

Evaluation of *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*
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Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views, edited by Chad O. Brand, provides four common positions in evangelical Christianity on the relationship of Israel and the church: the covenantal position, the traditional dispensational position, the progressive dispensational position, and the progressive covenantal view. This book features excellent scholars who are committed to their positions and can biblically defend the positions. The tone is irenic and the format of allowing each writer to defend his position and the other writers to respond to the specific statements provides a helpful perspective to the reader. This review will focus on the ways in which traditional dispensationalism was misunderstood or misrepresented in the book.¹ The authors who presented views outside of dispensationalism seemed to misunderstand several key aspects of dispensationalism. The key areas of misunderstanding among the non-dispensational writers that will be reviewed in this paper are: the doxological purpose of God, a traditional dispensational soteriology, a traditional dispensational understanding of true Israel,² and a literal hermeneutic. A better understanding of these areas will address some of the concerns raised by the advocates of other positions.

¹Dr. Robert Thomas did an exceptional job defending traditional dispensationalism and pointing out the deficiencies of the other systems. Since I have no significant area of disagreement with him, I will allow the reader to read his portions of the book to form their own opinion. The areas I am pointing to did not seem to be addressed in as much detail but that was probably not due to a deficiency in Dr. Thomas' treatment but instead a likely result of space limitation that he had to work with.

²Time and space will only permit a discussion of the biblical data on this topic and not a historical analysis. For a historical analysis of the development of the distinctions between the church and Israel in covenant theology see Peter. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1969) and Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004).

The Doxological Purpose of God

Brand makes a statement that indicates that he does not fully understand a traditional dispensational view of the doxological purpose of God when he writes, "As to the other principle, the glory of God, covenant theology is every bit as committed to the principle as dispensationalism is, as is readily obvious in any standard work of covenant theology."³ Ryrie contrasts a traditional dispensational view with the covenantal perspective when he writes:

The covenant theologian, in practice, believes the purpose to be salvation (although covenant theologians strongly emphasize the glory of God in their theology), and the dispensationalist says the purpose is broader than that, namely *the glory of God* [emphasis his]...To the normative dispensationalist, the soteriological, or saving, program of God is not the only program but one of the means God is using in the total program of glorifying Himself. Scripture is not man-centered as though salvation were the main theme, but it is God-centered because His glory is at the center. The Bible itself clearly teaches that salvation, important and wonderful as it is, is not an end in itself but is rather a means to the end of glorifying God (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).⁴

This quotation by Ryrie demonstrates that God's overall purpose is His glory; salvation is one, but not the only means, by which His glory is accomplished. While Brand is very accurate in pointing out that covenant theology also focuses greatly on the glory of God, he misses the greater point that Ryrie makes that dispensationalism does not put soteriology at the center of its system as covenant theologians often do or Christology as progressive dispensationalists and progressive covenantalists often do. Instead, dispensationalists put primary emphasis on bibliology (especially the biblical covenants and hermeneutics) as well as theology proper by

³Chad O. Brand, "Introduction," *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) 9.

⁴Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, revised and expanded ed. (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1995), 40.

focusing on how God is glorified by achieving His stated purposes for everything He creates. The following chart⁵ by Dr. Mike Stallard is very helpful for illustrating Ryrie's third point:



As Stallard's chart shows, God receives glory from fulfilling His original created purpose for everything He creates. God's plan is more than just the salvation of individual men, but He has a plan for the world, the nations, Israel, the church, humans, and even angels.

If the nation of Israel was created for God's glory (cf. Isa. 44:23; 49:3, et. al.), then God is greatly glorified when he ultimately fulfills His created purpose for Israel. For this reason Paul proclaims in Romans 11:28-29, "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."⁶ Just as covenant theologians assert that

⁵ Mike Stallard, "The Focus of the Glory of God in Dispensationalism (unpublished course notes in TH1: Advanced Issues in Theological Method, Baptist Bible Seminary, Fall 2004) 1.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted that all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

God will ultimately fulfill His electing purposes in individual Christians, so also God will fulfill His electing purposes in the Nation of Israel; for His calling of the nation of Israel is irrevocable.

Perhaps this is why God so clearly stated His permanent commitment to Israel as a nation in Jeremiah 31:33-40:

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I 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. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the 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: "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever." Thus says the LORD, "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. "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."

For a dispensationalist, this passage is likely as critical to supporting the distinction between the church and Israel as Galatians 6:16 is for covenant theology. Surprisingly, even though multiple authors openly discussed the New Covenant, none of the non-dispensationalist authors addressed this important passage. This passage clearly states that the New Covenant is made with the house of Israel, and that Jerusalem will never be overthrown again. To demonstrate His commitment to Israel, God promises that the fixed order of the sun for the day and the moon for night will end before the offspring (note the physical concept of offspring) of Israel will be cast off. This level of commitment was stated in a book that predicted the Babylonian

captivity for Israelite disobedience. To argue that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan is to deny the clear meaning of this text.

God reiterates this commitment to the nation of Israel in Ezekiel 36:20-36:

When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.' But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. 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. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. 'I am not doing this for your sake,' declares the Lord GOD, 'let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel! Thus says the Lord GOD, 'On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited. Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it.'

First, this passage cannot be referring to the church as a spiritual replacement of Israel because they did not "come out of His land" as Ezekiel 36:20 requires. Additionally, the church has not been cleansed of all of its idolatry and filthiness as described Ezekiel 36:20. Ezekiel 36:28 also promises a time when Israel will be restored to the land promised to their forefathers, a

promise the church cannot fulfil. Each of these descriptions of the New Covenant in the Old Testament promise not only spiritual transformation (despite Israel's present rebellion) but also future restoration to the Promised Land without fear of being conquered in that land again. Most notably for the purpose of understanding the doxological purpose of God, note God's motivation for preserving Israel and delivering Israel. Ezekiel 36:22 clearly indicates that God intends to deliver and cleanse Israel for the sake of the glory of His holy name despite all of their acts to profane it (which once again does not likely refer to the church). Advocates of the non-dispensational perspective must address how God's stated purpose of glorifying Himself by fulfilling His purpose to the nation of Israel is accomplished by replacing Israel with the church.

In contrast to other positions that advocate a partial or complete fulfillment of the New Covenant by the church, the traditional dispensationalist awaits a future fulfillment by Israel in the Promised Land. An illustration might help in defining what that fulfillment might look like. On June 28, 2003, I married my lovely wife Suzan Seggerman (now Parle). In that marriage ceremony, I made a covenantal vow to her to love her "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do us part." When can it be determined that the covenant has been fulfilled? The vows are clear. This covenant cannot be fulfilled until death. If I love her for better or for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health for fifteen years but then divorce her in the sixteenth year, would a fifteen year track record fulfill my covenantal obligation? Clearly not. If I love her for better or worse and richer or poorer but fail to care for her any time she is sick, have I fulfilled the requirements of the covenant? Clearly not. In the same way, an eternal or perpetual covenant, can only be fulfilled in eternity when all aspects (and in the case of the New Covenant the land

aspects as well) are completed.⁷ As opposed to the partial fulfillment that progressive dispensationalists advocate, there may be times when my covenantal commitments are observed or realized. If I do take care of her when she is sick or our love stays strong during poverty, that reflects my efforts to comply with my covenantal obligation but it does not fulfill my covenantal obligation because of the time requirement of commitment until death.

In the same way, as a result of my marriage to Suzan, I was brought into a new family. In the twelve years we have been married, Suzan's parents have grown increasingly ill and we have had to provide much care for them in their sickness. Am I obligated by the covenant to care for her parents ? Nothing in the covenantal vow I made to Suzan requires me to do so. However, because of my deep love for my wife and my love for her parents as a result of my relationship with my wife, as her husband I make great effort to care for her parents. Now, if I divorced Suzan but continued to care for her parents when they were sick, would I have fulfilled my covenantal obligations? Clearly not. The blessings and benefits her parents receive result from a relationship of the covenant but they do not in fulfill the covenant.⁸

Similarly, the church today benefits from the New Covenant as a result of its relationship to Abraham through the bridegroom Christ. However, whatever benefits the church experiences now do not fulfill the eternal and complete requirements of the New Covenant. Such fulfillment awaits the fulfillment of the covenantal promises to ethnic Israel

⁷For a broader, more in depth discussion of traditional dispensationalist views of the New Covenant please see Michael Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* (Arlington Heights, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2012).

⁸Some might argue that the illustration is faulty because the church is the bride of Christ. However, in the Old Testament Israel was the bride of Yahweh, the Father (Isa. 54:5, Hos. 2:16-19, etc.). Thus Israel is the bride of the Father/Yahweh and the church is the bride of the Son/Christ.

when they come as a nation to saving faith in the true Messiah Jesus Christ as promised in Romans 11:25-27, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery-- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.'" Of particular note in this passage is the promise that all of Israel will be saved (*σωθήσεται*) in the future. This could not describe the church because they are experiencing His salvation in the present. Additionally, if the church is spiritual Israel, then who are the saved Gentiles mentioned in Romans 11:11-13? As Thomas mentions, replacement theologians often argue that when the New Testament speaks negatively of Israel it must be referring to ethnic Israel but when the New Testament is speaking positively about Israel it must be referring to the church.⁹ Dispensationalism resolves this inconsistency in the use of the term Israel by consistently identifying Israel as physical descendants of Abraham.¹⁰

⁹Robert L. Thomas, "The Traditional Dispensationalist View," *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) 136.

¹⁰Saucy addresses the common argument that covenant theologians make that the existence of one tree requires the church and Israel to be the same by As Saucy points out, Israel is grafted into its own olive tree in Romans 11:24, "For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?" See Robert L. Saucy, "The Progressive Dispensationalist View," *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) 184. It is somewhat ironic that covenantal dispensationalists argue based on the image of the tree while ignoring the clear statement by Paul in Romans 11:1 that he was an Israelite who was a physical descendent of Abraham and Benjamin. Similarly, Reymond argues for God replacing Israel based on the parable of the wicked farmers (see Reymond's argument on 47-49 and 72-74 for excellent defense of the traditional dispensational view by Thomas) and discounts the literal view of the thousand year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20 because Revelation "is distinguished by other New Testament books by its plethora of symbols" (214). If that is the case, isn't the illustration of the olive tree highly symbolic as well as the parable of the tenant? Using his own hermeneutic, one would think he would give more heed to Paul's clear statement in Romans 11:1 instead of negating it with a symbol.

Misunderstanding of Traditional Dispensational Soteriology¹¹

In contrast to the doxological purpose of God at the center of the traditional dispensational system, each of the other positions argued for salvation being the key overall purpose of God. For instance, Raymond writes, “Using the grammatical/historical canons of hermeneutics, the Swiss reformers … returned to the Bible’s root idea of God’s glory both in creation and particularly in salvation. It was natural, then, that they would develop the biblical covenants as the successive historical instruments whereby God determined to bring glory to himself by the salvation of the elect through the mediatorial work of his Son and the ministrations of His Spirit and his spoken and written word.”¹² Brand and Pratt write, “Our proposal is that the entire debate over the significance of Israel and the church in eschatological perspective is bound up in the *history of salvation* [emphasis his] as it is revealed in the metanarrative of Scripture.”¹³ Saucy also states, “Progressive dispensationalism sees God’s present activity in and through the church as the *already* [emphasis his] of an already not yet working out of messianic kingdom salvation. The *not yet* of messianic salvation will come only with the return of Christ and his righteous reign on earth, when his salvation will encompass all structures in human society and the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”¹⁴ Saucy later qualifies his use of term salvation to refer to more than justification

¹¹The free grace vs. Lordship salvation debate will not be addressed in this section since traditional dispensationalists disagree on issues related to that debate.

¹²Robert L. Reymond, “The Traditional Covenantal View,” *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) 18.

¹³Chad O. Brand and Tom Pratt Jr., “The Progressive-Covenantal View,” *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) 235.

¹⁴Robert L. Saucy, “The Progressive Dispensational View,” *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) 155.

when he writes, “Biblical salvation is more than the gift of eternal life and the deliverance of the individual from the effects of sin. It is the holistic salvation of history—a salvation that restores the order of creation.”¹⁵ This definition of salvation comes closer to the traditional dispensational view of the doxological purpose of God but Saucy’s use of salvation as opposed to glory supports, in his mind, the already not yet hermeneutic.

The overemphasis on soteriology in covenant theology causes misunderstandings on the need for the intermediate kingdom. If God’s primary role is justification of sinners, the thousand year reign of Christ appears to be an unnecessary step in the path from earth to heaven. However, if God’s ultimate purpose is to be glorified by fulfilling His original created purpose, then the millennial reign is very necessary. If God’s original purpose was for man to “rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26) and Adam did not fulfill that purpose because he submitted to the devil disguised as a serpent, then one should not be surprised that God will fulfill His purpose in the millennium on earth when believers will be “priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6) as well as in the eschaton when believers will “will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). God will also judge Satan and his demonic angels at the end of the millennium in Revelation 20:10, Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8 as well as unbelievers in Revelation 20:11-15. Jesus Christ rules on the Davidic throne on earth during the millennium and throughout the eschaton. Israel receives the land promised to Abraham in the millennium and the church participates in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb just prior to the millennium. Isaiah 65 predicts a time when children will

¹⁵Ibid., 173.

live very long lives (although death is possible as indicated in Isaiah 65:20 so this must refer to the millennium and not the eschaton), creation will be at peace as the wolf and the lamb lie together (Isa. 65:20), and Jerusalem will be a place of rejoicing instead of mourning.

Perhaps the focus on soteriology also causes the advocates of other positions to misunderstand traditional dispensational arguments regarding how exactly Jews are saved. For instance, Brand and Pratt write, “The strange idea that somehow the final ‘conversion’ of Israel will happen at the *parousia* is almost an offensive concept, for it implies that there will be a generation of ‘believers’ who will be allowed to pass the ‘offense of the cross’ in favor of a ‘sign from heaven’ (see Matt 12:38-41).”¹⁶ It appears as they do not understand how traditional dispensationalists interpret Romans 11. Most traditional dispensationalists argue that after the rapture of the Church prior to the Tribulation, God once again sets his attention on the national conversion of Israel as described in Romans 11:26-27. He begins by raising up two witnesses (Rev. 11) as well as 144,000 Jews who are sealed at the beginning of the Tribulation (Rev. 7:3-8) and will witness to unbelieving Israel and the world throughout the Tribulation (Rev. 14:1 suggests that the 144,000 Jews survive the entire Tribulation). During the first three and a half years of the Tribulation, the Israelites will enter into a peace treaty with the Antichrist but halfway through the tribulation he will cease all offerings on the restored temple and declare himself to be God (Dan. 9:27, 2 Thess. 2:3-4). Around the same time, the two witnesses will perform many miracles but the Antichrist will eventually kill them (Rev. 11:7). They will rise again from the dead (Rev. 11:11-12) and those who remain in Jerusalem will be converted (Rev. 11:13). After recognizing that the Antichrist is not the Messiah, Zechariah 12:10 states that the

¹⁶Chad O. Brand and Tom Pratt Jr., “The Progressive-Covenantal View,” 242.

Jewish nation will look upon the Messiah (Jesus Christ) whom they have pierced and mourn.

According to Zechariah 13, a national repentance will take place in Israel. The Jews will be persecuted greatly by the Antichrist and in the final battle at Megiddo, they will be surrounded but Jesus Christ will return to deliver and save their lives (Rev. 16 and 19). Hence, the nation will not only be justified by this time but they will also be delivered by their great Messiah (salvation here is used more like how Saucy used it as quoted earlier in the paper, without the complementary hermeneutic). Brand and Pratt seem to misunderstand how this will occur.

Another misunderstanding emerges as the non-dispensational positions argue that dispensationalism requires multiple ways to heaven. For instance, Reymond writes, "This means, although traditional dispensationalists may wish to deny it, that Scripture endorses different 'plans of salvation,' depending on the dispensation in which the Old Testament saint found himself."¹⁷ He then adds, "The elect of God were saved, are saved, and will be saved only by grace through faith in either the anticipated (OT) or accomplished (NT) work of the Messiah."¹⁸ Traditional dispensationalists argue that the means of salvation has always been the same: by grace through faith; however, the content of faith was further clarified through the progress of revelation. If a change in content is a different plan of salvation it is hard to understand how Reymond fails to see the same problem within his definition of how the elect are saved (anticipated and accomplished work are two different things). Acts 4:12 indicates that one must believe in the name of Jesus to be saved (an OT saint would not have believed that)

¹⁷ Robert L. Reymond, "The Traditional Covenantal View," 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

and 1 Corinthians 15:4 includes the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an essential aspect of the gospel (which once again no OT believer would have likely believed).¹⁹

Similarly, Brand and Pratt argue, “The dispensational approach virtually requires multiple pathways to this salvation.”²⁰ Brand also refers to the note on Genesis 12:1 found in the *Scofield Reference Bible* for further evidence.²¹ While some statements by Scofield and Chafer are used to point to multiple ways to salvation, most, if not all, traditional dispensationalists hold to salvation by grace through faith throughout the Old Testament. Distinctions in dispensations do not necessitate multiple ways to salvation. Chafer’s himself said, “Nor is the situation relieved for those who claim that the Law has ceased as a means of justification; for it was never that, nor could it be (Gal 3:11).”²² The law was never a means to justify anyone. Genesis 15:6 made it clear that Abraham was justified by faith. If anything, the law was the means of fellowship by which the Israelite grew in conformity and maturity to God’s will and character.

Misunderstanding of Traditional Dispensational Definition of True Israel

Another area of misunderstanding in the book is how traditional dispensationalists define true Israel. For instance, Reymond refers to Pastor John Hagee, who according to Reymond, “does not believe that Jews must trust Christ to go to heaven ... This *radically* [emphasis his] dispensational statement is heretical in its denial that faith is *universally*

¹⁹ Saucy does a good job of addressing the question of addressing Reymond’s arguments (especially whether OT saints had enough revelation to fully comprehend the death of the anticipated Messiah) on pages 76-78.

²⁰ Chad O. Brand and Tom Pratt Jr., “The Progressive-Covenantal View,” *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, 236.

²¹ Chad O. Brand, “Introduction,” *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, 10.

²² Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 93, no. 372 (October–December 1936): 415.

[emphasis his] essential for salvation. Hagee does not seem to understand that salvation for everyone is a matter of grace, *not race*.²³ Of course, Pastor Hagee is not a widely accepted dispensational scholar and few dispensationalists would espouse his theology (especially on this alleged matter). It appears to be more guilt by association which would be like judging covenant theology on the basis of how the PC USA views gay marriage or inerrancy.

Unfortunately, accusations like this are common. For instance, Knox Seminary's "An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel" seemed to lodge a similar complaint against dispensationalists:

1. The Gospel offers eternal life in heaven to Jews and Gentiles alike as a free gift in Jesus Christ. Eternal life in heaven is not earned or deserved, nor is it based upon ethnic descent or natural birth.
2. All human beings, Jews and Gentiles alike, are sinners, and, as such, they are under God's judgment of death. Because God's standard is perfect obedience and all are sinners, it is impossible for anyone to gain temporal peace or eternal life by his own efforts. Moreover, apart from Christ, there is no special divine favor upon any member of any ethnic group; nor, apart from Christ, is there any divine promise of an earthly land or a heavenly inheritance to anyone, whether Jew or Gentile. To teach or imply otherwise is nothing less than to compromise the Gospel itself...
6. The inheritance promises that God gave to Abraham were made effective through Christ, Abraham's True Seed. These promises were not and cannot be made effective through sinful man's keeping of God's law. Rather, the promise of an inheritance is made to those only who have faith in Jesus, the True Heir of Abraham. All spiritual benefits are derived from Jesus, and apart from him there is no participation in the promises. Since Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the Abrahamic Covenant, all who bless him and his people will be blessed of God, and all who curse him and his people will be cursed of God. These promises do not apply to any particular ethnic group, but to the church of Jesus Christ, the true Israel. The people of God, whether the church of Israel in the wilderness in the Old Testament or the Israel of God among the Gentile Galatians in

²³Robert L. Reymond, "The Traditional Covenantal View," 35.

the New Testament, are one body who through Jesus will receive the promise of the heavenly city, the everlasting Zion. This heavenly inheritance has been the expectation of the people of God in all ages...The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the "Holy Land" cannot be supported by Scripture. In fact, the land promises specific to Israel in the Old Testament were fulfilled under Joshua...No New Testament writer foresees a regathering of ethnic Israel in the land, as did the prophets of the Old Testament after the destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C.²⁴

Reymond alluded to this Open Letter for a better understanding of "the redemptive implications of this bad 'land theology.'" ²⁵ Dr. Mike Stallard has provided an excellent response to the letter,²⁶ but the consistent argument that traditional dispensationalists somehow believe that Jews are saved apart from Christ is troubling. As a result, a clarification is necessary.

When speaking of the land promises in the Abrahamic Covenant, many traditional dispensationalists refer to the promise to Abraham described in Genesis 15:18-21, "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Gergashite and the Jebusite.'" The promise gives the deed of the land from the river of Egypt to the River Euphrates to Abraham and his physical descendants (which were later further clarified in Scripture to include the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Genesis 13:15 established that this right to the land was perpetual by God's design. Hence, when Reymond appeals to Hebrews 11:8-10 on page 43 as proof that

²⁴"An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel," <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/wdoor.html> (accessed 8 September 2015).

²⁵Robert L. Reymond, "The Traditional Covenantal View," 31.

²⁶Dr. Mike Stallard, "A Dispensational Response to the Knox Seminary Open Letter to Evangelicals," <<http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/dispensational-response-to-knox-seminary-open-letter-evangelicals>> (accessed 8 September 2015).

Abraham did not receive or expect to receive the specific land promised to him in his lifetime, the dispensationalist points out that Abraham's descendants were promised the land. There was no expectation that he would possess it in his lifetime but Hebrews 11 assures us that He and his descendants will possess it in the millennium and the eschaton.

Contrary to the Open Letter, the perpetual Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled by Joshua. As previously mentioned in Ezekiel 36:20-36 and Jeremiah 31:33-40, the land is part of the fulfillment of the New Covenant which occurs after the destruction of the temple by Babylon. According to the Land Covenant (or what others call the Palestinian covenant despite concerns from Jewish theologians like Fruchtenbaum about the use of the term Palestinian), the Israelites were unconditionally given the land but the enjoyment of the land was subject to their obedience to God. It is no different than a parent who buys his teenager a car as a gift; the parent may even tell the teenager that the car is his but if the teenager is disciplined he might still be grounded from enjoying his own car. Contrary to the Open Letter's statement, the Abrahamic Covenant promised the specific land described in perpetuity. All of the land was not possessed in Joshua's time and the possession was not forever. The Abrahamic Covenant did not guarantee uninterrupted possession of the land from when the covenant was made any more than the Davidic Covenant guaranteed uninterrupted leadership of a descendent of David from the time of David until the eschaton. Enjoyment of those covenant blessings required obedience. Instead, the Abrahamic Covenant did guarantee that there would be a time in the future (starting with the millennium and ultimately the eschaton) when the Israelites would possess the land promised to them without interruption in the same way that there would one day be a Davidic King who would reign on the Davidic throne on earth forever.

By asserting the above, traditional dispensationalists are not arguing that the current nation of Israel is obedient to God, or worthy of the blessings of the land. Traditional dispensationalists do not endorse every action of Israel any more than the Old Testament prophets did when Israelite kings disobeyed God or acted unjustly. Traditional dispensationalists should speak out when Israel does things that are against God's commands. However, the disobedience of Israel does not negate the right to the land that the nation of Israel has as a result of the Abrahamic Covenant in perpetuity. God may remove them from the land for disobedience (even now) but they have not ceased to be His chosen people.

With respect to rights to the physical land promised to Abraham, traditional dispensationalists agree that the physical descendants were given the land but the enjoyment of the privilege of the land was conditional on obedience. Deuteronomy 1:8 and Numbers 33:53 affirm that God had already given the Israelites the land even before they were in possession of it. It is like a father who already bought his son a car and gave it to him as a gift with the stipulation that he cannot drive it until he is ready to possess it (in this case perhaps when he turns sixteen). The problem occurs when non-dispensationalists connect the land with a soteriological salvation and they argue that somehow by calling Jews God's chosen people that there were multiple ways to salvation. Clearly Moses was elect but he did not possess the land in his physical lifetime due to his disobedience (Num. 20:12). In the same way, some people who were not elect possessed land in the Promised Land. However, when the nation found itself without control of the Promised Land, they could assume based on Deuteronomy 30 that they needed to repent in order to possess the land again (which is the reason why both John the Baptist and Jesus urged repentance as a condition of entering the kingdom).

How then would a dispensationalist address Romans 9:6-7, “But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: 'THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.' That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.” What is often missed about this passage is that Paul is not comparing one person who wasn't a physical descendent with one who was. Both Isaac and Ishmael were physical descendants. However, only Isaac shared the faith of Abraham and was a son of the promise. According to Paul, physical descendancy was not enough to constitute true Israel. Jesus said the same in John 8:44 that the religious leaders were not sons of Abraham but sons of the devil (John the Baptist also discounts physical descendancy alone in Mat. 3:9). According to Paul, in order to be a member of true Israel, one must not only share in the physical descendancy of Abraham but also the faith of Abraham. Paul emphasizes his physical descendancy as an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, “For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1). Since this use of the term introduces Romans 11, it should determine what Israel refers to throughout the chapter. Paul emphasizes the physical aspect of being an Israelite and in Romans 11:6 notes that being a true Israelite also requires salvation by grace, not works.

The church is comprised of spiritual descendants of Abraham based on their relationship with Christ according to Galatians 3 which emphasizes the spiritual blessings the Gentiles would receive as a result of the Abrahamic Covenant. However, this spiritual descendancy does not make them true Israel. Paul clearly calls them Gentiles, “But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous” (Rom 11:11). “Their”

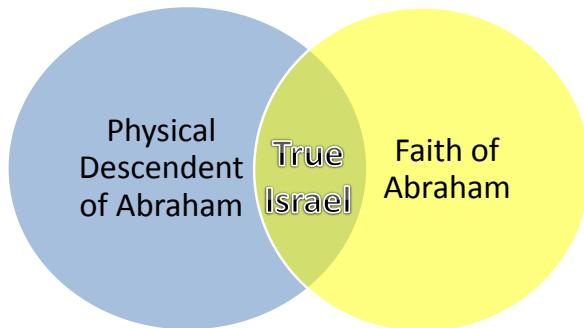
and “them” refers to the Jews but the Gentiles are saved. If the church is referred to as spiritual Israel, who are the spiritual believing Gentiles referred to in this passage?

This distinction is further supported when Paul writes:

And so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. 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. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. (Rom 11:26-31)

The passage argues that the same group that are saved are currently enemies of the Gentile believers (and unbelievers in the gospel currently). However, God has chosen the nation of Israel as God's beloved with an irrevocable calling. The Israel in question, in contrast to the Gentile believers in the church, is presently disobedient but still is an object of God's mercy. Based on these biblical distinctions, the figure below represents true Israel from a traditional dispensational perspective:

True Israel shares the Faith of Abraham and Physical Descendency



The religious leaders during Jesus' time shared physical descendency but were not true Israel but sons of the devil (John 8:44)

Gentiles in the church share the faith of Abraham and are consequently called Abraham's descendants (Gal. 3:25) but they are not true Israel as described by Paul in Romans 9:6

Consequently, from a soteriological perspective, the traditional dispensational distinction between the church and Israel does not establish a separate gospel because true Israel must share the physical descendants of Abraham and the spiritual faith of Abraham. Ultimately, as mentioned before, the true permanent inheritance of the land promised to Abraham awaits the beginning of the millennium when all of the physical descendants of Israel will trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Messiah.²⁷

Misunderstanding of Literal Hermeneutic

Throughout the book, non-dispensationalists misunderstand the hermeneutic that guides traditional dispensationalists. The non-dispensationalists prioritize the New Testament interpretations of the Old Testament and presume that the New Testament trumps the Old Testament's original meaning. For instance, Reymond writes, "To understand Abraham's concept of God's land promise to him, we must give special heed to the insights of the writers of the New Testament."²⁸ This argument presumes that every use of the Old Testament by a New Testament author was exegetical in nature. In another paper, I argued that the New Testament authors use the Old Testament in many ways, not just exegetically. Those ways include: exegesis, exposition, application, allusion, illustration (which may include typology).²⁹ In Galatians 4:24, Paul used the Old Testament allegorically. Does that mean that modern day

²⁷This section of the paper primarily addressed Romans 9:6-7. Thomas does an excellent job addressing Galatians 6:16 on pages 115-116 using similar arguments that the Israel of God refers to those who share both the physical descendants and the faith of Abraham.

²⁸Robert L. Reymond, "The Traditional Covenantal View," 43. Dr. Robert Thomas addressed this issue pretty well in his responses throughout the book so little space will be used in this paper to address this section.

²⁹Joseph Parle, "Overcoming the Myth that Dispensationalists Do Not Believe the Old Testament Applies to Modern Contexts" (paper presented at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Houston, TX, 3–4 October 2012), 5–12.

interpreters should read the Old Testament allegorically? Clearly not. I argued in my paper that some uses of the New Testament are not exegetical in nature (see Paul's use of Luk. 10:7 in 1 Tim. 5:18 which is primarily an application of a principle to the disciples to elders). Does that mean that modern day interpreters should not exegete the New Testament for its original intended meaning as intended by the original author as written to the original audience?

The primary principle I argued for in that previous paper is that one should derive exegetical principles from those Old Testament or New Testament texts in which the author is clearly exegeting the text (e.g., Psa. 110:1 in Mat. 24:44) and not from those which are not intended to provide an exegetical understanding of what the text actually means. Such uses of the Old Testament in the New Testament are fairly rare since the Old Testament is often being applied to an audience (namely the church) that the original Old Testament authors did not anticipate.

One issue that often arises is the insistence of single meaning being deposited in the original text as written to the original audience as intended by the original author. Robert Saucy argues, "Because the Scripture is God's Word conveyed through a human author (2 Peter 1:21), a text may have a more limited meaning to the human author in his historical context than it does to the divine author."³⁰ Traditional dispensationalists tend to distinguish between what E.D. Hirsch defines as meaning and significance. Hirsch argues that "meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent."³¹ He contrasts this with significance which "names a relationship

³⁰Robert L. Saucy, "The Progressive Dispensational View," 157.

³¹Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven.: Yale University Press, 1967), 8.

between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.”³² Thus, according to Hirsch, what changes for the author over time was the significance of the text and not the meaning. Thus he concludes that when critics argue for a change in meaning, they really mean a change in significance.

As an illustration, when I was a professor at the College of Biblical Studies, our Academic Dean at the time proposed a new vacation policy to limit faculty vacation requests to periods in between semesters when classes were not taking place. I was very concerned about this policy because when my wife was off for the summer from her work in the public schools I would still be working because we teach three semesters (fall, spring, and summer) as part of our contract. I and several other faculty members voiced our concern about this policy. The Academic Dean assured us that he would understand if we had special requests for vacation outside of the parameters of this policy. However, I continued to oppose the policy because I said, “Who knows whether the next Academic Dean will read the policy the same way you do? Policies should not be written with unwritten exceptions in mind because we do not know who the next Academic Dean is and how he will interpret them.” Little did I know that within a few years of that meeting, the Academic Dean would receive an offer to work in an Executive Pastor position at another church and I would become the next Academic Dean of the College of Biblical Studies. As I reflect on that situation, the meaning of my statements has not changed but I now have a greater appreciation for the significance of those statements that I did not have then. I had no idea at the time when I was referring to the next Academic Dean that I was actually referring to myself. Being the next Academic Dean of the College of Biblical Studies was

³²Ibid.

not a goal of mine and I would have never guessed I would be in this position. I now see an irony in those statements that I did not see then (as an aside, one of my first acts as Academic Dean was to eliminate that policy). The point of this illustration is that it is impossible to know for sure if Moses understood that the seed mentioned in Genesis 3:15 was the infinite God-man Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who would die on a cross and conquer Satan once and for all. However, contrary to Saucy's point, that information does not change the meaning of the original text; it just provides a greater significance that may not have been seen before.

Additionally, the priority of how the Old Testament and New Testament are interpreted and the results are synthesized differs between dispensationalism and other systems. Dr. Mike Stallard, in his article entitled "Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism," provides an interesting contrast. According to Stallard, a traditional dispensationalist system usually utilizes the following theological method:

1	The recognition of one's own preunderstanding
2	The formulation of a biblical theology from the Old Testament based upon literal interpretation (grammatical-historical method of interpretation) of the Old Testament text
3	The formulation of a biblical theology from the New Testament based upon literal interpretation (the grammatical-historical method of interpretation) of the New Testament text, which method includes the backgrounds arrived at via point 2 above
4	The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all inputs to theology including points 2 and 3 above ³³

In contrast, covenant theologians and progressive covenant theologians utilize the following approach:

³³Mike Stallard, "Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 29.

1	The recognition of one's own preunderstanding
2	The formulation of a biblical theology of the New Testament based upon the literal interpretation (grammatical-historical interpretation) of the New Testament text
3	The formulation of a biblical theology of the Old Testament based upon the New Testament understanding of the Old Testament text
4	The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all of the inputs above to theology including the results of points 2 and 3 above ³⁴

The distinction cited above is critical for understanding the distinction between dispensationalist and non-dispensationalist systems. The dispensationalist system best fits the progress of revelation and the way the original New Testament readers would have read the Bible (with the Old Testament as background). The dispensationalist system preserves literal interpretation because it does not allow the New Testament to be a trump card that changes the intended meaning of the Old Testament text (although it may lend greater significance to the Old Testament). The dispensationalist system portrays God as faithful to literally fulfilling His Old Testament and New Testament promises in the same way he already literally fulfilled Old Testament promises about the coming Messiah.

Conclusion

In this paper I evaluated *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views* for potential areas of misunderstanding of the traditional dispensationalist perspective. The key areas of misunderstanding among the non-dispensational writers that were reviewed in this paper were: the doxological purpose of God, a traditional dispensational soteriology, a traditional dispensational understanding of true Israel, and literal hermeneutic. Advocates of positions outside of dispensationalism fail to realize that dispensationalism argues for a doxological

³⁴Ibid., 31.

purpose that is greater than salvation of the elect. As a result, they often misinterpret statements about Israel being God's chosen people to imply that Jews are saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Instead, traditional dispensationalists argue that true Israel includes those who share the physical descendants from Abraham and the faith of Abraham. This distinction results from a literal hermeneutic that reads the Old Testament literally to provide the background to understanding the New Testament prior to synthesizing the observations into a comprehensive theology.