your descendants **forever** [Genesis 13:15].

"And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and to your descendants after you." But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name **Isaac**; and I will establish My covenant with him for an **everlasting covenant for his descendants** after him" [Genesis 17:7, 19].

[T]he covenant which He made with **Abraham**, and His oath to Isaac. He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an **everlasting** covenant [1 Chronicles 16:16-17].

He has remembered His **covenant forever**, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations, **the covenant** which He



made **with Abraham**, and His oath to Isaac. Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an **everlasting covenant** [Psalm 105:8-10].

ōNevertheless, I will remember **My covenant with you in the days of your youth** [either with Abraham or Moses] and I will establish an **everlasting covenant** with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. Thus, I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORDö [Ezekiel 16:60-62].

ōAnd **they shall live on the land** that I gave to **Jacob** My servant, in which **your fathers** lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sonsösons, **forever**; and David My servant shall be their prince **forever**. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an **everlasting covenant** with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set **My sanctuary in their midst foreverö** [Ezekiel 37:25-26].

What I am saying is this; the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, **does not invalidate a covenant** previously ratified by God, **so as to nullify the promise** [Galatians 3:17].

For when God made the **promise to Abraham**, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself...In the same way, God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the **unchangeableness of His purpose**, interposed with an oath, in order that by two **unchangeable** things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us [Hebrews 6:13,17-18].

God also promised David that his seed would have a right to rule and would eventually rule over Israel **forever**. Yet, David's children have not ruled over Israel since the exile. (King Herod was neither of David's line nor even truly Jewish.) The promise of an eternal throne for David's son must be fulfilled in the ultimate Son of David, Jesus Christ. **He must someday come to enjoy a literal rule over the Davidic Kingdom**, a rule that will be both 1,000 years according to Revelation 20:4-6 (hence called the Millennium) but also eternal in the sense that the Millennium will merge with the Eternal State. The

original promise to David was stated to be eternally binding. Just as with the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant is reaffirmed throughout Scripture as being irrevocable and eternal in nature. In the future, the church dispensation will end and the Kingdom will begin.

õWhen your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish **the throne of his kingdom forever**. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. **And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever, your throne shall be established forever**ö [2 Samuel 7:12-16].

õI have made a **covenant with My chosen**; I have sworn to **David** My servant, I will establish **your seed forever**, and build up **your throne to all generations**ö [Psalm 89:3-4].

õMy lovingkindness I will keep for him **forever**, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him. So I will establish **his descendants forever**, and his **throne as the days of heaven**ö [Psalm 89:28-29].

õBut I will **not break off** My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to **David**. His **descendants shall endure forever**, and his **throne as the sun** before Me. It shall be **established forever** like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithfulö [Psalm 89:33-37].

õIncline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an **everlasting covenant** with you, according to the faithful **mercies shown to David**ö [Isaiah 55:3].

õAnd it shall come about on that day,ö declares the LORD of hosts, õthat I will break his yoke from off their neck, and will tear off their bonds; and strangers shall no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and

**David their king**, whom I will **raise up** for themö [Jeremiah 30:8-9].

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and **David their king**; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness **in the last days** [Hosea 3:4-5].

öIn that day I will **raise up** the fallen booth of **David**, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of oldö [Amos 9:11].

The Old Testament prophets also spoke of a New Covenant that would be made with Israel. The New Covenant is based upon Christø's blood (Matthew 26:28). It is in force with the Church but will eventually also be ratified with the nation of Israel (see also Hebrews 8:7-13). This New Covenant is unconditional. It cannot be broken, and thus, guarantees a future for Israel. This means a Kingdom dispensation will follow a Church dispensation.

öBehold, days are coming,ö declares the LORD, öwhen I will make a **new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,ö declares the LORD. öBut this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,ö declares the LORD, öI will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying ¶Know the LORD,ø for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,ö declares the LORD, öfor I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more.ö Thus says the LORD, who gives the **sun** for light by day, and fixed order of the **moon** and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: ö**If this fixed order departs from before Me,**ö declares the LORD, ö**Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever.**ö Thus says the LORD, ö**If the heavens**

**above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done,** declares the LORD [Jeremiah 31:31-37].

And I will make an **everlasting covenant** with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me [Jeremiah 32:40].

For I will take you from the nations, **gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land.** Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh [Ezekiel 36:24-26].

Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will **open your graves** and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will **bring you into the land of Israel.** Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and **caused you to come up out of your graves,** My people. And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it, declares the LORD [Ezekiel 37:12-14].

And I will make a **covenant of peace** with them; it will be an **everlasting covenant** with them and I will set **My sanctuary in their midst forever** [Ezekiel 37:26] (This reference in Ezekiel 37 helps prove those in Ezekiel 36 also refer to the New Covenant ratified with Israel).

The Old Testament promises that Israel will be the center of a worldwide and enduring Kingdom. Unless we are to believe that either God is a liar or is too weak to keep His promises, **we must maintain that there is coming a future Kingdom for Israel.** (See also Jeremiah 31:3.)

Now it will come about that in the **last days,** the mountain of the **house of the LORD will be established** as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and **all the nations**

**will stream to it.** And many peoples will come and say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He **may teach** us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For **the law will go forth from Zion**, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will **judge between the nations**, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and **never again** will they learn war [Isaiah 2:2-4].

"And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising....Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, the **wealth of the nations will come to you**" [Isaiah 60:3, 5].

"And foreigners will build up your walls, and their kings will minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you, and in My favor I have had compassion on you. And **your gates will be open continually**; they will not be closed day or night, so that **men may bring to you the wealth of the nations**, with their kings in procession" [Isaiah 60:10-11].

"You will also suck the milk of nations, and will suck the breast of kings; then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver, and instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. And I will make peace your administrators, and righteousness your overseers. **Violence will not be heard again in your land**, nor devastation or destruction within your borders; but you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise. No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but **you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory**. Your sun will set no more, neither will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and the **days of your mourning will be finished**. Then all your people will be righteous; they will **possess the land forever**, The branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified [Isaiah 60:16-21].

But you will be called the priests of the LORD; you will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the **wealth of nations**, and in their riches you will boast [Isaiah 61:6].

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes **Jerusalem a praise in the earth** [Isaiah 62:6-7].

ōAt that time they shall call **Jerusalem** ~~–~~**The Throne of the LORD**,ø and **all the nations will be gathered to it**, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor shall they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heartö [Jeremiah 3:17].

And it will come about in the **last days** that the mountain of the **house of the LORD** will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and the **peoples will stream to it**. And **many nations will come** and say, öCome and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths.ö For from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And **He will judge between many peoples** and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and **never again** will they train for **war** [Micah 4:1-3].

ōThus says the LORD of hosts, –It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities. And the inhabitants of one will go to another saying, öLet us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I will also go.ö **So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem** and to entreat the favor of the LORD.ø Thus says the LORD of hosts, –In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, öLet us go with you, for we have heard that God is with youö ø ö [Zechariah 8:20-23].

And the LORD will be **king over all the earth**; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one [Zechariah 14:9].

And people will live in it, and there will be no more curse, for **Jerusalem** will dwell in **security** [Zechariah 14:11].

And Judah also will fight at **Jerusalem**; and the **wealth of all** the surrounding **nations will be gathered**, gold and silver and garments in great abundance [Zechariah 14:14].

Then it will come about that any who are left of **all the nations** that went against Jerusalem will **go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts**, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to **Jerusalem** to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them [Zechariah 14:16-17].

All these promises (covenants) find their ultimate fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ who will return to give Israel her eternal right to the land and her eternal Davidic throne. Many verses focus upon Messiah's role in a coming Kingdom.

“But as for Me, I have installed **My King upon Zion**, My holy mountain” [Psalm 2:6].

For **a child will be born to us**, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be **no end to the increase of His government** or of peace, **on the throne of David and over his kingdom**, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and **forevermore**. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this [Isaiah 9:6-7].

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I shall raise up for David a **righteous Branch**; and **He will reign as king** and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, “The LORD our righteousness” [Jeremiah 23:5-6].

“I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a **Son of Man** was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And **to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him.** His dominion is an **everlasting dominion** which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” [Daniel 7:13-14].

And the **LORD will be king** over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one [Zechariah 14:9].

These conclusions about a future for Israel should in no way be construed to mean that believers, who are a part of the Church, will have no role in the Kingdom. Believers are the “Sons of Abraham” and can be called the “true circumcision.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, the fact that the Church will share in millennial blessing does not cancel out the equally Biblical truth that Israel has a future and that Christ’s rule over David’s throne must culminate in a political and earthly rule (as opposed to merely a spiritual rule through the church as under present conditions). Promises for an earthly Kingdom centered in Israel with Christ as King are not restricted to only Old Testament literature. **The New Testament teaches the same. Just as the Law Dispensation ended, so the Church Dispensation will give way to the millennial Kingdom.**

And Jesus said to them. “Truly I say to you, that **you who have followed Me**, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also **shall sit upon twelve thrones**, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” [Matthew 19:28].

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the **throne of His father David**; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and **His kingdom will have no end**” [Luke 1:32-33].

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that **a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles** has come in; and thus **all Israel will be saved**; just as it written, “The **Deliverer will come from Zion**, He will **remove**

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 24-36, especially 28-32



**ungodliness from Jacob.** And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sinsö [Romans 11:25-27].

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and **reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who had a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will **reign with Him for a thousand years** [Revelation 20:4-6].

The Bible teaches there has been a dispensational change from the Law of Moses to the Church and that there must be a future rule of Christ on earth with Jerusalem as His world capital. The past change from Law to the Church (or õgraceö dispensation), and a future change to the millennial kingdom establish the basic foundation of the dispensational theological system. Godø's promises in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants guarantee a future land and throne after Christø's return. Many try to argue that those promises have either been fulfilled or cancelled by transference to the Church. Often both arguments occur in the same criticism without recognizing the obvious truth that both can not be true at the same time.

### 3. Countering Criticism of a Future Millennium

#### a. The Covenants were not Fulfilled in Old Testament Times

One common amillennial argument is that God has already totally fulfilled His promises to Abraham and David. Thus, there need be no future place for an Israelite Kingdom. Fulfillment supposedly came in the days of either Joshua or Solomon.

õSo the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to passö [Joshua 21:43-45].

Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life [1 Kings 4:21].

[W]ho has kept with Thy servant David, my father, that which Thou hast promised him; indeed, Thou hast spoken with Thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with Thy hand, as it is this day [2 Chronicles 6:15].

Genesis 15:18 gives the boundaries of the Promised Land. Regardless of whether the river of Egypt is the Wadi-el-Arish in the Sinai or the Nile itself, neither Joshua nor Solomon occupied the **full** Promised Land **forever** as the covenants so repeatedly promise. In fact, other Scriptures teach that the conquest under Joshua was by no means complete.

Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" [Judges 1:1].

But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so that the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day [Judges 1:21].

But Manasseh did not take possession of it [Judges 1:27].

And it came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely [Judges 1:28].

Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites ... [Judges 1:29].

Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants ... [Judges 1:30].

Asher did not drive out the inhabitants ... [Judges 1:31].

Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants ... [Judges 1:33].

Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley of it [Judges 1:34].

I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died. It is whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not. So the

LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua [Judges 2:21-23].

It ought to be obvious that Israel did not fully possess the land in the days of Joshua and never **eternally** possessed the land whether in the days of Joshua or Solomon. Why are there so many promises about the covenants **after** the times of Joshua and Solomon? (Isaiah 9:6ff., Luke 1:31-33, etc.) After direct and indirect references to main Old Testament characters, including many after Joshua, the author of Hebrews says:

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, **did not receive what was promised**, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect [Hebrews 11:39-40].

Statements in Joshua 21 about the fulfillment of God's promises need to be balanced by other statements about the incompleteness of the conquest and God's statement that Israel would gradually conquer the land (Exodus 23:29-30; Deuteronomy 7:22-24). There are options for an understanding of Joshua 21:43-45 that do not make it a complete fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There was under Joshua a comparative and incremental fulfillment to his point in time rather than a complete fulfillment of the promises to the patriarch. Joshua could claim **God had given the land He promised** within His unfolding plan for history **up to the time of the conquest**.

The conquest under Joshua did not completely fulfill promises to Abraham, but compared to the meager results that Abraham actually saw it could be called a fulfillment of the promises. Furthermore, it gave visible credibility that fulfillment of all promises would eventually come to pass. From the Israelite's perspective, God was actively working in the direction of a complete fulfillment of all His promises. There was now no doubt that the process was moving forward on all fronts. Thus, in a sense Israel could say, "God has done what He promised." It was not the case that **all** was actually accomplished but rather God had acted far enough towards completion that it was safe to assert His visible faithfulness in all respects. There could be no doubt of the direction of God's work for Israel. Since completion was only a matter of time, the author could assert, "Not one of the promises failed, all came to pass." Fulfillment of the promises was true comparatively (compared to what patriarchs actually saw of the promised fulfillment) and true relative to

credibility (God had done so much that no one could doubt that the rest was as good as done). All God promised the patriarchs had been fulfilled when viewed incrementally up to the time of Joshua, but this was not all Israel would ever obtain.

God has promised salvation, resurrection, and heaven to believers. Has he failed or kept His promise? Would it not be true for a Christian to testify, "God has kept all His promises to me" even though some have not technically come to pass and await the future?

Likewise, Joshua asserts that God kept all His promises up to his generation even though not all that would ever be done to bless Israel had yet come to pass. To this day many promises to Israel still await a complete fulfillment.

b. Christ Seated on the Throne in Heaven does not Fulfill His Rule on David's Throne

All Bible-believers agree that Christ is now seated in glory at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Acts 7:56; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 12:2). One branch of amillennialism/postmillennialism equates this with a fulfillment of the covenants with Israel.

The issue comes down to one of literal versus mystical interpretation. Those who advocate this position claim that the "throne of David" equals God's throne in heaven and that the "house of David" is the household of faith. Literal interpretation leads to premillennialism. Conservative amillennialists interpret the Bible literally in other areas but approach eschatology with a mystical or "spiritual" interpretation.

It is inconsistent to interpret by the literal method in all other areas but to reject this method in eschatology in order to force a conclusion that fits with amillennialism. One would think that if any material ought to be interpreted literally it would be promises, particularly promises concerning land. Title deeds to land are carefully worded to avoid misunderstandings. Mystical interpretations to agreements about land would end up producing fraud.

Consideration should be given to how the original recipients of the covenants understood the promises. Obviously, God led Abraham to believe that his descendants would obtain a land on earth (Genesis 13:14-15; 15:18). David understood his "house" to refer to his posterity (2 Samuel 7:18-19, 25, 29; with parallels in 1 Chronicles 17) and interpreted the promises as referring to a literal throne and a literal

Kingdom (see also Messianic Psalms 2, 45, 48, 72, 89, 110, and 132). Neither David nor Solomon would have understood the throne of David to refer to God's throne in heaven (likely a blasphemous thought) nor the house of David to refer to the household of faith. The rest of Biblical characters had the same understanding. To them the **house of David referred to physical descendants**. They believed that the **throne of David was in Jerusalem, not heaven**.<sup>2</sup>

ōAnd as for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then **I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David**, saying you shall not lack a man on the **throne of Israel** [1 Kings 9:4-5].

ōNow therefore, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep with Thy servant David, my father, that **which Thou hast promised him**, saying, -You shall not lack a man to sit **on the throne of Israel**, if only your sons take heed to their way, to walk in My law as you have walked before Me [2 Chronicles 6:16].

ōI will establish your seed forever, and build up your throne to all generations. **So I will establish his descendants forever, and his throne** as the days of heaven. If his sons forsake My law, and do not walk in My judgments, if they violate My statutes, and do not keep My commandments, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off my loving kindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. **His descendants shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me** [Psalm 89:4, 29-34, 36].

ō[T]hen say to them, -Thus says the LORD, Behold, I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land - the **kings that sit for David on his throne**, the priests, the prophets and all the inhabitants of **Jerusalem** - with drunkenness! [Jeremiah 13:13].

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<sup>2</sup> Prophets predict that some day Jerusalem will be the world's capital (Isaiah 2:1-4, 62:6-7; Jeremiah 3:17; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 8:22, 14:17).

[T]hen there will come in through the gates of **this city kings** and princes **sitting on the throne of David**, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of **Jerusalem**; and **this city** will be inhabited forever [Jeremiah 17:25].

For if you men will indeed perform this thing, then **kings** will enter the gates of this house, sitting in **David's place on his throne**, riding in chariots and on horses, even the king himself and his servants and his people. Thus says the LORD, write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper **sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah** [Jeremiah 22:4, 30].

¶ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. In those days Judah shall be saved, and **Jerusalem** shall dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she shall be called: the LORD is our righteousness. For thus says the LORD, **David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel...** ¶ Thus says the LORD, ¶ If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers. ¶ Thus says the LORD, ¶ If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the **descendants of Jacob and David** My servant, not taking **from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them ¶ [Jeremiah 33:15-17, 20-21, 25-26] (See also: 2 Samuel 23:5; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-32).

It ought to be obvious that Biblical characters understood the house of David to refer to David's physical descendants and the throne of David to refer to the throne in Jerusalem, not heaven. There are no directions in the Bible that tell its readers to substitute the throne of David with the throne of God in heaven. Acts 2:29-36 does not provide any clear example. ¶ Raised up ¶ in v. 32 refers to Christ's Resurrection from the dead which Peter witnessed not His Ascension to God's throne above

(see Acts 5:30). Witnesses in the Book of Acts primarily witnessed the risen Lord (Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:30; 10:39-41; 13:31).

Peter's language about Christ's being raised up from the dead may not be transferred to a reference to His Ascension to glory (which is indeed discussed in the context but not as a raising up). Furthermore, Peter's words about the Resurrection raising may not be connected to a fulfillment of the phrase raise up in the Davidic Covenant text from 2 Samuel 7:12.

God promised David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13 that He would raise up one of David's sons to establish His Kingdom and build a temple. So in this passage the phrase raise up concerns a child born and raised to rule on the throne in Jerusalem. It does not refer to the Lord's Resurrection much less His Ascension. It concerns Solomon who was neither resurrected nor exalted to a throne in heaven.

With precision 2 Samuel 7:13b specifically drops any reference to Solomon establishing David's throne eternally. It only promises that one of David's sons will eventually establish an eternal Davidic throne (see Psalm 132:11). Thus, at the point in the Davidic Covenant text when there is a reference to the Messiah and His eternal Davidic throne, language about Solomon and God raising Solomon up has been dropped.

The equation of Christ's Ascension to the right hand of God in heaven with His rule on the Davidic throne is not convincing. The Lord Jesus Christ must return to establish the throne of the Davidic Kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:13b; Luke 1:32-33). This fulfillment will take place with an installment of David's throne in Jerusalem.

Peter's main point is Christ as the raised up and **living** Son of David qualifies to return and establish the throne of David in Jerusalem (Acts 3:20-21). Acts 2:34-35 finds parallels between David's throne on earth and the Messiah's throne in heaven (Psalm 110:1). Some might understand Christ's present rule in heaven as being a partial fulfillment or foreshadowing of Old Testament prophecy that a Son of David would rule (similar to John the Baptist foreshadowing Elijah). However, Peter's teaching may only mean that the Son of David eternally lives and presently has the authority and power to return and rule this earth. The Davidic throne in Jerusalem in the past and in the millennium may be viewed as an extension of heavenly rule. None of these semantic quibbles over details undermines the primary truth. A

**full and satisfactory definition of David's eternal throne demands that Christ return and rule over a throne in Jerusalem.** Although David is mentioned approximately 59 times in the New Testament, no verse teaches a replacement of his house with the church or his throne with God's throne. If the throne of David equals Christ's position at the right hand of the Father in heaven, then how did Solomon sit on "David's throne"? If David's throne equals God's throne in heaven, then what need is there to establish it, for it has existed from eternity past?

Cults often use strange interpretations of prophetic Scripture to bolster their heretical systems. If one abandons literal interpretation, then prophecy can say whatever pleases an interpreter. Conservative amillennialists do not use prophetic portions to endorse heresy, but where does "mystical" interpretation of prophesy stop? If Jerusalem does not mean *Jerusalem*, then why must the church mean the *church* when God promised to rapture it? If the house of David means the house of faith, then could one not born a Son of David be qualified as Messiah?

Portions of the covenants that have been fulfilled have been fulfilled literally. Thus, premillennialists are justified in anticipating literal fulfillment for all aspects of the covenants. Christ must yet come to rule on the throne of David in Jerusalem. He will come to bring a Kingdom on earth.

### c. Blessings Not Transferred from Israel to the Church

Perhaps the most common amillennial objection to premillennialism is that covenant blessings have been transferred from Israel to the Church. Certain New Testament texts are used to show that the Church equals Israel. These texts will be examined one by one.

Premillennialists can be overzealous in their efforts to keep Israel and the Church so distinct as to deny all overlapping between these two main groupings of God's people. Often it is asserted that Israel enjoys only earthly blessings and the Church enjoys only heavenly blessings. The author does not feel any threat in the admission that there are overlapping aspects between Israel and the Church. The Church will indeed share in many of Israel's blessings in the coming Kingdom. Believers are "sons of Abraham." Those with faith are the "true circumcision." However, the Scripture comes short of directly equating the Church with Israel. Theologians might speak in loose terms of the



Church being a true Israel, but such language should be qualified, and it is not strictly Biblical terminology. All of the following Scriptures can be better interpreted by keeping Israel and the Church distinct (although they do sometimes share in the same blessings).

Suppose for conjecture we consider that some verses do call the Church *Israel*. Would this prove amillennialism? No, for even if the Church shares in all aspects of the covenant blessing, this still would not be the same as Israel losing her promises.<sup>3</sup> If I as a believer share in the future Kingdom, this still does not mean Israel will not. The New Testament still distinguishes between Israel and the Church (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:32), and it still predicts a future for Israel (e.g., Romans 11:25ff.). Usually interpreters give emphasis to the meaning of a passage to its original recipients. Abraham and David expected a future for Israel. It will come to pass regardless of the degree of the Church's participation in it.

Verses that follow do not directly call the church *Israel*. Even if they did, it would not be a sufficient basis for thinking that national Israel will have no future.

#### (1). The Church as Israel

A literal translation of a key phrase in Romans 9:6 says, *For not all they from Israel, these are Israel*. Amillennialists interpret this verse to mean, *Not all of true Israel are Israelites*. In other words, there is more to Israel than those who are ethnically Israelites, i.e., the Church, is also Israel. While such an interpretation fits amillennial desire to equate the Church with Israel and transfer all of Israel's blessings to the Church, it is not the best interpretation of Romans 9:6. Actually, one must first approach the text as an amillennialist to come away with this view.

Premillennialists understand that Romans 9:6 refers to two kinds of Israelites within Abraham's physical descendants. There are physical Israelites who are not spiritual Israelites, and there are physical Israelites who are also spiritual Israelites. The verse does not include any references to the Church at all. The NIV translation seems to follow the view that the distinctions of Romans 9:6 concern only two types of Jews without reference to the church at all: *For not all who*

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 11 teaches both that Israel has a future and that gentiles have been grafted in to share some of the covenant blessings with Israel.

are descended from Israel are Israelö (Romans 9:6 NIV). In other words, being racially Jewish does not make one a true Jew unless a person also has faith.

There are several reasons for accepting the interpretation that does not equate the Church with Israel. The context concerns racial Israel (Romans 9:1-5) and the word ðfromö (Greek *ek*, out of) refers to Christø's descent from David in v. 5. Therefore, *ek* in v. 6 also ought to be understood as a reference to physical descent as the NIV translates. The phrase ðnot all from (*ek*) Israelö means ðnot all descended from Israel.ö It does not refer to a ðspiritualö Israel (i.e., the Church) as the amillennial view asserts.

A second consideration is that the following illustrations in Romans 9:7-13 all concern the physical descendants of Abraham (Isaac, Ishmael by implication, Jacob and Esau). If explanatory material concerns only two categories of those physically descended from Abraham, then it stands to reason that the verse being explained, v.6, concerns two categories of those physically descended from Israel without any reference to the Church.

Thirdly, these illustrations in vv. 7-13 concern a large group of physical descendants that is distinguished from a smaller group of physical descendants who are also spiritual heirs. This pattern fits the premillennial understanding of Romans 9:6. There is a larger group of physical descendants, but only a smaller section of them are true (spiritual) Israelites.<sup>4</sup>

The amillennialist says that Romans 9:6 means that the spiritual heirs (the Church as true Israel) extend far beyond physical descendants. Yet, the illustrations in the following context (vv. 7-13) concern only those physically descended from Abraham, and they do not argue that there is a larger spiritual group than the smaller physical group. The illustrations give the reverse pattern of a larger group of physical descendants of whom only smaller groups are spiritual heirs.

One must first be an amillennialist to come up with an amillennial interpretation of Romans 9:6.

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<sup>4</sup> This is also the pattern in Romans 2:28-29.

Galatians 6:16 is another text that amillennialists use to assert that the Church has replaced Israel.

And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God [Galatians 6:16].

Amillennialists would teach that the last phrase of Galatians 6:16 identifies the Church as the true *Israel of God*. They would prefer that the word *andō* be translated *evenō* or *as many as (are) the Israel of God*. The NIV translation of Galatians 6:16 is more favorable to (but still does not prove) an amillennial view. *Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God*. The normal translation of the Greek word *kai* is *andō*. In Galatians 6:15-16 this would mean that Paul is referring to two groups, the New Creation (the Church), the first group, with the second group being part of the whole, comprised of saved Jews whom he designated as *the Israel of God*. Rather than identifying the whole Church as Israel, Galatians 6:16 is more likely giving a blessing to saved Jews who are a part of the Church. The primary meaning of a word (in this case *andō*) should be adopted unless the context clearly demonstrates that a secondary meaning must be preferred. In addition, the context favors a blessing upon saved Jews who have understood grace. After criticizing Jewish legalizers for an entire book, it is reasonable that Paul gives praise to Jewish people who have been justified by faith alone, *Peace and mercy ... upon the Israel of God*.

Suppose we do wish to adopt a more remote translation for *kai*. Still, a secondary translation (*evenō* or *alsoō*) need not be taken as an equation of the Church with Israel. To paraphrase, *God bless all who adhere to grace (including, also, even) believing Jews*. This would be Paul's way of showing he was not critical of all Jews, only works-oriented legalistic Jews. Ryrie is correct in saying only a very narrow understanding of Galatians 6:16 leads to the amillennial position. Most options do not clearly identify the Church as Israel.<sup>5</sup> In no other undebatable case does Paul identify the Church as Israel. Galatians 6:16 is a weak spot for finding a precedent. The duplication of the preposition *ūponō* (*epi*) also favors the view that Paul has two groups (the whole Church and the Jewish portion of it) in mind rather than only one group designated by two names (the New Creation is the

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 399.

Israel of God). The identification of the Church as Israel would have to be on other stronger grounds in order to find it in Galatians 6:15-16. Only pure theological preference, not linguistics or context, make Galatians 6:15-16 an amillennial proof-text.

(2). The Church as ðSons of Abrahamð

Galatians 3:7 calls believers ðsons of Abraham.ð

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham [Galatians 3:7].

The absence of the article seems important. Believers are not ðthe sons of Abrahamð but rather ðsons of Abraham.ð Paul stresses that believers have the quality of being Abraham's sons because they are people of faith like Abraham, but he does not technically make a complete identification of believers with the physical descendants of Abraham, Israel. Believers have the quality of Abraham's sons, but Paul does not teach that they have replaced Israel or that all promises to Israel have been transferred to the Church. In his next statement (Galatians 3:8-9) Paul focuses on the point that believers share in the ðall nations blessedð aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant. As ðsons of Abrahamð believing gentiles primarily enjoy the blessing of being justified by faith. The blessing of justification by faith was a major fulfillment of God's promise to bless all families of the earth through Abraham (Genesis 12:3). This is the sense in which believers are blessed as ðsons of Abraham.ð

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ðall the nations shall be blessed in you.ð So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer [Galatians 3:8-9].

Galatians 3:15-16 can be used as a proof text that the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional and unchanging. While the Church shares in the ðall nations blessedð aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant (i.e., mainly spiritual blessings), Israel will yet obtain complete fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, including eternal possession of the land (the full material blessings of the Abrahamic covenant).

Galatians 3:29 is similar to Galatians 3:7. Those who are a part of the Church (believers) have the quality of Abraham's seed. Again the phrase, ðseed of Abraham,ð lacks the definite article. Believers are not

the seed of Abraham as though we are all Israelites.<sup>6</sup> We rather have the qualities of Abraham's seed by virtue of being like him in faith and by enjoying the promise of all nations being blessed through Abraham. Whatever participation the Church has in the Abrahamic Covenant comes about through its relationship to Abraham's primary seed, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is Abraham's main seed (Galatians 3:16). While the Church does enjoy blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant (certainly spiritual blessings, i.e., justification by faith, and likely also some material blessings of being co-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom), it does so by virtue of its relationship with Christ, not because it has replaced Israel as the beneficiary of the covenants. The sons of Abraham, i.e., Israel, must still obtain the land, throne, and eternal Kingdom blessings of the covenants.

Romans makes a similar point to Galatians chapter 3. There Paul teaches that Abraham is the father of all who believe.

[A]nd he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain

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<sup>6</sup> The Bible uses the concept of Abraham's descendants (seed, children, sons) in at least four different senses. First, there are physical offspring from Abraham (see Genesis 15:4, 17:6, 16; John 8:37). Another sense in which the idea of Abraham's children occurs is that of physical children who are also spiritual children (John 8:39; Romans 2:28-29, 9:6; Revelation 2:9, 3:9). Thirdly, Christ is the primary seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). Finally, all those with spiritual faith are the spiritual sons of Abraham (Matthew 3:9; Romans 4:11-12, 16; Galatians 3:7-9), and spiritual seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29).

to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, ða father of many nations have I made you í ö) [Romans 4:11-17].

The argument of this important section in Romans is that justification is by faith. The close of verse 11 shows that imputed (reckoned) righteousness, i.e., justification, is the main blessing that comes to believers through a sharing in the faith of their spiritual father, Abraham. Just as in Galatians 3, the primary blessing for the Church that comes through Abraham is justification by faith. Through Abraham's seed, Christ, God blessed all the families of the earth by providing salvation for those with faith.

Verse 13 says that God promised Abraham that he would be ðheir of the world.ö Verses 14 and 16 teach that those with faith share in this blessing. Does this mean that Israel's earthly blessings have been transferred to the Church? At the most it means that the Church will share in the spiritual and material blessings of the Kingdom by virtue of its relationship with Christ (co-heirs with Him, Romans 8:17). We need not read into this passage a cancellation of the promises to national Israel. The idea of the Church sharing in a coming world Kingdom does not mean Israel loses her promises.

Furthermore, the phrase ðheir of the worldö may not even refer to land. God did promise Canaan to Abraham but not specifically the whole world. Also, the context emphasizes spiritual blessings, not material. Perhaps ðworldö means people, not land! Perhaps the sense in which Abraham became the heir of the world was that God gave him all the people of faith as his inheritance. Abraham lacked children for a long time, but God gave him the whole world of believers as an inheritance. Instead of no children, Abraham became the heir of a world full of spiritual children. These in turn were also the heirs of Abraham's blessings (Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:14 and 16) primarily the ðall-nations blessingö (cf. Genesis 12:3 with Galatians 3:8). This inheritance involves spiritual blessings coming through Christ, especially justification by faith. Romans 4 can be interpreted as teaching that the Church shares in only spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. Even if one believes material blessings are also in view, this still need not destroy the concept of a future Kingdom for Israel. Yes, believers are sons of Abraham, but they are spiritual children whose main

blessing under the Abrahamic covenant is justification by faith in Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. Any future sharing in the Kingdom comes from a relationship to the King, not from replacing Israel.

### (3). The Church as the True Circumcision

Several passages contrast fleshly circumcision with a true circumcision, i.e., the cutting away of spiritual filth from the heart. The idea of a spiritual circumcision did not begin with the Apostle Paul. It was also an Old Testament concept (see Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25-26; Ezekiel 44:7-9).

In Philippians 3:3 Paul says that believers have a true or better circumcision than do Jews who have only physical circumcision. Colossians 2:11 also refers to a spiritual separation of the inevitable dominion of the flesh over a believer.

[F]or we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh [Philippians 3:3].

[A]nd in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ [Colossians 2:11].

To say that believers have undergone a true circumcision is not the same as saying they are Israelites or that the Church now replaces Israel in God's program. All it means is that believers have undergone a circumcision of the heart which cuts away sin's inevitable control. This true circumcision is better than the physical circumcision of racial Israel. Those who are Jewish need to have this spiritual circumcision in addition to fleshly circumcision. This is the point of Romans 2:28-29:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God [Romans 2:28-29].

There is no special reason to think that Paul is identifying the Church as true Israel in Romans 2. In vv. 25-27 he contrasts a hypothetical gentile who (though uncircumcised in the flesh) keeps God's commandments and is, therefore, spiritually circumcised; with a circumcised Jew who

does not obey the Law and is, therefore, spiritually uncircumcised. This discussion is hypothetical, for in reality no one, Jew or gentile, actually keeps the Law. Nevertheless, Paul's point is that physical circumcision is of inferior value to spiritual circumcision (the cutting away of filth from the heart). The former without the latter is of little value. Thus, Jews are just as spiritually needy as gentiles. Both need justification by faith.

Some amillennialists view Romans 2:28-29 as a contrast between racial Jews (v. 28) and Christians as "true Jews" (v. 29). While a contrast of Jews with gentiles is indeed in the context, Paul has not yet brought in any discussion of the Church. There is no real reason to see the Church in Romans 2. Verses 28-29 concern only national Israelites. Verse 28 refers to those who are racially Jewish but are not "Jewish" in the full sense of the term because they are unsaved and have not undergone circumcision of a more important kind. The true Jew in v. 29 is a physical Jew who also has a circumcised heart, i.e., he has been saved. These verses establish that being physically Jewish is not enough to please God or bring salvation. Jewish descent alone is insufficient without a heart that is right with God. Paul will explain in following chapters how gentiles may obtain salvation by faith and how Jews may become "true Jews" in the same way. While this passage does teach that gentiles may have a true circumcision (without yet specifically saying how), it does not equate saved gentiles with national Israel. It just says that it takes more for a Jew to be fully Jewish than just physical circumcision.

#### (4). Transfer of the Kingdom to the Church

Amillennialists use Matthew 21:43ff. to assert that Israel will have no future Kingdom. It supposedly teaches that Israel has been set aside and the Church obtains its place of blessings.

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it....And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them [Matthew 21:43, 45].

This text is capable of several interpretations that do not support amillennialism. Matthew 21:45 clearly teaches that the "you" of v. 43 were the Chief Priests and Pharisees. They were not going to obtain the Kingdom. Another "nation" would.



The Lord may simply be saying that the present nation of Israel would not obtain any Messianic Kingdom, but a future **nation** of Israel would. In other words, the Israel of His generation would not obtain the Kingdom. The Kingdom had to await another generation when Israel would be a different nation. None of the first century Jewish nation would enjoy an earthly Kingdom, but a future Israelite nation would.

It is also possible to view *ōnationō* as a reference to the Church without drawing amillennial conclusions. Although the Church is not the millennial Kingdom, it is a form of God's Kingdom on earth (see Romans 14:17; Colossians 1:13; and Matthew Chapter 13 where the time period between the first and Second Coming is called the Kingdom). Furthermore, the Bible calls believers a nation in Romans 10:19 and 1 Peter 2:9-10 (the 1 Peter reference also quotes Psalm 118, as does Matthew 21). Perhaps the Lord is saying that the kingdom would be taken from those who led Israel in the first century and a form of the kingdom would be given to the Church. This truth does not necessarily contradict the belief that Israel will in the future be returned to a primary place in God's work and will yet obtain a political Kingdom of God on earth. In fact, such an interpretation to Matthew 21:43ff. makes it parallel to Romans 11. In Romans 11 Paul argues that gentiles (including gentiles within the Church) are in a place of blessing, but that same passage also teaches that Israel will yet return to God's favor and blessing. The identification of the *ōnationō* in Matthew 21:43, whether the future generation of Israel or the Church, is a secondary issue as to whether the removal of the kingdom from the leaders in Christ's day would be temporary or permanent. The millennial issue cannot be settled by Matthew 21 alone, but other texts make it clear that any removal of Israel from a position of blessings must be temporary and not eternal.

#### (5). An Evaluation of Amillennial Arguments

The main arguments that amillennialists use to object to premillennialism contradict each other. Since these arguments cannot all be true at the same time, they do not have any cumulative strength. Individually, they are weak. Even if one adopts the amillennial interpretation of a given passage, that passage still does not disprove that Israel has a future. Even if some Bible texts do call the Church a *ōtrue Israel,ō* this still would not prove that God has cancelled His

covenants with national Israel, only that the Church has a share in them.

This may be a good point for the reader to go back and review the promises made to Israel discussed earlier in this study. Language could not state an unconditional and eternal promise more forcefully. Also, a review of the differences between Israel and the Church might be helpful.

The New Testament still distinguishes between Israel and the Church (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:32). While this alone does not prove that Israel has a future Kingdom, it does mean that God distinguishes between Israel and the Church. This holds out the possibility of Israel having a future in God's program. The eternal nature of Israel's covenants coupled with the following texts makes that possibility a certainty. Long after Old Testament Israel had failed God and even after New Testament Israel had rejected her King, God still promises a glorious future for Israel (see also Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:4 and 6 for a future Kingdom on earth).

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end” [Luke 1:31-33].

And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” [Matthew 19:28] (Note that this verse follows the prediction of a church in Matthew 16:18).

But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses .... And now, brethren, I know that you acted in

ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time [Acts 3:12-15, 17-21] (Even after the cross Peter still offers the Kingdom to the Jews).

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable [Romans 11:1, 25-29].

And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel [Revelation 7:4].

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel [Revelation 21:10, 12].

Arguments against dispensationalism fail. The Abrahamic, Davidic, or New Covenants have not yet been totally fulfilled. Christ is not yet sitting on David's throne by virtue of His Ascension to God's right hand. The Church has not replaced Israel.

The Bible teaches a dispensational change from Law to Church (or Grace) and a future change between the Church and Christ's Kingdom

on earth after His Second Coming. These three dispensations (systems for God's work) prove the main dispensational pattern for Bible interpretation.

#### 4. Logic and Additional Dispensations

The Scripture itself insists there has been a change in administration from **Law to Grace**, from **Judaism to the Church**. Just as **clearly** it predicts **there will be a change from Church to a literal political Kingdom** at Christ's return to earth. Therefore, there are at least three dispensations (administrations or management systems) clearly taught by the Bible: **Law, Church, Kingdom**.

It is not fair to assert there is as clear Scriptural evidence for additional dispensations, but logic suggests that we should add several dispensations in God's program with man during the earliest of times. It is reasonable to think that God's plan for mankind was different after the Fall than it was before; that it was different after the flood as opposed to before the flood; and that it was different again after the beginning of the nation of Israel, through Abraham, than before the existence of Israel.

Although it is perhaps not fair to insist that another believe in the typical dispensational view with its seven dispensations, such a view does have merit. Usually, dispensationalists list God's various administrations as follows:

**Innocence** - before the Fall (Genesis 1:28 -3:6)

**Conscience** - after the Fall but before the Flood (Genesis 3:7 - 8:14)

**Human Civil Government** - after the Flood but before the promise to make a great nation from Abraham (Genesis 8:14 -11:32)

**Promise** - after Abraham's call and the beginning of Israel but before the giving of the Law of Moses at Mt. Sinai (Genesis 11:32 - Exodus 18)

**Law** - The Law was in force from its revelation at Mt. Sinai until the Holy Spirit formed the church at Pentecost (Exodus 19 - Acts 2; some Scriptures in the gospels, however, give teachings about the then future church).

**Grace or Church** - God has been working His program on earth through the church since the time of Pentecost and will continue to do so until the church's removal at the Rapture (Acts 2 to Rapture).

**Kingdom** - Christ will rule on earth for 1,000 years. The millennial Kingdom will commence with His Second Coming.

## 5. The Church as a Mystery

### a. Tracing a System given by New Testament Truths about "Mysteries"

The dispensational view can be proven by following the Bible's own transition from Law to the Church and by noting its unconditional promise of a coming Kingdom. However, this is not the only line of reasoning that proves the validity of dispensational thinking.

In the New Testament, the word *mystery* does not refer to a truth that is so difficult that it is virtually impossible to understand. A *mystery* is a truth that had been secret or hidden. As one traces the uses of the word *mystery* through the New Testament, it becomes clear that the Church was a brand new aspect to God's work in the world. Truths about the Church were completely unknown to the Old Testament saints who lived under the Law of Moses. This establishes that a great distinction exists between Israel and the Church. When God inaugurated the Church, He was initiating a completely new administration in His divine government.

Many texts speak of the new truths being given to the apostles as being a mystery in general terms. They, in a general sense, were unknown under the Law (Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7, 4:1; Ephesians 1:9; 6:19; Colossians 2:2; 4:3; 1 Timothy 3:9).

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the **revelation of the mystery** which has been kept **secret for long ages past**, but **now is manifested**, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been **made known** to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith [Romans 16:25-26].

More pertinent to the topic of dispensationalism are the verses that give the specific truths that were hidden mysteries to the Old Testament saints but were revealed in apostolic times. When the cumulative points from these verses are considered together, it creates the same view of

God's program as espoused by dispensationalism. We study these in their logical, but not necessarily Scriptural, order.

The Jews expected a Messiah Who would curse their enemies and usher in a worldwide dominion of perfect righteousness, peace, and prosperity. When they rejected their King, He lectured to them on the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:11ff.; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). **One of the mysteries** that was totally hidden to the Old Testament saints under the Law was that **there would be two comings of the Messiah with a period intervening in which good and evil would be mixed**, as in the parable of the wheat and tares and of the dragnet. Instead of bringing in an immediate earthly and political kingdom with perfect justice, the Messiah was going to allow a period in which a spiritual, but nonpolitical, aspect of the Kingdom on earth prevailed. Good and evil would be mixed until the end of the age when the Son of Man would return to sort out the bad from the good and begin His Kingdom in a more political manner (e.g., Matthew 13:39-43, 47-50). The doctrine of two advents with a time of good mixed with evil between was a brand new teaching that had been a mystery to the Old Testament saints. It is also expressed in 1 Timothy 3:16. The Messiah came, but He also ascended to await the establishment of a literal Kingdom on earth at another time.

And by common confession great is the **mystery** of godliness: He who was **revealed in the flesh**, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, **taken up in glory** [1 Timothy 3:16].

**Another mystery** that had been unknown to the Old Testament saints is the truth that **Israel would be temporarily set aside and then restored at a later time** in God's program.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this **mystery**, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a **partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in**; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, **“The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.** And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable [Romans 11:25-29].

The Old Testament saints never dreamed there would be two Messianic advents with a time period in between them. They did not know God would cease working through Israel for a time. Additional references to the mystery show the **mystery that the Church was a brand new revelation and that the Church did not exist under the Law** (this is the essence of dispensationalism).

[I]f indeed you have heard of the **stewardship of God's grace** which was given to me for you; that by **revelation** there was **made known** to me the **mystery**, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the **mystery of Christ**, which in **other generations was not made known** to the sons of men, as it **has now been revealed** to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, **that the Gentiles are fellow heirs** and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel [Ephesians 3:2-6].

God began a **brand new work** when He **instituted a body composed of both Jews and gentiles**. No longer did He work through Judaism, but all believers became one in Christ. Take note that the context calls this new union of believers the *church* (Ephesians 3:10) and that Paul said this new revelation (*mystery*) brought to light a new administration that had been secret. The words for *stewardship* in Ephesians 3:2 and *administration* in Ephesians 3:9 mean *dispensation*. All are the same Greek word *oikonomia* from which our English word *economy* derives (See chart, pp. 43-44).<sup>7</sup>

**Another mystery** that was unknown under the Law was that **God Himself would indwell** this group of believers comprised of both Jews and gentiles. Under the Law only a few believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit (see appendix). Most Old Testament saints did not experience an actual union with God. Once again the Church is shown to be a new work of God in great distinction from Israel under the Law. The great differences between the way the Holy Spirit worked before Pentecost to the way He works since the inception of the Church is

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<sup>7</sup> To say the Church is a new "dispensation" means it is a new way of God's administration. The Church is a new "economy," not as a financial system but a spiritual system for God's work. "Dispensation" is a Bible word meaning "economy," "system of management" or "administration." More study follows on pp. 43-46.

another proof of the dispensational system (see appendix, pp. 50-53). Note the word *stewardship* in Colossians 1:25 means "dispensation."

Of this church I was made a minister according to the **stewardship** (*dispensation*) from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God, that is, **the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages** and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of **this mystery** among the Gentiles, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory [Colossians. 1:25-27].

[B]ecause **we are members of his body**. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This **mystery** is great; but I am speaking with reference to **Christ and the church** [Ephesians 5:30-32].

Most people would interpret the mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 to be the resurrection of the body.

Behold, I tell you a **mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed**, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed [1 Corinthians 15:51-52].

The problem with equating the Resurrection with Paul's *mystery* is that the doctrine of bodily resurrection was not a secret under the Law (Job 19:25-27; Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 37:12; Dan. 12:2). Thus, it is difficult to conclude that Paul would be calling the Resurrection a mystery. A more careful reading of what is actually being said leads to the conclusion that the **new revelations** in this verse are that **not all believers would experience death** and that all, whether dead or alive, would experience an **instant transformation** at the trumpet of God. Students of the New Testament will immediately equate these ideas with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and the doctrine of the Rapture. The **mystery**, unknown under the Law, was **that Christ would return to the clouds** (not yet all the way to the earth) **and would immediately transform all who have believed in Him**. Those who had died would be resurrected and glorified, but some would never die, and these would be instantly glorified without even experiencing death.



The **last ðmysteryö** that was revealed in apostolic times is the **mystery of lawlessness** in 2 Thessalonians 2:7. It will help to give some of the context.

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the **mystery of lawlessness** is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved [2 Thessalonians 2:3-10].

The ðMan of Sinö in 2 Thessalonians 2 sits in the temple claiming to be God (v. 4). He ought to be equated with Christø warning of the ðabomination that makes desolateö (Matthew 24:15 etc.). The ðmystery of lawlessnessö refers to Satanø program whereby he would like to control the world by the ðAntichrist.ö However, there is at present (during the church administration) a restrainer who prevents the lawless one from coming to power until the time of Godø plan for world history.

Some commentaries view government as being the restraint that hinders lawlessness. However, the **personal** pronoun ðHeö is used in verse seven. Furthermore, governments are not powerful enough to control Satan, nor do they always restrain lawlessness; at times they cause it. Others think that the Church restrains lawlessness. This is a better attempt of an interpretation for the ðrestrainer.ö Yet, the church is also unable to oppose Satan, and it is also an unlikely candidate to qualify as an ðHe.ö

The best solution to the identity of the restrainer is that He is the Holy Spirit. God alone is powerful enough to restrain Satanø most ardent ambitions. Also, the Holy Spirit is a person and would qualify as ðHeö

in v. 7; but the Greek word for *ōSpiritōs* is neuter, and this would explain the neuter reference to *ōwhat restrainsō* in v. 6.

Reasoning that the Holy Spirit is present in a special way in the Church (by indwelling every believer and baptizing them into one body), it is difficult to think of the Holy Spirit's special presence being withdrawn while the church remains. 2 Thessalonians 2:6ff. yields the idea that the Holy Spirit will restrain the rise of the Antichrist until the Church is removed (and with the Church goes the witness and special presence of the Holy Spirit in the world). The Church's removal at the Rapture will make possible the rise of the *ōMan of Sin,ō* the Antichrist.

#### b. Conclusions about Mysteries Revealed in the New Testament

Anyone at all familiar with the dispensational school of thought will realize that **the *ōmysteriesō* of the New Testament give the dispensational system.** There will be a time period in between the first and second comings during which good and evil exist side by side (Matthew 13:11ff.; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; 1 Timothy 3:16). Israel will be set aside during this time, and God will work through a new administration called the Church, which is composed of both Jews and gentiles united in Christ (Romans 11:25-29; Ephesians 3:2-6, 5:30-32; Colossians 1:25-27). Eventually, this Church will be raptured and all, both dead and living, will obtain a glorified body (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). With the church's removal the Antichrist can arise (2 Thessalonians 2:3-10). Yet, this man of sin will ultimately be slain at the Lord's Second Coming, when He will separate the good from the evil at the time of beginning a Kingdom on earth when God will again choose to work through Israel. It is impossible to deny that the *ōmysteriesō* of the New Testament prove that there are at least three administrations or dispensations: Law, Church, and Kingdom.

#### 6. Evidence for a Change of Administrations

The gospels give plenty of indications that there would be a dramatic change in the way God worked after Christ's departure from earth. The greatest changes occurred in the ministry of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Christ promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come in a unique way after His Ascension (John 16:7-13 etc.). Unlike the Law system, the **Holy Spirit** would **indwell all** believers and indwell them

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix, pp. 50-53.

**permanently** beginning at the time of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13, etc.). Also, the baptism of the Spirit that John the Baptist predicted (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) occurred after the Lord's departure (Acts 1:5) to form the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

These changes in the ministry of the Holy Spirit prove that there was a great change between Law and the church and support the truth of dispensationalism. It should also be stressed that the **Church was future** to Matthew 16:18 when Christ said; *õI will build my church.õ* Much of Christ's teaching was **preparatory for the change from Judaism to the Church.**

Finally, the change in a day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday also establishes that there has been a fundamental change in administrations from Law to church.<sup>9</sup>

#### 7. Is *Dispensation* a Biblical Term?

*Dispensation* is more of a Scriptural term than is *Trinity* or *rapture*. *Dispensation* is an old English word that the King James translators used to translate the Greek term *oikonomia* from which we derive our word *economy*. This is a compound term formed from *oikos* meaning *õhouseõ* and *nomos* meaning *õlawõ* (as in Deuteronomy, *õsecond lawõ*). Thus, it refers to the law of the household or the system of rules by which a household is governed. We should think of a large rural estate with many sons, daughters, servants, and temporary hired help. There might also be accountants and merchants who buy for the household's needs and sell the estate's products. The system by which this large household's business operation was managed, or administered, was called an *õeconomy.õ* Modern translators have dropped the archaic term *dispensation* and used other translations as the following chart reveals:

Reference	NASB	NIV
Luke 16:2	Management	Management
Luke 16:3	Management	My job (as manager)
Luke 16:4	Management	My job (as manager)

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<sup>9</sup> See Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone, An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Amarillo TX: Westcliff Press, 2010), pp. 328-29.

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1 Corinthians 9:17	Stewardship	The trust
Ephesians 1:10	Administration	(Not translated)
Ephesians 3:2	Stewardship	Administration
Ephesians 3:9	Administration	Administration
Colossians 1:25	Stewardship	Commission
1 Timothy 1:4	Administration	God's Work

The KJV used *dispensation* to translate *oikonomia* four times. *Dispensationalism* takes its name from this older word. However, several contemporary synonyms include the same concept.

*Oikonomia* is a system of trade. The United States is a capitalistic dispensation; the Soviet Union was a communist dispensation. An *administration* is a system of management that gives direction to a government. Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt, et al, have served in various political dispensations or administrations of the government. A stewardship is a trust or commission to manage property or assets. Joseph had a dispensation to manage Potiphar's household. At its basic form a dispensation involves a system of management, rules for a system's organization. Thus, a *dispensation* is a system of management, an administration, a stewardship, trust, or commission whereby God gives man certain tasks to fulfill. Dispensationalism simply means God has imposed different systems as to how He wants His household of faith to live and work. These various administrations **do not involve differing ways of salvation**, for salvation has always been by faith alone (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4). The dispensations vary responsibilities and tasks that God wants His people to do in order to fulfill His will and His plan for working in the world.

Of the nine occurrences of *dispensation* in the Bible, Ephesians 3 and Colossians 1 are the strongest relative to supporting that the church is a new administration in great contrast to the old administration of Law. Because the King James Version uses the word *dispensation*, it will be quoted in support of the theological system bearing its name.

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the **dispensation of the grace of God** which is given me to you-ward: how that by **revelation he made known** unto me the **mystery**; (as I wrote afore in few

words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the **mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known** unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the **Gentiles** should be fellow-heirs, and of **the same body**, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to **make all men see** what is the fellowship (**dispensation**) of the mystery, which **from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God**, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent **that now** unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places **might be known by the church** the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him [Ephesians 3:1-12 KJV].

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is **the church**: Whereof I am made a minister, **according to the dispensation of God** which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the **mystery which hath been hid from ages** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this **mystery among the Gentiles**; which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory [Colossians 1:24-27 KJV].

In both passages Paul says that he was given the revelation of a new administration or dispensation, the Church. This new dispensation was hidden and unknown to the Old Testament saints, but had been recently revealed to the apostles and the New Testament prophets. Unlike the prevailing condition under the Law administration, the church is composed of Jew and gentile united into one body, the Church. Another difference between these dispensations, or administrations, was the union of all believers with the indwelling Christ. Note carefully that Ephesians 3:9 teaches that God gave Paul the task of helping all men to understand this new dispensation. It is

amazing that some segments of the professing Church are so ignorant of the Scriptures as to classify dispensationalism as a strange cult!

#### 8. Various Dispensational Details

One of the major misunderstandings about dispensationalism is that some think it teaches different ways of salvation. This is simply not true. Old Testament saints were saved by faith (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 4:6). Old Testament saints were well aware of the fact that sacrifices alone could not save. It was the faith expressed by the offering of a sacrifice that saved. (See 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; 51:16; Proverbs 15:8; 21:27; Isaiah 1:11ff.; Hosea 6:3-6; Micah 6:6ff.; Hebrews 9:12; 10:3.)

Dispensations may represent different systems for doing God's work, different modes of operation for fulfilling His will, different responsibilities and requirements for managing God's household of faith as it labors in the world, but **dispensationalism does not teach different ways of salvation.**

Just as the United States has had only one government under the Constitution but has been managed by more than forty administrations, so too God has only one divine government; but He has structured various administrations by which to manage it. God's attributes do not change. The way of salvation does not change. Yet, God can and has varied His governing relationship with His people by altering His works through them. Although dispensations involve time, time is only a secondary matter. A dispensation is a distinct system by which God ordains that His household of faith operates. Just as it is better to refer to a communist system or capitalistic system as opposed to communistic or capitalistic times, so it is more precise to refer to the Law system or Church system and not the Law age or the Church age.

Just as regulations from previous presidential administrations are still in force unless they have been specifically rescinded, so too, regulations from previous administrations should be considered binding under the church dispensation unless they have been rescinded.

Thus, we are no longer obligated to offer blood sacrifices. However, the dispensation of human government has never been rescinded by later Scriptures. Thus, such truths as capital punishment (Genesis 9:6) are still very much in force. Again, time is only a secondary factor in dispensations. Systems of management or administrations are the main

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idea. It is better to think of the regulations from the previous dispensations as cumulative (unless rescinded) as shown by Charts A and B, below.

### *The Cumulative Nature of Pre-Law Dispensations*

CHART A

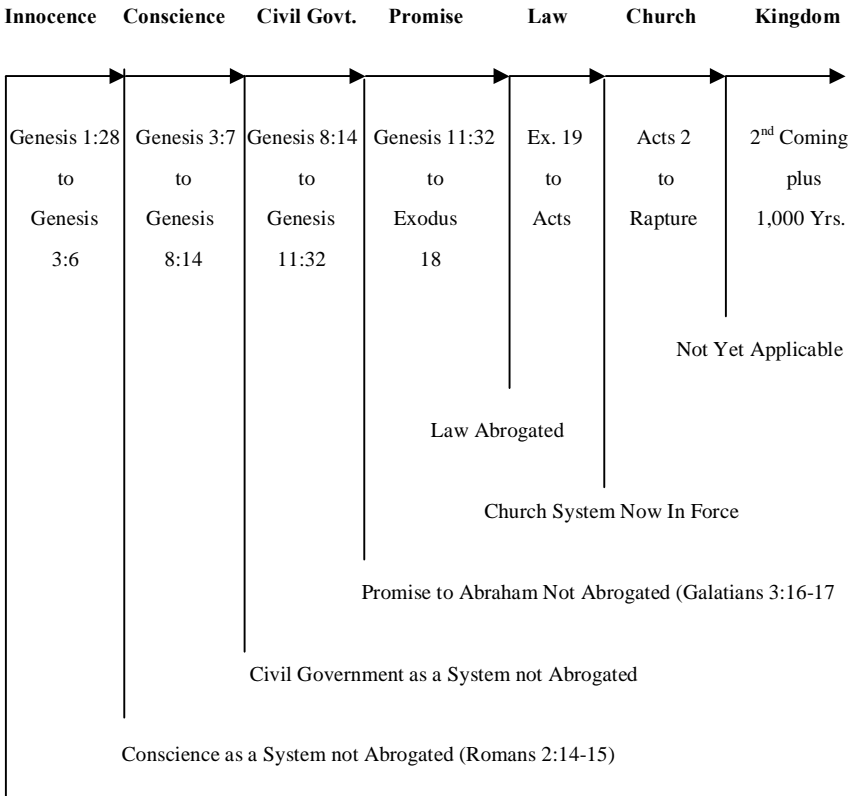


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## The Cumulative Nature of Pre-Law Dispensations

CHART B



Abrogated at Expulsion from the Garden



## Conclusion

The Church is a unique system of administration in God's government. Bible students who fail to understand the great difference between Law and Grace and the future millennial Kingdom will never understand the details of the Bible. Without dispensationalism, large segments of Scripture will at best remain hidden or obscured: at worst they will be used to develop false ideas. Bible students must always consider the dispensational system in force for each specific Bible text. Does a given Bible statement pertain to the Law of Moses (past), to the Church (present), or to a future Kingdom? With this key interpretative principle the Bible will be consistent with itself and far more understandable.

## Appendix

### The Work of the Spirit under the Law Administration

#### A. The Importance of Distinguishing the Spirit under Law from the Spirit under Grace.

The greatest mistake in studies of the Holy Spirit is an ignorance and/or neglect of the differences between the Holy Spirit's work under the Law and His work under grace. The student who ignores the great change at Pentecost (Acts 2) from Judaism to the Church (from Law to Grace) will likely never understand the works of the Holy Spirit. The pattern for the Holy Spirit's work under the church system is not found in the Old Testament or Gospels. There is little excuse for missing the announcements in the Gospels that a great change in the Holy Spirit's work was impending. John the Baptist constantly referred to Spirit baptism as something future (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Even at the Ascension, Christ told His followers that the Spirit baptism was future and would occur shortly (Acts 1:5). By the time of Acts 11:15-16, this Spirit baptism had already occurred. Thus, at Pentecost the predicted change occurred. The Holy Spirit's work after Pentecost is not the same as before. Therefore, one cannot look to the Old Testament or Gospels as giving the Spirit's pattern or work for today.

There are other indications in the Gospels that a major change in the Holy Spirit's work was coming. John 7:37-39 teaches that all believers would be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but it just as clearly teaches that this work of the Holy Spirit would commence **after** Christ's glorification. Likewise, the Upper Room Discourse on the night before the Lord's death (John 14:16) is replete with anticipation that the Holy Spirit would begin brand new ministries after Christ's departure.

Those who look to the Old Testament and/or Gospels as giving the normative operation for the Holy Spirit in this age have only themselves to blame for their confusion. There are plenty of indications that the Spirit's work would radically change after the Lord's Resurrection and Ascension. While it is correct that Old Testament saints (the disciples included) obtained the Holy Spirit subsequent to the time of salvation, this is not the way the Holy Spirit works under the Church system. The differences between the Spirit's work under Judaism and the Spirit's work under the Church must be understood in order to have a Biblical view of the Holy Spirit. The differences will

now be listed, and the Holy Spirit's work under the Old Testament explained.

#### B. The Old Testament Recipients of the Holy Spirit

Under the Law system the Holy Spirit usually comes upon or fills a person long after salvation, and He works in the lives of **only a few outstanding individuals rather than in all believers**. One view is that the following Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit's work only involved His blessing for leadership abilities upon a few. They involved anointing for service, not indwelling. By this view, these Old Testament passages would become even less a pattern for how the Holy Spirit works in the life of every believer since Pentecost. By either interpretation of Old Testament information, a study of the Holy Spirit must stress texts concerning His works after Pentecost.

Under Grace the Holy Spirit works in the life of **every believer** and begins to work at the time of salvation (John 7:37-39; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:2; 1 John 4:13).

Those who properly note this change in the Spirit's work at Pentecost object to the idea of a "Second Blessing" where the Holy Spirit supposedly enters into a believer's life at a crisis or maturation point after salvation. They also correctly object to a theology that makes some believers have the Holy Spirit and some to be without Him. The doctrine that some believers have had a "Second Blessing" and, therefore, have the Holy Spirit while others do not is based upon a Law pattern. This is not the way the Holy Spirit works in the Church. Old Testament examples where the Holy Spirit came upon only a few outstanding leaders (not all believers as during the Church age) at a time **subsequent to salvation** (not at the time of salvation as during the Church age) include the following:

- Bezalel ó the tabernacle craftsman (**filled with Spirit**, Exodus 31:3; 35:31)
- Moses and the 70 Elders of Israel, whom the Holy Spirit **rested upon** (Numbers 11:17-29)
- Joshua ó whom the Spirit **indwelt** (Numbers 27:18)
- Othniel ó the Spirit **came upon** (Judges 3:10)
- Gideon ó the Spirit **came upon** (Judges 6:34)

- Jephthah ó the Spirit **came upon** (Judges 11:29)
- Samson ó the Spirit **came upon** and stirred (Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14)
- Saul ó the Spirit **came upon** (1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 11:6)
- David ó the Spirit **came upon** (1 Samuel 16:13; see also 2 Samuel 23:2)
- Amasai, one of David's officers ó the Spirit **came upon** (1 Chronicles 12:18)
- Azariah the prophet ó the Spirit **came upon** (2 Chronicles 15:1)
- Jahaziel the prophet ó the Spirit **came upon** (2 Chronicles. 20:14)
- Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the prophet ó the Spirit **came on** (2 Chronicles 24:20)
- Ezekiel ó the Spirit **fell on** (Ezekiel 11:5)
- Micah - **filled with** the Spirit (Micah 3:8)

#### C. The Old Testament Duration of the Holy Spirit's Ministry in a Person

The first difference between the work of the Spirit under Law and His work under Grace lies in the persons with whom He works. Under the Law the Spirit came upon only a few select individuals (not all) and at a time after salvation. The second major distinction between His work in the Old Testament versus His work in the New Testament concerns the duration of His work in a life. Under the church system the Holy Spirit abides **forever** in a believer's life (see John 14:16-17 and Ephesians 4:30). However, under the Law system He would come and go. It is a serious mistake to confuse the two distinct systems and think that the Holy Spirit might depart a believer today or that His continued presence is contingent upon a believer's holiness. Such grave misunderstandings result in unbiblical notions of pleading for the Spirit to reenter a life or not to depart. The total removal of the Holy Spirit's presence from a believer's life pertains strictly to the Law administration. The Holy Spirit did leave Samson and Saul; and David was concerned about the possibility of the Spirit's removal. Sometimes the Holy Spirit would work in the lives of sinful people. There may

even be cases of the Holy Spirit's temporary influence upon unbelievers (Numbers 24:2; 1 Samuel 19:20-24).

And she (Delilah) said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!"  
And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that **the LORD had departed from him** [Judges 16:20].

Now the Spirit of the LORD departed **from Saul** í **Samuel 16:14a**].

Do not cast me away from Thy presence, and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me [Psalm 51:11].

Doctrine about the Holy Spirit must be developed from texts pertaining to the Church system not the Law system. This establishes the validity of the dispensational method of Bible interpretations, and illustrates its importance. Those who disregard dispensational distinctions will make mistakes in other theological areas such as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.