

# What Do Israel and the Church Share from a Traditional Dispensational Viewpoint?

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Traditional dispensationalism has long frustrated non-dispensationalists with its focus on the distinction between Israel and the Church.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this distinction is, as Ryrie noted long ago, the *essence* of the dispensational approach to Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Such a conclusion should be overwhelmingly accepted by those interested in Bible interpretation. Nonetheless, the centering of dispensationalism on this needed doctrinal conclusion sometimes obscures the fact that most dispensationalists actually believe that Israel and the Church share some important elements in God's historical plan. More importantly, such sharing between these two significant institutional creations of God means that dispensationalists have some theological wickets to discuss. Thus, the purpose of this article is to frame the sharing of various experiences between Israel and the Church and thereby bring added precision to the excellent framework of a dispensational understanding of the Bible. In order to accomplish this task, review of several areas will be undertaken: past intensification of the distinction by dispensationalists, shared points between Israel and the Church, and potential implications of such sharing using the pretribulational rapture as a case study.

## Intensification of the Doctrinal Distinction between Israel and the Church

Part of the needed discussion involves the extent to which various dispensationalists in the history of the tradition have ordered theological formulations that intensify the distinction between Israel and the Church. Here we will review two such examples. First, Lewis Sperry Chafer offered the view that there are two new covenants, one for Israel and one for the Church.

There remains to be recognized a heavenly covenant for the heavenly people, which is also styled like the preceding one for Israel a "new covenant." It is made in the blood of Christ (cf. Mark 14:24) and continues in effect throughout this age, whereas the new covenant made with Israel happens to be future in its application. To suppose that these two covenants—one for Israel and one for the Church—are the same is to assume that there is latitude of common interest between God's purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church. Israel's covenant, however, is new only because it replaces the Mosaic, but the Church's covenant is new because it introduces that which is God's mysterious and unrelated purpose.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> One example of disagreement expressed by covenant theologians is Michael Horton's statement: "Covenant theology begins with continuity rather than discontinuity, not because of any a priori bias, but because Scripture itself moves from promise to fulfillment, not from one distinct program to another and then back again" (*Introducing Covenant Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006], 20). Horton's expression, while missing the mark, is superior to the caricature of dispensationalism found in G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 340-41. Also, see Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 428.

<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 44-47; *Dispensationalism*, revised and expanded (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 38-41.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), VII: 98-99.

While respecting Chafer, it must be noted that this statement at least partly bases the theological conclusion about two new covenants on the prior theological conclusion that Israel and the Church have little or nothing in common relative to purpose. In fact, Chafer seems to amplify the distinction by his handling of the issue of two new covenants.<sup>4</sup>

In 2009, the Council on Dispensationalism dedicated its meetings to conversations about the new covenant. Three major views were robustly defended in that conference with a book published representing the positions.<sup>5</sup> The two new covenants view was not among the views advanced by the speakers or authors. A majority of dispensationalists seemed to affirm that the Church had some relationship to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 based upon New Testament revelation while believing that the promises to Israel relative to the new covenant will be carried out in the future kingdom precisely as God gave in the prophet Jeremiah. A strong minority argued that the Church had no relation to the new covenant of Jeremiah but did not seem to insist on a separate new covenant for the Church in the Chaferian sense. In fact, a study of dispensationalists prior to Chafer showed that few, if any, during the earlier period actually held to his position.<sup>6</sup>

A second illustration of possible intensification of the distinction between Israel and the Church among dispensationalists involves the heavenly/earthly dichotomy that is well-known and controversial within the history of the movement. While it is not necessary at this juncture to go into all of the issues, the relation of New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2) vis-a-vis the millennium provides fodder for discussion. There has been an attempt by some dispensationalists to ensure that the future destinies of Israel and the Church are spatially separated during the millennium. The result is the virtual absolutizing of the distinction. For example, Darby comments on the New Jerusalem with these words: "What follows is the description of the heavenly city, as before we had that of Babylon. Its heavenly character and millennial connection with the earth is revealed."<sup>7</sup> This heavenly character for Darby is something that is more than a spiritual quality; it is a physical spatial reality. He goes on to note, "The vision goes on to shew its relationship to those on the earth, and its inhabitants: a seeming inconsistency, but no real one; for the city is viewed as the estate of the bride...The connection of the holy city with the earth, **though not on it**, is everywhere seen" (emphasis mine).<sup>8</sup> When one also studies Darby's summary of Hebrews 12:22-24, he appears to allow Old Testament saints associated with Israel into this heavenly city. However, the spatial distinction still exists between the Jewish remnant on earth headquartered in the

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Ryrie at times follows Chafer closely in this matter. He summarizes, relative to NT texts about the Church and the new covenant, what he considers to be the most significant issue: "If the Church does not have a [separate] new covenant then she is fulfilling Israel's promises, for it has been shown that the Old Testament teaches that the new covenant is for Israel alone. If the Church is fulfilling Israel's promises as contained in the new covenant or anywhere in Scripture, then premillennialism is weakened" (*The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, reprint ed. [Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1981], 118). The bracketed term is this author's addition for clarity. In the matter of two new covenants, then, Ryrie asserts that premillennialism is threatened if the distinction between Israel and the Church is not strictly followed.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Mike Stallard, "The Interpretation of the New Covenant in the History of Traditional Dispensationalism" in *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* edited by Mike Stallard (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012), 73-106.

<sup>7</sup> J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, reprint ed. (Addison, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1980), 5:560.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:563.

earthly Jerusalem (along with the Gentile earthly nations of the millennium) and this heavenly city of resurrected saints of all ages.<sup>9</sup>

Pentecost adds his support to this approach to some degree. While discussing whether Revelation 21:9 to 22:7 describes the millennium or the eternal state, he says, “It is generally agreed by interpreters of both views that the city seen in Revelation 21:10 is suspended over the earth.”<sup>10</sup> When later outlining the city’s relation to the millennium and the Church, Pentecost argues, “When the Lord returns with His bride to reign, her dwelling place is not to be left unoccupied for a thousand years. Rather, the place of occupancy is transferred from heaven to a position over the earth...This dwelling place remains in the air, to cast its light, which is the shining of the effulgence of the Son, onto the earth so that ‘the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it’...”<sup>11</sup> To be sure Pentecost places all resurrected saints including those from Old Testament Israel in this holy celestial city which hovers over the earth during the millennium. He cites those who disagree because this would not fully honor the distinction between Israel and the Church overall.<sup>12</sup> Pentecost justifies his viewpoint of having both saints from Israel and the Church within the city during the millennium by stressing: “it would thus be concluded that during the millennium the heavenly city will be brought into a relation to the earth, although not settled on the earth. The resurrected saints of all ages in that city will be in their eternal state and possessed of their eternal blessings, even though such is not true of things down on the earth itself.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, he seems to be more concerned with the distinction between millennial non-glorified saints and resurrected saints at this point than he is the distinction between Israel and the Church. Nonetheless, national Israel on earth existing from the surviving remnant from the tribulation is still maintained in spatial distinction from the heavenly church saints within this scheme.

Two examples of theologizing within traditional dispensationalism have been given which highlight how distinctions are played out between Israel and the Church. Neither of these examples appear to be a majority view among traditional dispensationalists at the present time. However, the lesson to be learned from these examples is the need for all dispensationalists to examine their own arguments to see if the distinction between Israel and the Church is serving as a theological switch to adjudicate the views in question. In all cases, there must be valid warrant found in exegetical and textual arguments. Along the way, we must also ask, “how absolute is the distinction?”

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5:342-344.

<sup>10</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 569. This particular writer does not necessarily agree with this statement. It is better to see the purpose of the city coming down in Revelation 21:1-4 to be the moving of the abode of the triune God to the new earth after the millennium so He can dwell with all saved men so that the curse is finally and fully lifted. The arguments are beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to note that this author agrees with the position of Robert Thomas in most details. See Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 457-58. Thomas notes, “Grounds for explaining this as a city descending like a space platform and hovering over the earth as this view sometimes proposes are nonexistent” (458).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 577.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Pentecost here cites the commentaries of F. C. Jennings and Walter Scott.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 579. Cp. Hebrews 12:22-24.

## What Do Israel and the Church Share?

### The One True God

It goes without saying that Israel and the Church share the same God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, we should not rush by this important point. This is the same God who became incarnated in Jesus Christ and provided atonement through the gospel. The same Creator who raised up the nation of Israel within the history of nations also created the Church on the day of Pentecost. While not belaboring the point, this sharing between Israel and the Church actually allows a focus on unity in diversity that is theologically significant. It is the one, true, and living God who is able to do more than one thing in history, more than individual redemption of souls, who shows his sovereign power within the corridors of time. The multi-faceted nature of God's work in the world's timeline demonstrates his astounding glory. This is what Ryrie means when he talks about the doxological unifying theme of the Bible.<sup>14</sup> The earlier dispensationalists referred to the same idea under the rubric of the doxological biblical purposes of God, highlighting the plural *purposes*.

One striking example of how dispensationalists have voiced this biblical truth comes from A. C. Gaebelein. Several of his writings, decades apart, show amazing consistency in his thinking on this matter. In a 1901 article in *Our Hope*, Gaebelein outlined the multi-faceted plan of God's redemptive purposes brought to fruition by the Second Coming and associated events.<sup>15</sup> Later in the 1930s he writes a series of books highlighting the hopelessness of the present age over against prophetic hope offered for the Church in the rapture, for Israel in the Second Coming and start of the kingdom, for the nations of the world, and for all creation. Of special note is his 1935 work *Hopeless, Yet There is Hope*.<sup>16</sup> Gaebelein closed this volume with a prayer: "Even so Come, Thou Hope of the hopeless, Thou Hope of Israel, Thou Hope of the World, all Nations and Creation. Even so, Come Lord Jesus." This prayer is not exhaustive but demonstrates the many tracks in God's overall work which Gaebelein preached.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, this close friend of Scofield and Chafer illustrates the doxological biblical purposes of God.<sup>18</sup> What is being voiced in this analysis is that continuity and diversity are brought together. Such a

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<sup>14</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 40-41.

<sup>15</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, "The Coming of the Lord, the Hope of Israel, and the Hope of the Nations and Creation," *Our Hope* 8 (September 1901):194-99.

<sup>16</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *Hopeless, Yet There is Hope: A Study in World Conditions and Their Solution* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope,") 1935.

<sup>17</sup> A covenant theologian might complain that the church is not mentioned in Gaebelein's prayer, thereby supporting the covenant accusation that for dispensationalists the church is a "mere" parenthesis in God's dealings. They would charge dispensationalists with believing that Israel is where the action is. However, in response, one would have to note that Gaebelein is clear in *Hopeless, Yet There is Hope* about the Church's redemption as part of the overall plan. It just does not show up in the prayer explicitly. Furthermore, if one reads Gaebelein's commentary on Ephesians, he will find that Gaebelein believed that the presentation of the church in this New Testament book is "by far the greatest revelation" (*God's Masterpiece: An Analytical Exposition of Ephesians I-III* [New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1913], 2-3. Far from seeing the church as a mere parenthesis, he saw it as the highest truth.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion, see this author's published dissertation: Michael D. Stallard, *The Early Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 234-45. This section of my dissertation was also adapted and published as Mike Stallard, "Prophetic Hope in the Writings of Arno C. Gaebelein: A Possible Demonstration of the Doxological Purpose of Biblical History," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 2 (Fall 1998): 190-211.

doxological purpose stems from a shared God who is active in the life of Israel and the Church albeit in distinct ways.

### Individual Redemption

A second point of commonality between Israel and the Church is individual redemption. For dispensationalists, this is also virtually assumed, but in the light of ongoing complaints from covenant theologians about the alleged false teaching of two ways of salvation (which never seems to go away), it is impossible to gloss over the issue.<sup>19</sup> Gaebelein comes to the rescue once again. While Scofield and Chafer have debated passages in their writings, Gaebelein has crystal clarity on the issue: “for their (pre-Pentecost saints) salvation as well as ours (Church saints), is ‘not of works’ but of Grace alone.”<sup>20</sup> With such a statement, one wonders why covenant theologians and other critics of traditional dispensationalism do not pay attention to a contemporary of Scofield and Chafer when his writings are perhaps more voluminous than Scofield and Chafer combined. Ryrie also assists us in this matter by his excellent discussion of the content of faith—the change throughout the progress of revelation that takes place in the level of understanding people had of the object of faith.<sup>21</sup>

The significance of a sharing in the plan of individual redemption for Israel and the Church lies once again in the idea of unity through diversity. The same God is providing the same individual redemption based upon the same gospel of Christ although the working out of the details might vary through the divergent contexts of the dispensations of history.

### Elements of Purpose

A third area of sharing between Israel and the Church is found in certain elements of purpose. For example, dispensationalists strongly affirm that the nature of Israel as a national, ethnic people is quite different than the nature of the Church as an international, non-ethnic institution. However, within this diversity there is the shared spiritual purpose of being a light or witness to the world. One of the themes of the book of Isaiah relates to the Messiah as the light of Israel and the world (e.g., 9:2; 42:6). In addition, the prophet notes in Isaiah 43:9-10 that the people of Israel are to serve as witnesses to the other nations:

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<sup>19</sup> Dispensationalists over the last two decades have been fond of alluding to the horrid work of John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, Foreword by R. C. Sproul (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991). Gerstner accuses dispensationalists of being dubious evangelicals with a wrong view of salvation and even lays the groundwork for believing that our erroneous doctrine of salvation places us outside of salvation in the position of a Christian cult. Culprits of our alleged wrong thinking are found in our doctrine of two ways of salvation and antinomian tendencies for the present age of grace and others including how the distinction between Israel and the Church leads to theological problems in the arena of individual redemption. I do not have access to his paper, but progressive dispensationalist Todd Mangum discussed the Chafer and Scofield problematic statements lending to a two ways of salvation position within dispensationalism. I attended his presentation and was disappointed with his lack of reference to Gaebelein’s clarity over against Scofield and Chafer.

<sup>20</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Book of Exodus: A Complete Analysis of Exodus with Annotations* (New York: Our Hope Publication Office, n.d.), 21.

<sup>21</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 105-22. See also Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1989), 376-79.

- <sup>9</sup> Let all the nations be gathered together,  
 And let the people be assembled.  
 Who among them can declare this,  
 And show us former things?  
 Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified;  
 Or let them hear and say, "*It is truth.*"
- <sup>10</sup> "You *are* My witnesses," says the LORD,  
 "And My servant whom I have chosen,  
 That you may know and believe Me,  
 And understand that I *am* He (NKJV).

The blind among the nations are to see the light by means of Israel's witness to and about God. The message is repeated in verse 12 – "Therefore you are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God."

This same description is used for the Church. In the New Testament, Jesus affirms that He is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). But he also plainly told his disciples that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They should let their light shine to point other people to the Father (Matt. 5:13-16). The event of this teaching is pre-Pentecost, but the very character of Christians can be portrayed as light (Eph. 5:8). From the reluctant missionary Jonah to the (at times) hesitant Jewish outreach to the Gentiles in the book of Acts, the people of God in Israel and in the Church are said to witness and testify to the work of God that is available to those in the world.

Unfortunately, one must be careful at this point not to draw the analogy too tight. Covenant theology makes theological connections where dispensationalism observes simple analogies. The dispensationalist will not use the sharing by Israel and the Church to identify the two. Israel is not the Old Testament Church. The Church is not defined soteriologically as the collection of all of the saved of all time. Similarity does not prove identity.

### God's Coming Kingdom

The final and most important area to be discussed relative to sharing by Israel and the Church is God's coming kingdom. This topic has already been addressed to some degree earlier when reviewing possible intensification of the distinction between Israel and the Church. At this point, what remains is to flesh out this author's understanding in brief terms of how Israel and the Church share the millennium.<sup>22</sup>

Beginning with Israel, one can easily point to the Old Testament promises to restore Israel in a final, ultimate, righteous, and earthly kingdom in the physical land promised to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac (e.g., Isa. 11:11ff; Daniel 2, 7; Eze. 36-48; Zech. 12-14; Amos 9:11-15). The ruler of this earthly domain is to be Christ Himself. The passages cited from the First Testament are enough. No New Testament texts are needed to confirm a straight-forward reading of these texts, although they may be found (e.g., Matt. 24-25; Rom. 9-11; Revelation 4-22). How can someone take the literal promise of eternal security for Church Age believers found in Romans 8:28-39 if God did not mean

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<sup>22</sup> We will leave aside the issue of the eternal state for now. Suffice it to say that this author views the coming earthly kingdom of God initiated at the Second Coming as the millennium (the literal 1000 years) *plus* eternal state (new heavens and new earth). The Old Testament prophets knew nothing of a 1000 years, only a forever, earthly dominion. There are both continuities and discontinuities between the two aspects of God's forever earthly kingdom.

His promises in these earlier and glorious Old Testament contexts?<sup>23</sup> How can I understand promises to me individually and literally, if God did not mean to fulfill His land promises to national Israel? The upshot of all of these Old Testament passages and a host of others shows that Israel will be on the earth during the millennium in glorious kingdom restoration centered in the Middle East in the land promised to Abraham.

At this point one must ask how the church saints fit into this coming kingdom. To be sure, dispensationalists do not see church saints in general living in or ruling in the land of Israel, although all nations will come up to Jerusalem to see the Lord (Isa. 2:1-4). A key passage for understanding the role of Church saints in the millennium is Luke 19:11-27. Right before the triumphal entry of Jesus, he tells them a parable because many of them, due to his proximity to Jerusalem, “supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (NASB). In other words, there is a coming delay relative to the expectations of many of His Jewish followers. There is no reason to see a spiritual-only kingdom in view in these words. They were anticipating that Jesus, the healer of the sick and controller of the wind, would defeat the Romans and move ahead with God’s earthly kingdom program. His parable is intended to prepare them for the fact that His plan was not to do so at that time in history.

Commentators from various theological positions point out the historical backdrop to Jesus’ teaching. From the dispensational side, we can use Ironside as an example. Quoting at length to get the full force, Ironside’s comments are instructive:

...This parable was based on an historical incident that had taken place not many years before, and with which the people generally would be familiar. When King Herod died, that is, the Herod who lived when our Lord Jesus Christ was born, and who decreed that all babies in Bethlehem should be put to death, he decreed in his will that Archelaus should succeed him on the throne. But the Jews hated this man and did not want him to reign over them, and so he went over the sea to Rome to confer with Augustus Caesar, and to secure his approval regarding the kingdom. Before going away he entrusted large sums of money to many of his friends and gave instructions as to how this money was to be used in his absence, in order to make other friends who would forward his interests and be ready to acknowledge his claims. But the Jews who hated him sent an embassy after him and said to Caesar, “We do not want this man to reign over us. He is cruel; we hate every member of his house.” Archelaus conferred with the Emperor, secured his approval and eventually returned to Jerusalem to be proclaimed king over Judaea. He then sent for the servants to whom he had entrusted the money and had inquired as to the use they had made of it, rewarding them according to their faithfulness to his interests. After that he summoned his enemies who had been determined that he should not be recognized as king, and put many of them to death.

All of this was fresh in the minds of the people...He [Jesus] based His parable upon that incident, because there was a certain likeness in what took place then and what will take place in connection with His present rejection and future return.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In describing the role that Romans 9-11 plays within the argument of the book of Romans, Woodrow Kroll comments that “the many messianic promises to the Jews of old necessitated an understand that God would yet honor those promises” (*The Book of Romans: Righteousness in Christ*, Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series [Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002], 153.

<sup>24</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of Luke*, reprint ed. (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1955), 576-77. The progressive dispensationalist Darrell L. Bock makes the same historical connection in this passage (*The NIV*

Thus, Jesus, in this parable, uses a recent historical event to compare his own situation relative to the Jewish leaders at that time.

Several elements of the parable need to be mentioned. First, it almost goes without saying, that the nobleman represents Jesus. The citizens or subjects who hated him and did not want him to reign over them (v. 14) are the enemies that are destroyed on his return (v. 27). In the context they must allude to the Jews who will soon (within a week?) call for Jesus' crucifixion. The larger picture is that those Jews who rejected him at that time will not stand to enter the kingdom when Jesus returns. It is not a stretch to see the application that all those who reject Jesus as ruler over them will share the same fate.

Of special interest for purposes here is the identification of the servants whom Jesus leaves behind with an assignment. The assignment is portrayed in the form of giving each one ten minas.<sup>25</sup> Jesus tells them to "put the money to work...until I come back" (v. 13, NIV). The amount given to the servants is not the key point. What each servant does with what is given to him is crucial. Upon the return of the Lord there is the granting of rewards based upon how well the servants performed. The servant who earned ten minas with his lot *reigns* over ten cities in the coming kingdom (v. 17). The one who earned five minas *reigns* over five cities (v. 19). The one who fails to earn any additional minas through lack of effort and a wrong view of Jesus gets to reign over nothing (v. 24).<sup>26</sup> Notice that the rewards are described in terms of administrative ruling. There is a reigning with Christ in His coming kingdom.

The question that now must be addressed is if the parable teaching actually encompasses Church saints. After all, the Church did not yet exist when Jesus spoke these words. But the anticipatory nature of what Chafer called an intercalation and other dispensationalists have called a parenthesis envisions much more than potential Jewish believers who would have been the audience of Jesus when this parable was given. Luke's Gospel ends with the call for the gospel witness to go to "all nations" (24:47). The parallel with the Parable of Talents in Matthew (25:14-30) has an even clearer context of a biblical theology of a book that shows the development of and shift to the Gentile mission. This anticipates the Church age. The implication is that the words of Jesus in the Lukan 19 parable about servants receiving administrative rewards in God's coming kingdom would indeed include Church Age saints.

At this point, we have noted that there is the nation of Israel whose saints rule during the coming kingdom in the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. But through the parable of the minas we see the door opened for the Church saints simultaneously ruling, but presumably they would rule somewhere on the earth other than the land promised to Abraham. In this light, not only do Israel and the Church share the same God, individual redemption, and elements of purpose, they share location and station within God's coming earthly kingdom.

*Application Commentary: Luke* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002], 485) as does the nondispensationalist William Barclay (*The Gospel of Luke*, Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975], 236).

<sup>25</sup> A mina is the equivalent of about four month's salary at that time. See Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1533.

<sup>26</sup> The issue of millennial exclusionism is beyond the scope of this paper. This author's view is that the one who gets nothing is a false professor who is lost and unable to enter the kingdom. The idea that this is a true believer who will miss the millennium but be part of the eternal state does not fit the teaching of Scripture.



## Implications of Sharing: A Case Study of the Rapture of the Church

The sharing of Israel and the Church in various ways has some implications that traditional dispensationalists should review. In particular, the sharing of the kingdom by the two institutions influences how the argument for the pre-tribulational rapture may be engaged. A standard argument for the pre-trib rapture is that the distinction between Israel and the Church compels the conclusion that the Church will avoid the tribulational wrath of God. Typically the argument is stated this way: (1) the tribulation period of seven years is noted as a time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), (2) therefore, that time is designed for Israel and not for the Church, (3) hence, the Church has no part in the tribulation, (4) the next step is to state how this requires a pre-trib rapture.<sup>27</sup>

Modern dispensationalists of all time periods have made the above argument in some form. Gaebelein comments:

All passages which have to do with the great tribulation prove that it is Israel's time of sorrow (Jer. xxx; Mark xiii: 14-22; Rev. vii:1-14; Dan. xii:1; Matt. xxiv). "Jacob's trouble," not the Church's trouble. Christ saved us from wrath to come and will deliver us from that hour of trial that shall try them that dwell on the earth. When this takes place the Church will be far above the storm (John iii:36; 1 Thess. V:9; Rev. iii:10).<sup>28</sup>

A few decades later, the venerable Pentecost uses the same argument although he does a better job of demonstrating that this particular argument is used within a cumulative case approach to proving the pre-tribulational rapture: "It should be borne in mind that it is not claimed that all of the arguments have the same importance or weight. The pretribulational doctrine is not based on these arguments singly, but rather they are considered as cumulative evidence that the church will be delivered by rapture before the inception of Daniel's seventieth week."<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, Pentecost follows the same template on the particular argument from the distinction between Israel and the Church. While correctly beginning with the need of literal interpretation, Pentecost notes that there are two purposes for the tribulation. First, it is a time of God's wrath upon the whole world (including those outside of Israel).<sup>30</sup> The second major purpose of the tribulation according to Pentecost is the preparation of Israel for her King (and Kingdom).<sup>31</sup> In both of these assessments Pentecost is accurate.

However, one must note that Pentecost is somewhat dismissive of the issue which concerns this author, namely, the reasoning for automatically excluding the church from those within the category of the world. It is true that the earth-dwellers in the book of Revelation are unbelievers who rebel against God and would not characterize the Church. However, the many passages throughout the Bible speaking of the day of the Lord wrath upon the world need to be weighed more keenly. In the end,

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<sup>27</sup> The summary given here is also stated at the author's blog: Our Hope, "Distinction Between Israel and the Church as an Argument for the Pre-Trib Rapture," August 12, 2015. See [www.our-hope.org](http://www.our-hope.org).

<sup>28</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, "The True Church: Its Translation Before the End," *Our Hope* 38 (September 1931): 184. See also Michael Stallard, *Gaebelein*, 238-39. Observe particularly Note 180.

<sup>29</sup> Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 218. It is also true that Gaebelein in the note above also had other arguments but he generally presented them more as "proof" arguments that stood alone, although sometimes it is hard to tell in some authors.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-98.

Pentecost argues from the distinction between Israel and the Church and between the Church and the earth-dwellers to argue for the pre-trib rapture within a cumulative case approach.

A more recent use of the argument from distinction comes from dispensationalist Rydelnik. He contends, "Seeing a distinction between Israel and the church inexorably leads to a belief that the rapture of the church will take place before the tribulation, when God refocuses His attention on Israel."<sup>32</sup> Much of his article is given over to the fact that Israel and the Church are distinct and the tribulation period is designed with Israel in mind. Thus, the distinction serves virtually as a stand-alone argument demonstrating a pre-trib rapture.

It is the conviction of this author that most dispensationalists who argue this way really do not use the distinction as a stand-alone argument for the pre-trib rapture. Many times other truths such as exegetical and theological arguments in familiar texts like 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and Revelation 3:10 are often assumed but not stated. When this happens, exegetical grounding is thus implicit in the given arguments. The question that this presentation wants to consider in light of this state of affairs is simply this: "if the distinction between Israel and the Church was the only argument for the pre-trib rapture would that argument carry the day?" It is not obvious to this author that it would.

Opponents of the pre-trib rapture could argue that, if dispensationalists include the earth-dwellers of the whole world in the tribulation with Jacob's children, such dispensationalists may be overstating the significance of Jeremiah 30:7 and its time of Jacob's trouble. While in some passages like Revelation 3:10, an exegetical case can be made to separate the Church saints from the earth-dwellers, such a conclusion from the book of Revelation should not be read into the multitude of Old Testament texts where the entire planet is the focus of God's wrath (e.g., Isa. 13:11). In light of the previous discussion about sharing between Israel and the Church, opponents might ask to pursue this issue further. The sharing of Israel and the Church in the millennium is a case in point. If the nature of the nation of Israel is qualitatively different from the nature of the Church so that they cannot share the tribulation, why then do they share the kingdom?

### Conclusion

This presentation may be causing some consternation. To alleviate concern, the moderator of the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics is not abandoning the distinction between Israel and the Church or its place at the heart of the essence of dispensationalism. The goal here is greater precision in how the argument from distinction is used in overall theological method so that dispensationalists avoid weakened statements. The issue of sharing between Israel and the Church has been used to frame the necessity for this greater precision.

Two points must be made to direct the proper desire for precision. First, an anecdote from the past illustrates the heart of the problem. Progressive dispensationalist Darrell Bock once told this reviewer during a phone conversation back in the 1990s that traditional dispensationalists were not giving exegetical responses to PD positions. Instead, they were arguing from within their system—that is, making theological arguments that assumed their entire system in place using things like the distinction between Israel and the Church. I have found this to be true in some measure. I told Darrell to go look at George Gunn's article on Psalm 110 at the Shasta Bible College website for an exegetical response. Darrell emailed me shortly to let me know I was right. Gunn's article was an exegetical

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<sup>32</sup> Michael A. Rydelnik, "Israel: Why the Church Must Be Raptured Before the Tribulation" in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism* edited by John F. Hart (Chicago: Moody, 2015).

response. Traditional dispensationalists have gotten better at exegetical work in response to progressive dispensationalists in the opinion of this author. But we must always be on guard. Covenant theology uses the covenant of grace as a theological switch by which to read the entire Bible. Progressive dispensationalism has developed enough over time that many of them are now arguing from within their system using the doctrinal conclusion of complementary hermeneutics or already-not yet as a grid by which to interpret everything in the Word. Traditional dispensationalists must not follow suit. We must continue to be the champions for inductive Bible study and interpretation. Among other things, this means that we do not use the distinction between Israel and the Church as an interpretive switch by which to read all in the sacred text.

Coming back to the pre-trib rapture issue, we must continue to note the distinction between Israel and the Church in the debate. However, it is a correlation argument, not a logical “proof” that stands alone. At the level of theological integration, our dispensational worldview must make sense as a whole. The distinction serves to assist us in this endeavor. The distinction between Israel and the Church fits nicely into the pre-trib rapture teaching without being a “proof doctrine” compelling the conclusion. It should ride the coat-tails of exegetical arguments from 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Revelation 3:10. In other words, dispensationalists should do more exegetical arguing instead of theological pronouncements in the way that we voice our doctrinal formulations. We also must distinguish correlation arguments from logical “proof” arguments along the way.

Pre-trib dispensationalists know that God has chosen to keep the Church out of the tribulation. But the question comes easily to mind: “Could God have chosen for Israel and the Church to share the tribulation wrath of God?” Yes, God could have done so if that was His plan. After all, He has sovereignly designed for both to share the coming kingdom. The simple fact is that God has simply decided that the Church is not to take part in the day of the Lord wrath. He has told us so in various passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, and Revelation 3:10. It is those exegetical arguments that ground our belief. Other theological arguments are supportive. If we follow this way of thinking, we will not overstate by either intensifying doctrines to maintain the distinction in unwarranted ways or by elevating correlation arguments to the level of exegetical arguments. After all, Israel and the Church share many things in God’s sovereign plan of history. This is a truth we should not hide.