

Dispensationalism (Trying the Spirits) (5)

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Dispensationalism: A Modern Thief

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It is a distinction of Dispensationalism, not of Reformed truth, to speak of spiritual blessings and temporal blessings. The distinction is made because it is mistakenly believed that God makes promises that apply to all men without exception, and that He has blessings for all men, if not spiritual, then temporal. But the promises of God are all made exclusively in Christ. Not one of them can be of any good to those outside of Christ. There is no favor of God shown outside of Christ.

To put it more pointedly, there is no favor of God shown to any apart from the Cross. Outside of the purchased mercies of Calvary, there is no favor shown men. To speak of special mercies in Calvary and common mercies outside Calvary is plain Modernism. Any outside of Christ are out of the favor of God. He has such in His view only as the objects of His wrath. There is no place of refuge or hope for a man except in Christ. If it be asked, "Does not God do many good things to all men, including those outside of Christ, sending rain upon the just and the unjust, and filling even the wicked with food and gladness?" (See [Ps. 17:14](#) and [Acts 14:17](#)). This is true. But those good gifts are not blessings to the wicked. The Lord says they are not in [Prov. 3:32-35](#). The righteous enjoy His secret, but the froward are an abomination to Him. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just." Those outside of Christ He scorns, "but He gives grace to the lowly," not to the wicked. The wise shall experience glory, but fools shame. Good

gifts, according to this Word of God, are common, but not blessings. Good gifts to the righteous are blessings, but to the wicked they are like food given to bullocks prepared for the day of slaughter (cp. [Jer. 12:3](#) with [Jas. 5:5](#)). Temporal gifts do not make temporal blessings. For blessings are not temporal; they are spiritual. Temporalities are common; but mercies are particular.

One of the greatest promises of God of the highest spiritual order is found in [Heb. 13:5](#), where we read, "for He hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' " Now, who would conceive of this promise as for the Jews, and not for the Church? Yet to whom was this precious promise first given? To Jews - Moses and Joshua (cp. [Deut. 31:6](#) with [Josh. 15](#)). This proves that there are evangelical promises in the Old Testament, and that, according to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, they are for the one Church of all ages. (cp. [Heb. 12:22-24](#) with 13:5-6, marg. refs.). Now, let not Dispensationalists object here to say we are "spiritualizing" in such a way that we, the Church, take all the blessings of Scripture, and leave all the curses to the Jews, that we thus rob the Jews. For all the Jews who have but the faith of Abraham are with us partakers of the same promises. We do not rob them of anything. Rather, Dispensationalism, by its very nature, makes its adherents religious thieves who rob believers, the Church, whether Jew or Gentile, of the comfort meant for them in the gracious promises of the Old Covenant.

Since the Puritans and Reformers were quite aware of the dangers inherent in this faulty interpretive system, it will be most instructive to closely consider a condensation from John Owen given in answer to the plea that promises made to Old Testament Israel belong exclusively to the Jews. "If this plea be admitted, I know not any one promise that would more evidently fall under the power of it, than this we have now in consideration. It was made to a peculiar person, and that upon a peculiar occasion; made to a general or captain of armies, with respect to the great wars he had to undertake, upon the special command of God. May not a poor, hungry believer say, 'What is this to me? I am not a general of an army, have no wars to make upon God's command. The virtues of this promise doubtless expired with the conquest of Canaan, and died with him to whom it was made!' " But Owen goes on to maintain "*the sameness* of love that is in *all* the promises, their

establishment in *one* Mediator, and the general concernment of believers in *every one* of them, and that on whatsoever occasion given. This promise to Joshua is here applied to the condition of the weakest, meanest and poorest of the saints of God, to all and every one of them, to the saints of old, even Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and the residue of them who walked with God in their generations. So that we may say boldly (without staggering at it by unbelief) 'the Lord is *my* Helper.' This is a conclusion of faith! because God said to Joshua, a BELIEVER, 'I will never leave *thee*, nor forsake *thee*' (though upon a particular occasion, and in reference to a particular employment), every believer may say with boldness, 'He is *my* Helper !'

It is not possible that believers be not led infallibly to glory. Yet it is possible that their comfort along the way to a great extent be undermined. This occurs when their confidence in the promises of God is either weakened or removed. True believers have an unshakable faith in the divine, verbal inspiration of Holy Writ, and in the inerrancy and veracity of the promises. They are not so likely to go astray at this point. But there is the temptation before them to yield to the subtle persuasion that the great majority of God's promises do not belong to Christians at all — they are but a "parenthesis" people — but, because made to the people of the Old Covenant, are the property of the Jews only.

Dispensationalism does go to the extreme of belittling the Old Testament, its importance and value. Some of its disciples cannot criticize strongly enough those who do not limit themselves entirely to the New Testament. This is done, not by open atheists, or by known Modernists, but by those who are the reputed champions of orthodoxy, who profess the plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture. So the alert defenses of the Christian may become slowed and deadened, without his awareness, merely because the ministry he sits under is that of men faithful to the "fundamentals," well versed in Scripture and completely dedicated to Christ. Then when they come out with their "dispensational truth," they "must be right!"

We say once again, Dispensationalism compares in many ways to Modernism, in fact, has in it the seeds of Modernism, and so can be no adequate defense against

or refutation of Modernism. Modernists are like King Jehoiakim, who with his pen-knife cut whole sections of the Scripture out of the Book of the Covenant and threw them into the fire. The teachers of "dispensational truth" have often called attention to these destructive "higher critical" methods of the Modernists in their handling of Scripture. Thomas Jefferson's version of the New Testament is a good example of this pernicious method. Hence the tendency is to allay the fears in the minds of the hearers of these who are regarded as "sound expositors of Scripture" and "internationally known Bible teachers." The tendency is to be favorably impressed by men who "stand for the whole Word of God" and who earnestly denounce "modernism" and expose "evolutionism." The inference is, here certainly we must have men who may be safely followed in all their assertions! Yet both dispensationalism and modernism are productive of a fractional, pen-knife edition of the Bible, so that "the whole Word of God" is hardly recognizable. For Modernists claim much of the Old and New Testaments to be spurious; while Dispensationalists claim much of both Testaments belongs not to us. Both pen-knife addicts render much of Scripture a dead letter.

Of course, it may be argued that many promises were given to Israel and so can have no direct reference to the Church, that therefore Christians cannot fairly appropriate them, nor justly expect their fulfillment to them. But if this were true, then [Rom. 15:4](#) would not be true: "For *whatsoever* things were written aforetime, were written for *our* learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." If certain passages of God's Word do not belong to me, how can they be of comfort to me? how can that bring me hope which belongs exclusively the Jews? Christ came not to limit and segregate the promises, some to Jews and some to Christians. He came "to *confirm* the promises made unto the fathers, *and* that the *Gentiles* might glorify God for His mercy." (15:8-9)

Dispensationalists, who regard certain vast areas of the Old Testament of carnal and earthly content, charge that their opponents misapply these parts to themselves in that they "spiritualize" them. We turn that around, charging that they "sectionize" and "atomize" the Scriptures, setting the exact boundaries of mutually exclusive dispensations, and dividing to distinct companies various parts of the Word of God.

This method erects arbitrary hedges which bar Christ's sheep from large portions of the green pastures of His Word. For, as they say, the Old Testament does not contain "Church truth," hence is not for us. Neither do the Gospels and most of the Revelation. Ultradispensationalists leave for the Christian no more than a few prison epistles of Paul as that which applies to the Church today. The epistles of Peter belong to a coming age and to the Jewish remnant in the future great tribulation. The Sermon on the Mount is reserved for the Jews in the promised millennial kingdom.

What is so fundamentally wrong with Dispensationalism is that it has a wrong and not the most basic starting point. They base God's plan of the ages upon their arbitrary and subjective scheme of seven dispensations. This is not to "rightly divide the Word of truth," but to turn the Scriptures exactly upside down. All of God's works and ways, all of history are based upon the everlasting Covenant. His plan and purpose are with a view to the ultimate complete realization of His covenant. The various dispensations are but dispensations of the covenant, parts of the one grand foreordained whole. God's own essential, inherent life is an intertheistic, trinitarian, covenant life. Each of the three persons of the divine trinity conspire to realize the fulfillment of the great design of the covenant, which was that God in Christ should dwell in the glorified election of grace in the New Heavens and New Earth. The three persons unite to secure this design. All their acts of creation, providence and grace were and are performed to this end. The Father ordained the Son to be the incarnate God, the anointed Mediator in His office of prophet, priest and king. The Spirit pledged Himself for the effectual application of the purchased redemption of Christ to all its predestined beneficiaries. Therefore, in Christ God would establish, maintain and fulfill His covenant. He would prepare the way for its realization, actually provide all things necessary to that end and guarantee the success of it. There is God's plan of the ages. In it we have a biblical dispensationalism, which alone is in harmony with [Ephesians 1:10](#).

Dispensationalism

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The most popular, but not the only, form of Premillennialism is known as Dispensationalism. It is a pseudo-hermeneutical system which claims to be the only correct method of interpreting the Scriptures. Its motto is, "Rightly dividing the Word of truth." In the English-speaking world its origin may be traced back one hundred and thirty-five years to the Plymouth Brethren. It is called Brethrenism, Darbyism (after J.N. Darby) and, in this country, Scofieldianism.

Because of the extremes of this system, we ought to distinguish between Premillennialism and Dispensationalism. For the former is a rather moderate, though erroneous, theory of Christ's return. The latter is a bizarre interpretative arrangement which not only segregates, but trichotomizes the contents of Scripture into sections, labeling them "exclusively for the Jews," or "for the Gentiles," or "for the church of God." We might call it partitioning dispensational-ism. The more reasonable Historical Premillennarians hold that there will be one final advent of Christ, at which He will judge and overthrow the Beast, the False Prophet and apostate Christendom, then set up His one thousand year reign, after which occurs the resurrection and judgment of the wicked dead, followed by the ushering in of eternity. But the more extreme Dispensationalists really have three final advents of Christ: one at the Rapture when He (it may be at any moment) comes into our atmosphere to take up the church; another about seven years later in the Revelation of Christ, who then actually comes to earth to reign; and then another after the millennium for the final judgment. Therefore Premillennialism and Dispensationalism are not synonymous terms. Every Dispensationalist is premillennial, but not every Premillennialist is dispensational.

C.I. Scofield, who popularized Dispensationalism with his "Scofield Reference Bible," defines a dispensation as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." Similarly, the Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary defines a dispensation as "the period during

which a particular revelation of God's mind and will has been directly operative on mankind." Further, Scofield has seven dispensations which divide all time, from the creation to the new heaven and new earth. First, there is the Dispensation of Innocence, then Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace and Kingdom. There is no objection to this definition of a dispensation, nor to the dividing of history into seven periods, nor to the fact that each of these periods is marked off by a particular development of the divine purpose and revelation. But although Scofield speaks of the dispensations as revealing the "increasing purpose" of God, he does not make clear what that purpose is. It would appear, however, that it is an earthly kingdom-purpose.

Dispensationalists need make no appeal for their contentions to the word translated *dispensation* in the Bible. For there it does not mean a period of time. In [Luke 16:2, 3, 4](#), where the word first appears, it is rendered *stewardship*, which has nothing to do with an era. In [I Cor. 9:17](#), Paul wrote, "a dispensation is committed unto me," which cannot mean that an age had been entrusted to him, but that a duty had been directed to him. He reminds that "ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me" ([Eph. 3:2](#)) and that "I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God" ([Col. 1:25](#)), which has reference not to a segment of history, but to the administration of the apostolic office. Then the words "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times cannot designate the name for the "last of the ordered ages." It simply means that the administration of the fulness of times is headed up in Christ. The King James Version in these places wrongly employs the word *dispensation*, for actually that word never appears in Scripture. The word is stewardship, administration (literally, economy) and signifies not an era, but the administration of the covenant and all things as given by divine commission. The covenant has always been the same, but the dispensation (administration) of the covenant has changed. Therefore it is wrong to speak of this Christian era as "the dispensation (age) of grace, wrong because misleading, seeing that every dispensation (administration) of the covenant was in pure grace.

It is also faulty to speak of a dispensation "as a new test of the natural man," as though God in history deals primarily not with His covenant people, but with the

unregenerate. Each separate dispensation reveals man's state of sin, his responsibility for it and his inevitable failure. It all begins with man and ends with man. Scripture reveals the dispensations of history severally beginning with man's misery, continuing with his deliverance and ending with his gratitude!

Some of the partitions this system makes in Scripture are called parentheses. There is a parenthesis between the first two verses in Genesis, chapter one. This parenthetical age saw the universe in a catastrophic state, brought about by a supernatural cataclysmic change involving the fall of angels. The earth, then, for an unknown, indefinitely long period was chaotically waste and desolate. Then there is the "church parenthesis," which intervenes between Pentecost and the Rapture. History, from the time of Abraham at least, always moves along the line of the Jews. But with the baptism of the Spirit, a parenthetical period sets in, bringing "a wholly new thing—the church, which is his (Christ's) body." This church interim had the effect of disannulling ancient Israel. But at the end of this church age there will follow "the regathering of Israel," after which the glorious Davidic, earthly world empire of the Jews will be restored to them. This idea is guilty of creating another parenthesis, namely, the interval of seven years between the rapture and the revelation of Christ coming to the earth. For in that period the nation of the Jews is to be regathered and restored. They had the kingdom once, but lost it in the captivities. Then just before the church-parenthesis set in the kingdom once more was offered to them, but they rejected it. So the kingdom-age was "postponed" to the closing era of the world. That short seven year period is hardly more than a parenthesis, for God's clock ticks only on kingdom time, not on church time. So because of all these rather disannulling intervals in the chronology of Dispensationalism, we might call it "gap theory" dispensationalism.

This brings us to the crux of the matter. For dispensational error lies not in holding that there are dispensations of time in sacred history. The church has never denied that. The error lies in the fact that the Church is made a mere parenthesis in God's scheme of things, which temporarily obstructs and hinders the main thrust of His purpose. If there were any parenthesis at all in history, which we deny, it would not embrace the *Church*, but *Israel*, as Herman Bavinck neatly points out. From Creation

to Abraham, "redemption had a universal" emphasis. But with him and especially through the Mosaic dispensation, "a parenthesis set in, which came to an end in Christ. Then redemptive history resumed the universal character which it had at the beginning." (Quoted in *Prophecy and the Church*, O.T. Allis, p. 298).

Dr. Abraham Kuyper also had held the idea of this Israel-parenthesis, rather than the Church-parenthesis. He saw three dispensations, the first extending from Adam to Abraham, being for the most part one of "common grace." The second, from Abraham to Christ, was the parenthetical dispensation, and predominantly one of particular grace. The third, from Christ to the end, is a kind of mixture of special grace and "common grace" shown to man. But although Kuyper's view does save the Church from the Nirvana of a hiatus, it nevertheless makes the Cross of Christ not the center of the whole scheme of redemption, but an emergency measure. For, according to Kuyper, the main line that God took in the first dispensation was creational. The permanent, prevailing entity of the dispensations is the ordinance of Creation. In it, God administered His covenant, largely, according to "common grace." Then followed the temporary interruption of the second and parenthetical dispensation, in which, generally, He administered the covenant according to special grace. But this makes the dispensation of pure grace nothing more than an interlude. Also it implies that God's original creational purposes proved a failure, so that He took emergency measures in Christ, His Cross and the Church. The Cross is made an afterthought.

To introduce into biblical history parentheses, postponements or emergencies is to lose sight of the true development of the promise, which happens to be the main thread woven throughout all Scripture and all history. There is nothing wrong in speaking of an Adamic, an Abrahamic or a Christian dispensation. But it is wrong to imply, as Kuyper does, that neither the saints of the Adamic nor of the Abrahamic era were looking for the heavenly city, nor for Christ as Redeemer, but were instead anticipating the restoration of the Adamic paradise. We see no parentheses in history. For history is the revelation and the realization of God's counsel in the midst of the world for the sake of the Church. This being so, God through all time moves steadily, directly; progressively and aggressively toward the final accomplishment of His ultimate goal, which is to dwell eternally with His people in the New Jerusalem.

God's counsel never deviates, is never side-tracked nor postponed.

Dispensationalism has yet another gap which appears right in the middle of the verse in [Is. 61:2](#). Between the comma and the conjunction (!) there is the chasm of the ages extending from the first advent to the second advent. Jesus, when He read the passage to the Nazareth synagogue, stopped at the comma. The reason is said to be that although prophecy was fulfilled to "the acceptable year of the Lord," that "the day of vengeance" was still future, awaiting the day of judgment. This puts two fundamentally different dispensations in this text, the word "and" in the middle of it up to now covering a period of over nineteen centuries! But this is to ignore the remainder of the text, "to comfort all that mourn," which exactly characterizes the New Testament dispensation, as does also the expression "the day of vengeance" (the words Jesus omitted). For the latter was fulfilled in [Matt. 11:21, 23](#); [Matt. 23:13-38](#); [Matt. 24:2](#) and [Matt. 22:7](#). So Dispensationalists depart from the central line of the Counsel of God. Neither the Scriptures, the Reformed standards nor the Calvinistic churches support the flimsy, fanciful fantasies of these exegetical manipulators.

Dispensationalism: An Ancient Error

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The premillennial view is the doctrine of the visible and personal reign of Christ on the earth for one thousand years after the Antichrist, the False Prophet and apostate Christendom have been judged and condemned to the lake of fire. This view, in sharp contrast to Postmillennialism, teaches that Christ will not come into a perfect, converted world, but to one of mixed good and evil, with evil, largely, predominating. The slogan of premillennialism is "No millennium until Christ comes."

Premillennialists hold that at the Lord's coming, all the elect, of both dispensations,

shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, which is the rapture, to be immediately followed by His return with all the saints to the earth for the millennial reign.

We are not to confuse the above with Dispensationalism. The most popular form of Premillennialism is Dispensationalism. Its theme is, "Rightly dividing the Word of truth," which means the dividing of Scripture according to seven periods of time, or, as so-called "ultra-dispensationalism" has it, according to ten periods. Usually these eras, ages or dispensations are distinguished in the following order: innocency, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace and the kingdom. The sixth dispensation, that of grace, is the dispensation of the Church. It is said to *bedistinguished* from the other periods as a parenthesis in history. But if so, then we must understand the word underscored not to mean "to make eminent, illustrious and worthy of special regard," but merely to separate or divide by some mark or quality. For a parenthesis indicates something of lesser regard, something not of the general trend or main connection. Accordingly, this view sees the Church age as having not only no connection with the preceding one of law, but as standing in sharp contrast to it. The same may be said of the following kingdom age. Although no one has objection to the dividing of Scripture according to periods of time, as such, yet because so much is made of this "mystery parenthesis" as it is called, it ought to be referred to as Mystery-Parenthesis Dispensationalism. The term "dispensationalism" itself does not sufficiently indicate what is so offensive in the system. But to speak of Parenthesis Dispensationalism identifies it, on the face of it, as a system which puts the Church out of the main stream of God's plan for the ages.

What we have attempted to do above is to set Dispensationalism aside from Premillennialism, historically considered. The latter does not go to the bizarre extremes of Dispensationalism. It does not view the second coming of Christ in two widely separated stages, with a rapture into the air and a coming down to the earth divided by a period of years. Nor is it so narrow as to hold that the "rapture" concerns the church only. For these and other reasons it should be understood that Premillennialism and Dispensationalism are not synonymous terms. All Dispensationalists are premillennial, but not all Premillennialists are dispensational. Therefore, it would be fairer and more clarifying to speak of "historic

premillennialism" as over against "dispensational premillennialism" than to attribute dispensationalism as such flatly to the premillennial school.

The following were notable historic premillennialists: Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Bengel, Alford, Bonar, Ellicott, W. J. Erdman, H. G. Guinness, W. G. Moorehead, George Muller of Bristol, B. W. Newton, Ryle, A. Saphir, Tregelles, R. C. H. Trench and Nathanael West. Some notable Bible expositors of this school were: Godet, Lange and Zahn. On the other hand, well-known Dispensationalists we have in J. N. Darby, Wm. Kelly, W. E. Blackstone, James M. Gray, A. C. Gaebelien, Wm. L. Pettingill and especially C. I. Scofield. These representatives should by no means be herded into the same corral. Staid pacers do not belong with wild broncos.

The slogan of Dispensationalism is, "All Scripture is *for* us, but it is not all *to* us, or *about* us." Explaining, they say, "Some parts of Scripture have particularly the *Church* in view. Other parts belong to the *Jews*. Therefore, certain sections of the Bible have nothing to do with this present age, but belong to the past and abrogated old dispensation, while other sections concern the future great tribulation, a period which occurs after the Church has departed the earthly scene. Still other portions apply only to the earthly millennial kingdom of Christ." This hacking method of interpreting Scripture chops the Bible into such small fragments that the Christian is robbed of much of the promises of God. The inspired "rightly dividing the Word of truth" ([II Tim. 2:15](#)) does not mean we are to dissect the Bible into pieces, making it a sort of crazy-quilt. Rather it means "to hew a straight line through the Word of truth." But the line Dispensationalism makes through Scripture is disjointed, slip-knotted, sheep-shanked, strained and broken with many gaps intervening along its shabby, ludicrous length.

Dispensationalism has close comparison to Modernism, despite the fact that the former vehemently repudiates the latter. For Dispensationalists claim the evangelical school, accepting the infallibility and divine authority of Scripture. But they become guilty of approaching the Bible according to modernistic methods. For both Dispensationalism and Modernism have a subjective theory of Bible structure. The latter reads the Book of Isaiah applying its subjective method and decides that chapters 40-66 could never have been written by the same prophet, but must have come from a later period. The former reads the Gospel According to Matthew

applying its subjective hypothesis, and decides that the Sermon on the Mount is not intended for the Church today, but for a future age, after the Church has gone.

These two methods are basically the same, yet the one comes from Modernism's "critical school" and the other from Dispensationalism's "prophetical school."

Although Dispensationalism is a questionable hermeneutical method relatively new, arising as it did in England and Ireland about 136 years ago, its ideas were in some places prevalent 280 years ago. For Puritan John Owen in his *Doctrine of Saints' Perseverance* wrote, "Some labour much to *rob believers* of the consolation intended for them in the evangelical promises of the Old Testament, though made in the general to the Church on this account, (affirming) that they were *made to the Jews*, and being to them peculiar, our concernment lieth not now in them" (ital. added).

But it is really no new teaching that God's promises are divided, some to the Church, embracing a heavenly people, and some to the Jews, an earthly people. The Church of England in its Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion was correct when it over three hundred years ago denied this error. The Reformed Episcopal Church in its Article VI puts it thus: "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they, are not to be heard, which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises..." If any Jews had the faith of Abraham, they were not an earthly people, did not mind earthly things and did not expect earthly promises to be fulfilled to them, but heavenly promises, as [Gen. 15:1](#) and [Heb. 11:13-16](#) clearly and convincingly show.

Over 400 hundred years ago John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes* a beautiful refutation of modern dispensationalism. Says he, "From the preceding observations it may now be evident that all those persons, from the beginning of the world, whom God has adopted into the society of His people, have been federally connected with Him by the same law and the same doctrine which are in force among us: but because it is of no small importance that this point be established, I shall show, by way of appendix, since the fathers were partakers with us of the same inheritance, and hoped for the same salvation through the grace of our common Mediator, how far

their condition in this connection was from ours. For though the testimonies we have collected from the law and the prophets in proof of this, render it sufficiently evident that the people of God have never had any other rule of religion and piety, yet because some writers have raised many disputes concerning the difference of the Old and New Testaments, which may occasion doubts in the minds of an undiscerning reader, we shall assign a particular chapter for the better and more accurate discussion of this subject. Moreover, what would otherwise have been very useful, has now been rendered necessary for us by Servetus and some madmen of the sect of the Anabaptists, who entertain no other ideas of the Israelitish nation, than a herd of swine, whom they pretend to have been pampered by the Lord in this world, without the least hope of a future immortality in heaven." (From *The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments*, Bk. II, X, 1).

In the next paragraph Calvin says, "The covenant of all the fathers is so far from differing substantially from ours, that it is the very same; it only varies in the administration." But dispensationalism has eight different covenants! Calvin further on adds, "Carnal opulence and felicity were not proposed to the Jews as the mark towards which they should ultimately aspire, but that they were adopted to the hope of immortality, and that the truth of this adoption was certified to them by oracles, by the law, and by the prophets." This being so, the Old Testament brought to the Jews the same high spiritual truth of the New Testament, and proves that the chosen people of the old dispensation were not an earthly people with only material aims and seeking only "earthly blessings." Indeed, "the end of the Old Testament was always in Christ and eternal life." "Then let us drive far away from us this absurd and pernicious notion, either that the Lord proposed nothing else to the Jews, or that the Jews sought nothing else, but an abundance of food, carnal delights, flourishing wealth, external power, a numerous offspring, and whatever is esteemed valuable by a natural man" (II, X, 23).

Calvin also points out where the Jews were wrong and are wrong today, namely, "in expecting an earthly kingdom of the Messiah." He calls this expectation a stroke of blindness and also a keeping of "themselves in voluntary darkness."

Dispensationalism is then such a grave error that it is both a mark of the righteous judgment of God and the willful sin of man.

Dispensationalism On Israel And The Church

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Continuing our examination of dispensationalism, we again call attention to Christ's words, "I will build My church, " and, this time, to the fact that they amount to the charter of the Christian church. For the charter of the old covenant church we have in the first promise of [Genesis 3:15](#), "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; He shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush His heel." The old covenant people were a body of believers, a congregation ([Ps. 22:22](#)), founded on that charter. Then they were founded on Christ. There is only one foundation, and only one building on that foundation.

In this connection, it is highly recommended to dispensationalists that they give Matthew Henry's commentary a close perusal. He was a biblically-minded man, who hewed rather consistently and closely to Holy Writ, certainly far more so than they who claim to "rightly divide the Word of truth" as these age-theorists do. He on this text said, "Christ...signed and published this royal, this divine charter, by which that body politic is incorporated...God had a church in the world from the beginning, and it was built upon the rock of the promised Seed, [Gen. 3:15](#). But now that promised Seed being come, it was requisite that the church should have a new charter, as Christian, and standing in relation to a Christ already come. Now here we have that charter." No *new* church was chartered by the Lord, but the same church with a new charter. That church certainly was to be found in the old dispensation. Although denied by dispensationalists, the very word for "church" is found in that era. For the N.T. word which Jesus used for "church", *ekklesia*, is the word used to translate the O.T. word for "church," *qahal*, in the "*congregation* of the Lord." ([Ps. 22:22](#) with [Heb. 2:12](#)) The point is, a *qahal* is a *church*. If there was a *qahal* in that day, there was a *church* then. When Jesus referred to the building of His church, He spoke of "his own *house*, whose *house* are we." ([Heb. 3:6](#)) This "house" of God was not some

wholly new thing which began at Pentecost. For it is the same house Moses was a member of (cp. [Heb. 3:2-6](#) with [Nu. 12:7](#)) and of which the psalmist was a member when he said, "Except the Lord build the *house*, they labor in vain that build it." ([Ps. 127:1](#)) That gracious declaration certainly applies to our house of the present dispensation, as [Prov. 9:1](#), [Song 2:4](#) and [Matt. 10:25](#) will show. If the reader will take the time to carefully examine these texts he will see the devastating effect they have on dispensationalism.

The idea that the church of N.T. saints is a wholly new thing limited to this Christian dispensation, and not found in the old dispensation is proved erroneous by the teaching of [Heb. 12:22-23](#). It is not true that the O.T. Jews only had Moses and the law, while they of the new dispensation have Christ and the gospel. For the old covenant Israel had Abraham and the promises in which they embraced *Christ*. (cp. [Jn. 8:56](#) with [Heb. 11:13,26](#)) Mount Zion, the city of the living God, is the city Abraham looked for ([Heb. 11:10](#)), which was prepared for *all* (v. 13) the O.T. saints, which they desired (v. 16), and which we of the Christian dispensation also seek (13:14). In contrast to "the new Jerusalem," the heavenly Jerusalem is "the above Jerusalem" ([Gal. 4:26](#), Gk.), which is the mother of us all, i.e., of all the children of the promise, including believers of the O.T., as the following quotation (v. 27) from Isaiah indicates. It only takes a comparison of [Heb. 11:10](#) with 12:22 to learn that the O.T. saints looked for the *heavenly* Jerusalem! The "general assembly" in the O.T. was called "the assembly of the saints" ([Ps. 89:7](#)) or the "assembly of the upright." (111:1) In the N.T. it is seen to be the entire Election of Grace, as is evident from the added, "which are written in heaven." (cp; [Isa. 4:3](#); [Daniel 12:1](#)) But whether Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly or the church of the firstborn, it is all one and the same body seen from different viewpoints.

A text sometimes appealed to as teaching that the church had its beginning at Pentecost is [1 Cor. 1:13](#), "For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles.. ." But this does not mean that we were all so baptized *at the same time*, as no corporate action is in view, for on that day *Gentiles* were not baptized by the Spirit. Paul means by "all... in one body" the *members* of the *body* of Christ, the same body and members from Adam and Abel onward, whom we saw

mentioned in [Ps. 35:10](#); 40:5; 69:5; 81:5; 84:8-9; 139:15-16 and many other passages. By "baptized" (by the Spirit) Paul refers plainly to nothing other than to being "regenerated." It is regeneration which makes a man a member of the body of Christ.

It has been argued by dispensationalists that [Eph. 1:19-23](#) proves there was no church before Pentecost. God gave Christ to be the "Head over all things to the church which is His body" after the ascension, it is pointed out. This is no reasoning. One may as well argue that no sins were remitted until after Christ made atonement on the cross. Or that none were regenerated until after Christ was made a "life-giving Spirit" at His resurrection. It would be just as valid argument to say that Christ could not make intercession for His people until after He sat down at God's right hand. But this is refuted by [Zech. 1:12-13](#)(3:1,2)! Christ was Mediator "set up (anointed) from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." ([Prov. 8:23](#)) We must be able to see Christ as the preincarnate Head of His people from the beginning, because "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," as well as Christ the incarnate Head in history after His birth, death, resurrection and ascension. Otherwise we cannot "rightly divide the Word of truth," much less "cut a straight line through the truth."

In the Book of Daniel it is revealed that "the saints of the Most High shall *take* the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever." (7:18) This kingdom is none other than the "everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." ([II Pet. 1:11](#)) In the 1909 edition of the Scofield Reference Bible the editor inserted the marginal note, "That these are church saints seems clear from [Acts 16:17](#); [Rom. 8:17](#); [II Tim. 2:10-12](#); [I Pet. 2:9](#); [Rev. 1:6](#), etc." But in the 1917 edition this note was changed to read, "That church-saints will also *share* in the rule seems clear from [Acts 16:17](#), etc." (ital. added) The note as it now stands means that through eternity the church will have a place subservient to Israel! But the meaning is, if anything, that the *church* will not merely share in the kingdom, but *take* it and *possess* it for ever! It is also of interest that the phrase, "the saints of the most High" may also be translated "the saints of the highest places," which parallels [Eph. 1:3](#); 2:6. That Daniel wrote of New Testament saints is plain from a comparison of

7:27 with [Luke 12:32](#). I referred to what could only be *Old Testament* saints when he wrote of Gentiles being "fellow-citizens *with the saints*." These saints included the "prophets" of the O.T. and the "apostles" of the N.T. ([Eph. 2:19-22](#)). They being "fitly framed *together*" and "builded *together*" refers to the saints of all ages as members of the same body, the same household. That household is "the household of faith." ([Gal. 6:10](#)) The O.T. saints were members of that household according to [Hebrews 11](#), verse 39. But the would-be "right-dividers" have wrongly divided the household of God, have not maintained "the unity of the Spirit," and in effect have made God the author of confusion. For the inseparable unity of O.T. and N.T. saints is seen in the New Jerusalem which bears not only the names of the twelve apostles on its foundations, but also the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on its gates! ([Rev. 21:12](#))

The writer in his dispensationalist days moved in circles where it was loudly insisted that "Jew" meant "Jew" and not Christian, and that "Israel" meant "Israel" and not Church. It was commonly held that Israel was an earthly people. It never occurred to the writer then that such a statement ought to be adjudged inane! Granted they were an earthly people, —what else could they be? certainly not a lunar people, dwelling on earth's satellite, nor a marine people, inhabiting Atlantis or Aquatania. The Canaanites and the Edomites were also an earthly people. Christians here below are an earthly people, for in body and soul they are still this side of heaven. If the dispensationalists explain that what is intended by this language is that Israel's was an *earthly inheritance*, we must ask, Did the patriarchs have an earthly inheritance? It ought to be plainly evident by now in this series that [Hebrews 11](#) proves otherwise. (14-16) Why contend that Moses had an earthly inheritance in the face of [Heb. 11:26](#)? Do not assign such an inheritance to David, for he claimed to be "a *stranger* in the earth." ([Ps. 39:12](#); 119:19) Scripture distinguishes between one who is a Jew outwardly and the Jew inwardly, between a carnal Israel and the spiritual Israel. There is an Israel within Israel, the Israel of God. According to [Romans 2:28-29](#), all God's regenerated people are true Jews.

Keeping this distinction in mind, attend to the words of Asaph. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." ([Ps. 73:1](#)) What is the meaning of

"Israel" in this place? Certainly not the nation of Israel nor the natural Jews living at that time, for it could not be said that *they*, as such, had "clean hearts." "O Lord, be Thou my Helper true, for just and godly men are few; the faithful who can find?" ([Ps. 12:1](#)) A "clean heart" is not found in the natural man, Jew or Gentile, for all the descendants of Adam are born with a heart consummately deceitful and desperately wicked. A clean heart is the product of regeneration through the sprinkling of (baptism of) the blood of Jesus Christ ([Heb. 10:22](#)), a purifying act of God through faith ([Acts 15:9](#)). Thus the Israel mentioned in the text is the regenerated, the *spiritual* Israel. The text obviously excludes carnal Israel.

Jesus so distinguished. "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" ([Jn. 1:47](#)) By "Israelite" He meant more than a mere natural descendant of Jacob. He meant a *true Israelite*. When He said, "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples *indeed*," (8:31) He meant disciples in fact, not in name only. Jesus was saying that Nathanael was a regenerated person, "in whom is no guile," which added the confirmation that Nathanael was a saved and spiritual man, like the man described in [Ps. 32:2](#), "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit is no guile."

Dispensationalism: A Mutilated Ecclesiology

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"I will build My Church" ([Mt. 16:18](#)). These words of Christ are appealed to by dispensationalists in their attempt to prove that there was no church in the Old Testament. They insist that such saints as Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Malachi and John the Baptist were not in the church. The words, "I will build My, Church" are said to be in the future tense, implying that the Church did not then exist, nor prior to that time, but was yet to be established at Pentecost. At this point in his reference Bible, Scofield, on the Greek word for *church*, *ekklesia*, says that it

means "an assembly of called out ones" and "implies no more." So that Israel in the Old Testament, in Egypt for example, was simply an assembly. What Scofield means here is that *ekklesia* does not necessarily mean *church* and definitely does not mean so here. But the word *ekklesia*, to get at the truth of the matter, contains not only the meaning of the term *church*, but also the extent of its membership. It signifies a separated company. "The Church of God" is synonymous with "the elect of God." For the Church is neither broader nor narrower in scope than the whole election of grace. This we can prove with the greatest ease and clarity. Compare [Col. 1:24](#), where Paul speaks of his "sufferings" for Christ's "body's sake, which is the church," with [II Tim. 2:10](#) where Paul says he endured those sufferings "for the elect's sakes." The inference is that the Church and the elect are one and *the same!* The same evidence we have in [Eph. 5:25-27](#) where it is stated: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it..." Here the teaching is that Christ loved a people prior to His giving Himself for them. Who are they? N.T. saints only? The O.T. saints He also loved prior to His giving Himself for them. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" ([Jer. 31:3](#)). Both Old and New Testament believers are "the saints that are in the earth...the excellent in whom is all My delight." ([Ps. 16:3](#))

"I will build My Church" makes not so much a reference to the future (I shall) as to the promise (I will). The Lord does not teach here that there was no church in the old dispensation. There was such a church, but the stones and the materials of it, although provided and amassed, were not yet put into place. This awaited the laying of the "Sure Foundation." The "living stones" were cut out beforehand, but could not be actually built in O.T. times to *then* form the completed habitation of God through the Spirit, because the building was to be raised upon Jesus Christ crucified and risen as the sure foundation and chief cornerstone.

Therefore, "I will *build* My Church" does not mean, "I will bring into existence My church." Nor does it mean, "I will *begin* to build My Church." It means, "I will *continue* to build it." For the building had already been begun in the making ready of the stones and materials. That was the O.T. stage of the Church. The N.T. phase was in the putting of the stones together upon the cornerstone. Jesus was referring only to this latter operation. The O.T. church is symbolized in David and his reign,

while the N.T. church is typified in Solomon and his reign. David provided all the building materials for the temple of Solomon. Of Solomon's actually raising of the edifice it is said that "the house, when it was in building, was built of stone *made ready before it was brought thither.*" ([1 Kings 6:7](#)) The O.T. church was a readying of the stones and a providing of the materials for the building. There were living stones, but they were not yet set on the foundation (except in plan and principle), for the simple reason that the foundation stone had not yet been formed (from the Virgin!). The N.T. church was in the bringing of all the materials to the erection site and the actual framing of them together. The O.T. church was in that dispensation so readied that when the N.T. church was built "there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building." There was an O.T. church; it was then a prepared work. The N.T. church is the finished building. Proof? This: "*Prepare thy work without and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.*" ([Prov. 24:27](#)) The church of the old dispensation was being prepared without and made fit in the field. *Afterwards* in the church of the new dispensation the building of the prepared house was accomplished. It was in two different forms in the two dispensations, but throughout it is the *same* house!

Not only is Dispensationalism far wrong, then, in its shallow interpretation of [Matt. 16:18](#); but also in its claim that the body of Christ is never mentioned in the Old Testament, it is fundamentally mistaken. But before we turn to O.T. Scripture, which is most irrefutable and abundant on the subject, let us form in our minds some idea of the body of Christ. Here is an illustration: "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me*?!' ([Acts 9:4](#)). It would take an extremely carnal eye, indeed, not to see in these words any reference to the body (the church) of Christ. For it is undeniably there. Saul learned then that he had not been prosecuting heretics and extremists, but had been persecuting no less than the Lord of Glory. That is not difficult to see. Christ and His people are so united that what is done to Christ's members is done to Him. He and they are one, "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." ([Eph. 5:30](#)) He and they are one spirit. ([1 Cor. 6:17](#)) When *they* are persecuted, *He* is persecuted. "In all *their* affliction *He* was afflicted," ([Isa. 63:9](#)) i.e., "all the members suffer with" any suffering member. ([1 Cor. 12:26](#)) When *they* suffer, the *Head* suffers too. This truth runs so deeply and widely

throughout the Old Testament that it cannot be as Scofield claimed, an entirely unheard of new truth revealed exclusively through the Apostle Paul. Hence, *the body of Christ* is found revealed in the Old Testament. This contention we will now proceed convincingly and conclusively to prove.

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." ([Gn. 49: 10](#)) This is the O.T. form of the N.T. prophecy where the Messiah "should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." ([Jn. 11:52](#)) The same truth is more highly developed in [Eph. 1:10](#), "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him." What is here in view is not something yet to occur in the future, but that which has been accomplished ever since God set Christ "at His own right hand" and "*hath* put all under His feet, and gave Him, the head over all, to the church." (1:20, 22) He has assumed this authority far above all principality (1:21), and is thus over all things whatsoever. They are under Him now, ([Matt. 28:18](#)), so that He *is* the head of the church. In this dispensation of the fullness of times the Shiloh prophecy has its fulfillment.

"And Moses said (to Pharaoh), Thus saith the Lord, 'About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die..and all these thy servants shall come down unto Me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow Thee! and after that I will go out.'" ([Ex. 11:4,5,8](#)) In verse 4 the first personal pronoun is emphatic, i.e., the Lord will act here by no instrumentality, but wholly of Himself. So that the antecedents to these pronouns is the Lord alone, who said, "*I* will go out," thus expressing His identity with His people in the exodus — the Head intimately united with His body.

"The land shall not be sold, forever; for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners *with Me*." ([Lev. 25:23](#)) The N.T. expression of this thought is had in, "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." ([John 17:16](#)) Again God is graciously identified with His people. David saw this spiritual union as a ground for answered prayer, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not Thy

peace at my tears: for I am a stranger *with Thee*, a sojourner as all my fathers were."
 ([Ps. 39:12](#))

"All My *bones* shall say, 'Lord, who is like unto Thee, which deliverest the *poor* from him that is too strong for him; yea, the poor and the *needy* from him that spoileth him.' " ([Ps. 35:10](#)) A parallel passage we have in [Isa. 26:19](#), "Thy dead shall live. My dead *body*— they shall arise! Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust!" How utterly insupportable is the contention that the body of Christ is a spiritual reality unknown to the O.T.! In this Messianic Psalm Christ speaks, as verses 7, 11-16, 19 undeniably show. He speaks as Head of the Church, His body, and makes reference to His members. "For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of *His bones*."
 ([Eph. 5:30](#))

[Psalm 40](#) is another where Christ speaks of Himself and His body. That this is a messianic Psalm is plain from a comparison of verses 6-7 with [Heb. 10](#). Verse 1 presents a foreview of Christ in Gethsemane; verse 2, He is delivered from the sufferings of Gethsemane and the curse of the cross through the resurrection; verse 3 records His praise for that deliverance, "He hath put a new song in *My* mouth, even praise unto *our* God." In victory over death the Redeemer is quite conscious of the spiritual union between Him and the redeemed. He constantly delights in it. This is the covenant idea. "Many, O Lord, *My* God, are Thy wonderful works, which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are *tous-ward*." (vs. 5) Christ in the O.T. insisted that the Head and the members of His body are one in God's sight.

According to Dispensationalism, the Church in union with Christ, and especially conceived of as the body of Christ, is not revealed in the O.T. How foreign to Scripture this poverty-stricken view! How far short of the whole range of the Old Testament! But very much more proof that the body of Christ *is* revealed therein can be furnished, and, D.V., will be.