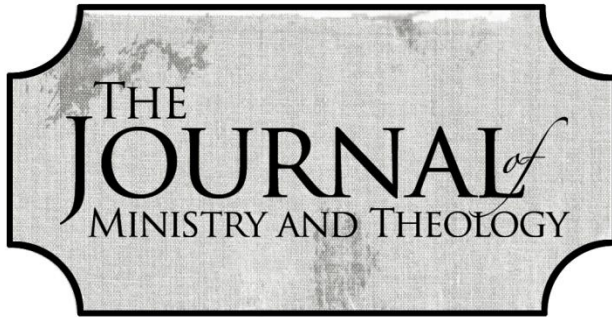


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Jim Jeffery
President

Mike Stallard
Dean of Baptist Bible Seminary

Gary Gromacki/Mike Stallard
Editors

Teresa Ingalls/Sarah Nippert
Editorial Assistants

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2 Timothy 2:2

*And the things that you have heard from me
among many witnesses, commit these
to faithful men who will be able
to teach others also.*

A Biblical and Theological Discussion of Traditional Dispensational Premillennialism

Dr. David Mappes
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology
and Bible Exposition
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

Dr. H. Wayne House
Distinguished Professor
of Theology, Law, and Culture
Faith Evangelical Seminary
Tacoma, Washington¹

INTRODUCTION

All orthodox Christians agree on the scriptural-prophetic facts of the personal, visible, sudden, and bodily return of Jesus Christ referred to as his second coming. Jesus Christ himself promised his return (Matt 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44; 25:31), which was announced by angelic beings (Acts 1:9-11) and proclaimed in the early church (Acts 3:19-21). The author of Hebrews guarantees Christ's return which he writes, "so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await him" (Heb 9:28). Christians, however, disagree on the specific details surrounding his return, including the nature of the rapture and the nature of his earthly reign referred to as the millennium.

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The word *millennium* is derived from a Latin term meaning one-thousand. The term appears six times in Revelation 20:1-7, referring to a one-thousand-year time period when Jesus Christ physically, spatially reigns on earth with glorified, resurrected as well as non-resurrected believers while Satan is bound and spatially removed from the earth. Premillennialism entails the view that Jesus will physically return prior to the millennium to establish his earthly reign after which eternity will begin with establishment of the new heavens and new earth. When Jesus returns to the earth, he establishes his millennial, earthly kingdom.

Classic (or historical) premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism are primarily distinguished by their hermeneutical system with respect to how OT promises to national Israel relate to the millennium. Progressive dispensationalists and traditional/classic dispensationalists are distinguished with respect to the question of whether or not the church has inaugurated the OT prophesied kingdom age. By way of contrast, Amillennialists do not believe in a future, bodily, earthly reign of Christ.

Common features among all premillennialists entail the following: (1) Jesus himself institutes his earthly reign as described in Revelation 19:11-21. This future millennium will not be a gradual extension of Christ's current session in heaven. Rather Christ himself will return in a sudden, dynamic, cataclysmic manner and render Satan completely inactive by spatially removing him and his followers. Jesus Christ will personally end the wars, famines, great apostasy, and the Antichrist that are all part of the prophesied Great Tribulation; (2) the two resurrections in Revelation 20:1-6, which are chronologically separated by the one thousand-year reign, are actually two distinct resurrections. The first resurrection in 20:4 indicates that the millennium contains believers in their glorified state inhabiting the millennial reign while the second resurrection refers to the judgment of non-believers; (3) Similarities, though also distinct differences, exist between Christ's future millennial reign vs. his reign in the eternal state as described in Revelation 21-22; thus they are separate time

periods; (4) Christ's current rule in heaven vs. his future earthly reign as described in Revelation 20:1-6 cannot be reduced to a mere apocalyptic metaphorical description of a past or current event(s) nor reduced to an apocalyptic metaphorical description of Christ's current rule in heaven.

TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONAL DISTINCTIVES

Traditional dispensationalism is currently nuanced by its (1) consistent practice of literal hermeneutics and theological method in the Old and New Testament; (2) the nature of the church as a mystery and Christ's current heavenly session as priestly, non-Davidic reign; and (3) the non-fusing nature and relationship between Israel and the church. Consequently, traditional dispensationalists hold to the *not-yet* view of the kingdom and *deny an already-not-yet view of the Messianic kingdom*. Christ inaugurates the Messianic kingdom age in his second coming, not in his first Advent.

***Sensus Literal* Hermeneutic and Theological Method**

As previously stated all orthodox Christians hold to the scriptural facts of the bodily return of Christ to judge the living and the dead. This interpretative view has been held throughout the ages because believers apply a common, single, consistent, literal hermeneutic in addressing the repeated assertions in the NT that describes the visible, glorious return of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, evangelical Christians who were both millenarians and non-millenarians alike continued to hold to these common eschatological truths even when liberal rationalistic theologians² sought to apply anti-supernatural views in de-

² See Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) and *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation*, ed. Wendell Willis (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987).

eschatologizing and consequently redefining the kingdom motif, including the return of Christ as being only ethical in nature.³

Traditional dispensationalists seek to practice this common, consistent hermeneutical historical-grammatical-literal (*sensus literal*) method of interpretation to *discern the intention of the human author by examining what the author affirms in the historical context of his writing* and then correlate all the material related to a topic in a compressive manner.⁴ Rather than re-interpret the OT or practice a complementary hermeneutic, traditional dispensationalists seek to understand the *literal meaning of a text by its immediate historical-textual parameters* and then understand how this meaning relates to

³ As an example, professor Charles R. Erdman in his article entitled "The Coming of Christ" demonstrates this notion when he writes, "The return of Christ is a *fundamental doctrine* of the Christian faith. It is embodied in hymns of hope; it forms the climax of the creeds; it is the sublime motive for evangelistic and missionary activity; and daily it is voiced in the inspired prayer: 'Even so: Come, Lord Jesus.' It is peculiarly a *Scriptural doctrine*. It is not, on the one hand, a dream of ignorant fanatics, nor, on the other, a creation of speculative theologians; but it is a truth divinely revealed, and recorded in the Bible with marked clearness, emphasis and prominence. Like the other great truths of revelation it is a *controverted doctrine*. The essential fact is held universally by all who admit the authority of Scripture" (Charles R. Erdman, "The Coming of Christ," revised and edited by Gerald B. Stanton in *The Fundamentals for Today*, ed. Charles L. Feinberg [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1958], 637). Also see "Humility and Tolerance: Exploring their Biblical, Theological, and Cultural Expression" presented by David Mappes at the Faculty Forum of Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit PA, 25 October 2010.

⁴ Ryrie writes, "Literal interpretation is not the exclusive property of dispensationalists. . . . The difference between the dispensationalist's use of this hermeneutical principle and the nondispensationalist's. . . lies in the dispensationalist's claim to use the normal principle of interpretation *consistently* in *all* his study of the Bible" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism: Revised and Expanded* [Chicago: Moody P, 1995], 92-93; emphasis original).

God's overall program.⁵ This system of interpretation allows the immediate historical context of a passage to define and limit textual meaning.

Any theological system encounters difficulties with the NT use of the OT and all systems acknowledge it is not possible to exhaustively classify all NT uses of the OT in a simple, single usage. Bateman correctly summarizes that theological arguments to fully nuance and address the future millennial kingdom rest upon the "presuppositional preference on one testament over the other"⁶ and those presuppositions then determine one's hermeneutical starting point.

Darrell Bock has summarized four methods describing how evangelicals currently address this question of prioritizing and

⁵ Traditional dispensationalists believe that issues of intertextuality and NT use of the OT are too complex and too varied to justify a hermeneutic that allows a re-interpretation or resignification of an OT text based upon the NT usage. The use of the fulfillment formula in the NT is simply too broad to suggest that its mere appearance indicates a historical completion of a prophetic promise. The context and use of each passage must be compared to the antecedent historical promise to validate a fulfilled prophecy. See Charles H. Dyer, "Biblical Meaning of Fulfillment," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Welsey R. Willis and John R. Masters (Chicago: Moody P, 1994), 51-72. Zuck who allows for a controlled *sensus plenior* describes ten different ways in which a NT author may use an OT text without the altering historical meaning or claiming exhaustive, complete fulfillment: (1) to point up the current accomplishment or realization of a prediction; (2) to confirm that a NT incident is in agreement with an OT principle; (3) to explain a point given in the OT; (4) to support a point being made in the NT; (5) to illustrate a NT truth; (6) to apply the OT to a NT truth; (7) to summarize an OT concept; (8) to use OT terminology; (9) to draw a parallel with an OT incident; (10) to relate an OT situation to Christ. (Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991], 260-67).

⁶ Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 38.

harmonizing the Old and New Testaments.⁷ Traditional dispensationalists support the single historical, human/Divine

⁷ Darrell Bock, "Part 1 Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New," *BSac* 142:567 (July 1985): 209-220. The following is a modification of Bock's categories of *Full Human Intent* view, *Divine Intent-Human Words Intent* view, *Historical Progress of Revelation* or *Christocentric Exegesis* and *Canonical Approach*.

(1) *The Full Human Intent*. In this view, the OT authors possessed a full, comprehensive understanding of the meaning of their writing with the possible exception of time elements involved of when a prophecy is brought to full fulfillment. This model then posits a single historical, authorial meaning for any given text; hence God and the human author were coauthors who "affirm one and the same thing in one and the same text" (Norman L. Geisler and William D. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 145). This one single-meaning (*sensus unum*) for any given text does not mean the human authors comprehend all the implications of the meaning nor does it imply that the author understood how God might later apply the meaning of text. However the model asserts that while the authorial meaning may be applied in different ways, the meaning itself is not altered. While the NT authors use OT verbal meaning in a variety of ways, they do not violate the human authorial sense of the historical meaning. In this model the author was fully conscious of the divine intent of his writing; hence any fuller, hidden meaning to a promise from subsequent revelation is denied. In summary, this model does not allow a fuller meaning or double meaning (*sensus plenior*) but does allow for various kinds of applications of that verbal meaning.

(2) *The Divine Intent-Human Words Intent*. This model allows for the divine intent to say more than what the OT human author actually, consciously intended or comprehended to say. Thus a distinction is allowed between what the human author fully comprehended his text to historically mean and what the divine Author intended. The divine intent always includes the human authorial intent and is controlled by the human authorial intent though subsequent revelation can clarify and reveal the fuller

sense of the divine author. This model allows for the NT author to demonstrate the richer and fuller divine intended meaning but does not change the human author's verbal meaning. Importantly, any fuller NT explanation is only an extension and development of the OT authorial verbal meaning and thus always governed by the initial pattern of authorial meaning; therefore any *sensus plenior* or *reference plenior* remains a textually controlled extension of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation rather than a non-textually controlled allegorical method of interpretation.

(3) *The Historical Progress of Revelation or Christocentric Exegesis.* In general, this approach allows for the NT author to alter and change the historic verbal meaning of the OT text through what is alleged as NT exegetical and hermeneutical techniques. In this model the interpreter allows a NT author priority in interpreting, or re-interpreting the meaning of the OT text for Christian theology. In many respects the model allows a NT author to Christocentrize the OT. The basis for this model revolves around the A/author distinction of the text as both human and divine. Poythress argues that any statement interpreted must be based on the context of the speaker/author but in Scripture there are two authors, human and divine; hence how can their contexts be *exactly* the same? (Vern S. Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," *WTJ* 48, no. 2 [Fall 1986]: 249–55). He posits the grammatical-historical-literal model is inadequate since he alleges that "the NT authors characteristically do *not* aim merely at grammatical-historical exegesis of the OT" (Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," 276). He advocates for a progressive reading and meaning of a passage. The passage is first understood "in the context of the particular book of the bible in which it appears and in the context of the human author and historical circumstances of the book" and then understood "in the context of the total canon of Scripture available up to that point in time" and then understood "in the context of the entire Bible (the complete canon)." (Vern S. Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," 241–79, esp. 267).

authorial meaning for any given text. Some traditional dispensationalist support a controlled form of *sensus plenior* or *reference plenior*, though any fuller NT explanation is only an extension and development of the OT authorial verbal meaning and thus always governed by the initial pattern of authorial meaning.

Since dispensationalists insist on a higher degree of consistency in following the *sensus literal* hermeneutic, they then have a larger amount of material to synthesize and collate. So then naturally the dispensationalists have more nuanced specificity in their eschatology as well as more complex problems for resolution. Nonetheless, dispensationalists would rather allow for both complexity and tension without creating a forced harmony or worse, a progressive reinterpretation of a historically conditioned text that alters the human author's meaning of Scripture.

The general parameters of this theological method include a stratified process that collates and analyzes data first at the exegetical level to form a biblical theology which then serves as the basis for systematic theology. Biblical theology here refers to the "historically conditioned progress of the self-revelation of God as deposited in the Bible."⁸ Once the human authorial

(4) *Canonical Approach*. In general, this approach posits that entire OT (not just select portions of OT) must be read in light of the whole canon hence the NT takes full priority to unpack, interpret and exclude the original authorial meaning of a passage. Waltke argues that the meaning of a text in the canon is changed by later canonical revelation as he writes, "older texts in the canon underwent a correlative progressive perception of meaning as they became part of a growing canonical literature" (Bruce K. Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988], 284).

⁸ Charles Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody P, 1959), 12.

meaning is determined, then that meaning becomes fixed in time and does not change. The reader then examines how a later author uses that historically conditioned meaning in subsequent writings. Since the OT provides the foundational building block for NT theology, the traditional dispensationalist argues that the OT literal interpretation must be preserved in light of later progressive revelation.⁹

⁹ A model for theological method is necessary for any system since the Scripture is progressively revealed and no one topic is fully addressed by any one author or in any one time era. The model must be minimally measured by the following components: (1) *Canonical*: First priority and authority is given to the canonical books of Scripture over personal experience, personal sensibilities, other writing, general revelation, speculation, etc. though this does not preclude addressing ones presuppositions. (2) *Comprehensive*: All biblical teaching on a topic must be examined with greater weight given to the clearest and most definitive passages rather than selecting vague passages used in a mere proof-texting manner. (3) *Consistent hermeneutical approach*: The interpretive philosophy must be consistently used within the theological method rather than a changing the hermeneutical philosophy from topic-to-topic, passage-to-passage, covenant-to-covenant, etc. (4) *Congruency*: The method must allow for both harmony, complexity, and tension without creating illogical direct contradictions, and/or forced harmonization to remove complexities so as to alter the author's meaning of Scripture. (5) *Coherence*: The theological model must demonstrate a logical ordering of investigation providing greatest weight to didactic teaching noting the "prescriptive vs. descriptive" or the "is vs. ought," and the model must reveal clear steps of investigation. (6) *Call of Response/Application*: The model an appropriate response(s) relate to the verbal meaning of the Scriptural truth/passage that is being considered and does the call of response reflect the specificity of the truth/passage? The call for response or significance of Scripture is always controlled by the authorial meaning of passage; hence the degree to which a pronouncement, pattern, or principle transfers into the contemporary setting is carefully evaluated. The *degree of transfer* is the degree to which the target audience is similar to or different from the originally intended

The Current Session of Christ

The current heavenly reign of Christ is understood as his high priestly Melchizedekian ministry over the church rather than a Davidic rule. His current heavenly priestly reign does not inaugurate nor fulfill the Davidic promise since this Davidic covenant relates to a future, political, earthly, king who rules over the future, earthly, national Israel in their regenerated status. The Messianic kingdom age and Messianic kingdom and Messianic ruling king are inextricably and historically linked together: one cannot have the Messianic kingdom or kingdom age without the physical presence of the ruling Messianic king.

The NT authors clearly identify Jesus Christ as the descendent of David (Luke 1:31-33), and it is clear that fulfillment of this promise is found in Jesus Christ. Christ satisfied provisions of the Davidic covenant and he is the Davidic king. The question, however, remains as to when fulfillment occurs. Traditional/classic dispensationalists argue that Christ's Davidic reign is inaugurated in the millennial kingdom when Jesus Christ returns (Rev 19:11-16) to reign over Israel and the nations of earth (Rev 20:4-6). The kingdom age entails the inaugural millennial kingdom and the future eternal state in order to fulfill the eternal dimensions of the covenant-promises. The Davidic reign is presented as territorial, political, national, earthly reign and not as a celestial, heavenly reign.

Traditional/classic dispensationalists certainly agree that aspects of the Davidic and new covenant have been satisfied. Christ is indeed the seed of the woman who did defeat the Serpent (Gen 3:15). He is the singular seed of Abraham and he is the Davidic king. Many contemporary traditional dispensationalists agree that the church currently participates in the new covenant blessings through Christ's Melchizedekian priestly ministry as described in Hebrews. Either Christ

recipients (David Mappes, "Love Wins by Rob Bell: A Biblical and Theological Critique," *JMAT* [Spring 2012]: 91-93).

mediates the actual new covenant of Jeremiah 31 to believers, or he mediates blessings of the new covenant to church believers today. Since Christ is said to be the spiritual seed of Abraham who embodies the covenant promise to Abraham (Gal 3:16), the church as a spiritual offspring of Abraham partakes (not fulfills) in some of these spiritual promises to Abraham by virtue of being in Christ (Gal 3:29). The aspect of the world-wide blessing promise through Abraham as expanded by the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 was satisfied by Christ and then provided to the church. This provision entails soteriological and pneumatological aspects (2 Cor 3) rather than the political and land territorial aspects of the new covenant. This provision entails spiritual cleansing (i.e., regeneration) both for Israel in the future (Zech 12:10-13:1, cf. Jer 31:33-34) and for the church of God today (1 Cor 11:23-26; 2 Cor 3:11-18). Applying a provision of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 to the church does not imply substitution, abrogation, nor final covenant fulfillment. The actual new covenant of Jeremiah and Ezekiel will not be fulfilled until all the historically stated parameters of the covenant have been satisfied.

God's Mediatorial Peoples/Programs

The church and Israel are considered as two separate mediatorial programs through which God administers his glory. There is only one people of God soteriologically in the sense that everyone in any time period is saved by God's grace; thus they mutually share in some of God's promises. There are, however, two distinct peoples/programs of God historically and teleologically in accomplishing God's purpose of glorification. This multi-faceted plan is how God chose maximally to glorify himself. This distinction is maintained throughout eternity.

In summary, since OT promises were made to Israel and since the church is portrayed as a mystery in the NT that does not correspond with OT kingdom prophecies, traditional dispensationalists deny that the church is fulfilling OT kingdom promises.

Consequently, the notion of an already-not-yet view of Messianic kingdom age is denied. The NT describes why the anticipated OT prophesied Messianic kingdom age was delayed, though they do not deny its future nor do they redefine the nature of the kingdom age from their OT counterparts. The NT explains the nature of the church as a spiritual-priestly-royal-people representing Jesus Christ to mediate God's current purposes, though not as fulfilling the OT expectation of the Messianic age. Other theological systems assert the NT authors either deny or in some fashion redefine the anticipated Messianic kingdom age.

MILLENNIAL-THEOLOGICAL VIEWS

Traditional and Progressive Dispensational Premillennialism

All dispensationalists form their theological framework around three biblical covenants made in the Scripture—the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant. These covenants are viewed as unconditional and irrevocable promises to Israel which progressively build upon one another. As Wayne House notes, "Dispensationalists do not see covenants made during subsequent dispensations as replacing the covenants made earlier, unless it is specifically so stated in the Scriptures."¹⁰ Interestingly, in the earlier debates between non-dispensational and dispensational theologians, Oswald T. Allis discounted a literal millennium based upon a literal view of the OT since it would result in a Jewish Israelitish

¹⁰ H. Wayne House, "The Future of National Israel," *BSac* 166, no. 664 (Oct 2009): 472.

age.¹¹ Dispensational premillennialists then include OT teaching on the millennial reign of Christ and thus recognize a distinct, future place for national Israel in the millennium as prophesied in the OT.

Primarily, traditional dispensationalists disagree with progressive dispensationalists on their practice of complementary hermeneutics and their understanding of what constitutes fulfillment and/ or inauguration of an OT covenant. This complementary hermeneutic leads progressives to assert the church is currently an expression of the Messianic kingdom, thus advancing the already-not-yet view of the Messianic kingdom age.

Traditional dispensationalists believe that each aspect of an unconditional promise-covenant is historically governed by the textual parameters of that initial promise. Therefore a strict one-to-one correspondence between details of a prophetic prediction and fulfillment of a prophecy must occur. This correspondence includes the details and “essentially the same message expressed in both passages.”¹² Fulfillment does not occur until all aspects of the initial promise have been satisfied. Since the promises to Israel in the OT always refers to the physical posterity of Jacob’s physical descendants, then these

¹¹ “Literal interpretation has always been a marked feature of Premillennialism . . . [and] it has been carried to an extreme. We have seen that this literalism found its most thoroughgoing expression in the claim that Israel must mean Israel, that it cannot mean the church . . . and that the Church was a mystery, unknown to the prophets and first made known to the apostle Paul. Now if the principle of interpretation is adopted that Israel always means Israel, that it does not mean the Church, then it follows of necessity that practically all of our information regarding the millennium will concern a Jewish or Israelitish age” (Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945], 244).

¹² Elliott E. Johnson, “Premillennialism Introduced: Hermeneutics” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody P, 1992), 19.

promises to Israel cannot be fulfilled by the NT church. For these covenant promises to be “fulfilled there must be a future [earthly] kingdom”¹³ as described by the OT prophets.

Elliott Johnson correctly posits that covenant fulfillment necessarily entails the keeping or satisfying the commitments and all provisions in the agreement with the specified recipient or partner. Covenant fulfillment is only *inaugurated* when all the provisions are kept in a partial or incomplete or limited manner and *covenant fulfillment only occurs* when all provisions are met in a complete manner per the historical covenant statement. Differences exist then between provisions of the covenant being fulfilled vs. inauguration of the entire covenant vs. the actual fulfillment of the covenant.¹⁴

The original promise should not be reinterpreted apart from the intention of the initial promise-covenant; thus *prophetic fulfillment* occurs only when all the commitments and provisions in a promise have been realized. Kaiser correctly states, “The theological interpretation or exegesis of a given piece of text must be understood only in light of the antecedent revelations of God to that biblical author and those writers of scripture who historically preceded him . . . and who shared the same technical terms or analogous concepts in the progress of revelation . . . [and analogy of faith principle must not be used] until the present text’s author has had a chance to indicate his

¹³ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “The Land Covenant” in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron J. Bigalke Jr. (Lanham, MD: Univ Press of America, 2005), 87. Also see Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries P, 1993).

¹⁴ Elliott E. Johnson, “Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 121-55.

own distinctive verbal meaning and theological contribution in light of the Bible available to him up to the time of writing."¹⁵

At times a prophecy may refer to more than one single future event (what scholars call double fulfillment), but *double fulfillment* does not signify double meaning. The original prophetic promise remains the determiner of what governs its fulfillment. *Prophetic typology* occurs when "points of commonality between Old Testament events and symbols illustrate or foreshadow New Testament truths."¹⁶ However, the original meaning (or pattern of meaning) always controls what constitutes the antitype. *Prophetic significance* refers to events occurring that appear to set the stage for actual prophetic fulfillment. Many current events could be interpreted as having prophetic significance, but this does not mean they are prophetic fulfillment.¹⁷

Progressive dispensationalists proffer if one element or provision of a covenant is satisfied, then the entire covenant is inaugurated. Darrell Bock writes, "One does not need every element of the promise to be fulfilled to have the beginning of fulfillment. In contrast to more traditional approaches fulfillment is not an 'all elements present' or 'no fulfillment present affair.'"¹⁸ Blaising explains that "the New Testament does introduce change and advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation. In making complementary additions, however, it does not jettison old promises. The enhancement is

¹⁵ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Reader's Understanding," *TJ* 6 (1977): 192.

¹⁶ H. Wayne House in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 316.

¹⁷ David Mappes, "Recalculating: Why We're Still here After Another Round of Failed Rapture Predictions," *Baptist Bulletin* (May/June 2011): 30-34.

¹⁸ Darrell L. Bock, "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 170.

not at the expense of the original promise.”¹⁹ This means that the NT authors can make complementary changes to the OT prophecies, though not deny the OT promises. In the model, OT promises are expanded and reapplied by the NT authors, though not replaced. This complementary hermeneutic then leads to prophetic fulfillment/inauguration with less than a one-to-one correspondence to the initial promise. Bock illustrates this less than one-to-one correspondence as he explains, “One of the ways Jews showed fulfillment of an OT passage was to cite the language in alluding to a second passage, thus linking the two texts conceptually. So by his use of the verb “to sit” (Acts 2:30, 34) Peter links Psalm 132:11 (cited in 2:30) with Psalm 110 (cited in 2:34).”²⁰ Traditional dispensationalist Mike Stallard evaluates this hermeneutic as he writes, “The promise can have a **coinciding or overlapping fulfillment** [emphasis original] through NT expansions of the promise [and] this concept helps form the basis of an “already, not yet” approach to various texts in the Bible.”²¹ An example of this hermeneutic is the assertion that, the church’s participation in the new covenant taught in the NT can actually add the church to the actual list of recipients of the new covenant promises made in the OT.²² Thereby claiming the church as an intended recipient of kingdom age promise is now an inaugural expression of the Messianic kingdom.

¹⁹ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 392-93.

²⁰ Bock, Evidence from Acts” in *A Case for Premillennialism*, 192.

²¹ Mike Stallard, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 4, <http://faculty.bbc.edu/mstallard/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/PD_Challenge.pdf and <http://our-hope.org/blog/2012/05/>> (accessed 1 September 2012).

²² Ibid.

Through this complementary hermeneutic, progressives use verbal analogy to link passages by associating words that are common to both passages. Stallard writes,

In Acts 2:24, the fact that Jesus was “raised up” from the dead is associated with the fact that God promised David in 2 Samuel 7:12 that he would “raise up” from history a descendent to sit on his throne. In spite of the fact that the idea of “raising up” is not equivalent in the passages, the similarity of language is used to link the two passages and justify the pouring of the Davidic Covenant into Acts 2. A second example would be the association of the word “to seat” with respect to the throne of David in Acts 2:30 with “sit” in Acts 2:34 (from Ps 110) which refers to the ascension throne of Christ. The text does not explicitly make the equation of the two thrones and traditionalists have understood them as distinct.²³

The similarity of language is used within complementary hermeneutic to link these passages together in the sense of making them identical.

Psalms 110 portrays both a kingly and priestly emphasis of Messiah and is one of the most quoted and cited Psalms in the NT. The Psalmist, David records a heavenly conversation between the LORD (Yahweh) and his Lord (Adonai the Messiah) (v.1). The Psalm describes a future descendant of David who would not only be David’s son but also his Lord. Yahweh shared that the Messiah is seated (enthroned) at his heavenly, celestial right hand until the consummation of the ages when all enemies would be abolished and Messiah would himself return and territorially rule the earth.

Yahweh specifically links Messiah’s celestial heavenly rule with the priestly ministry of Melchizedek as he writes, “You are a priest forever/According to the order of Melchizedek” (110:4). he also portrays the future kingly-warrior aspect of Messiah. This Kingly-warrior aspect most likely refers to Messiah’s future Davidic earthly rule during the Kingdom age as portrayed in

²³ Ibid., 6.

Daniel 7:4, "And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve him." However, some traditional dispensationalists think this kingly rule is also restricted to his Melchizedekian ministry in heaven preparing the world for Davidic rule.²⁴

Jesus and NT authors repeatedly appealed to this Psalm to prove that he was the Messiah and not simply a human descendant of David. The determinative issues here in Psalm 110 entail the location of the throne as a heavenly, celestial throne and the authority of the heavenly throne being different than Messianic authoritative rule on earth. Traditional dispensationalists argue that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is now seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father, in satisfying (i.e., partially fulfilling) the high priestly Melchizedekian aspect of Psalm 110 (cf. Mark 16:19; Acts 2:34,35; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; etc.). Messiah's current enthronement is in heaven with a priestly emphasis while his future Davidic seat of rule will take place on earth.

The author of Hebrews argued that Christ is a priest forever according to the Melchizedekian order. Consequently Jesus' priesthood is superior and brought an end to the Aaronic priesthood.

If Yahweh sets up Messiah as a priest "forever," the Aaronic order of priests must end as God's appointed order (cf. Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21). As both the Priest and the sacrificial Lamb, Messiah offered himself as a substitute sacrifice on the cross (cf. Heb. 7:27-28; 10:10). Jesus was not of Aaron's line since he descended from the tribe of Judah (cf. Heb. 7:11-18). He is the new eternal High

²⁴ George Gunn and Jerry Neuman, "Psalm 110 and Progressive Dispensationalism," <<http://www.shasta.edu/admin/userfiles/resourceDocuments/psalm110full.pdf>> (accessed 1 September 2012), 18.

Priest (cf. Heb. 7:21-26, 28), and he mediates the New Covenant that replaces the Old Mosaic Covenant (cf. Heb. 8:13; 9:15).²⁵

Blaising suggests that since King David conquered Melchizedek's former city of Salem, then he would also have obtained Melchizedek's ancient throne; hence he posits that King David was also the "new Melchizedek . . . [who] restored the worship of the one true God."²⁶ Thereby Blaising concludes, "There should be no doubt that the Melchizedekian priesthood is part of the Davidic covenant."²⁷ However Gunn and Neuman point out that this view would appear then also to require that all of David's heirs be of a Melchizedekian king-priestly line, which is contrary to how Christ is portrayed in his Melchizedekian ministry.²⁸ In summary, Christ's current session at the right hand of the Father is portrayed in a Melchizedekian King-priestly manner rather than a spiritualized Davidic rule.

Traditional dispensationalists then contend that Jesus is now certainly the Lord of the cosmos and Savior of the church, and he is indeed seated at the right hand of God on a heavenly, priestly throne. Jesus is the anointed Davidic king who has satisfied all requirements to start his Davidic reign and rule. However that reign and rule will only take place at his return in establishing the millennial reign.²⁹

Progressive dispensationalists believe all the covenants are organically connected and share common elements so that

²⁵ Tom Constable, "Psalm 110," <<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>, 200>.

²⁶ Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 162.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 161-62.

²⁸ Gunn and Neuman, "Psalm 110 and Progressive Dispensationalism," <http://www.shasta.edu/admin/userfiles/resourceDocuments/psalm110full.pdf> (accessed 1 September 2012)>, 4.

²⁹ H. Wayne House, "Future of National Israel," 482.

initial fulfillment of an aspect of a covenant necessarily involves the realization of the other covenants. Since Christ in his messianic role has satisfied some aspects of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants, progressive dispensationalists then argue the kingdom age has been inaugurated through their complementary hermeneutic. Thus they assert that Christ is therefore currently reigning on David's throne in heaven over the church in an already-not-yet form of the Messianic kingdom. Progressives, however, do not believe the millennium has started. Consequently, this theological model "does not entail separate programs for the church and Israel that are somehow ultimately unified only in the display of God's glory or in eternity."³⁰ Some progressives are using this already-not-yet form of the Messianic kingdom as a primary theological matrix for social justice, thereby claiming authority which is only resident in the millennial kingdom. One apparent insurmountable problem thus far for progressive dispensationalists entails the land promises to Israel. If the church is an already-not-yet form of the Messianic kingdom, then how do the land promises to Israel relate to the church today?

While significant differences exist between progressive and traditional dispensational scholars, all dispensationalists believe that OT covenantal promises will find literal fulfillment and include (1) a future national kingdom of Israel, ruled by Jesus in Jerusalem according to OT prophecies and (2) that God's unconditional covenants and promises in the OT are irrevocable and will be fulfilled literally for the nation Israel. God promised Israel that they would be gathered to their own land, live in peace in that land, and be ruled by the Messiah as prophesied in Scripture.³¹

³⁰ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 27.

³¹ H. Wayne House, "Future of National Israel," 482.

Amillennialism

Amillennialists deny a future earthly, millennial kingdom. Rather, they contend that the full and final expression of the earthly kingdom of God is now spiritually present in the world being fulfilled in the NT church that will one day find full expression in the eternal state. They do anticipate the literal return of Christ and his establishment of the eschatological new heavens and new earth. This system then affirms a literal return of Christ accompanied by one general resurrection of believers and non-believers followed by the great judgment and establishment of the eternal state.

Frequently traced back to Augustine, it was later integrated into Covenant theology. Covenant theology was first systematized by Kaspar Olevanus (1536-1587) and Zacharius Ursinus (1534-1583) for use in the Heidelberg Catechism.³² Covenant theologians see little or no distinction or discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Focusing on the covenant of grace, they propose only one covenant-community of the redeemed throughout all of God's economy including the NT church. According to Covenant theologians, the church existed in the OT, so any and all promises made to that church in the OT (i.e., Israel) are intended for those who are included in the church today since they too are under the covenant of grace.³³ The soteriological covenant of grace then is the unifying principle for the one plan and one people of God. Thus the church and Israel are essentially identical and interchangeable.

This view proffers that Christ is portrayed as true Israel, and as such he has fulfilled all promises to Israel and all those in him experience those promises. The land promises to Israel are understood as a type of a fuller and richer inheritance for all of Abraham's children (i.e., the church), and/or the land type promises will be experienced and fulfilled in the new heaven

³² Ibid., 465-66.

³³ Ibid.

and new earth. Jeon writes, "The administration of blessings and curses on the nation of Israel points to the eschatological, heavenly blessings and everlasting hell [and] the eschatological interpretation of the Old covenant is progressively developed . . . as an application of *typology*."³⁴ In support of this position, Cox writes, "The Old Testament records two kinds of promises which God made to national Israel: national promises and spiritual promises. The spiritual promises encompassed every spiritual descendant of Abraham, and were not restricted to national Israel (Gen 12:3; 22:18; Rom 2:28-29; 4:17; Eph 2:11-16; 3:6-9; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11). The spiritual promises are being fulfilled through the church today. Israel's national promises all have been either fulfilled or invalidated because of unbelief."³⁵

New Covenant theology is a revision of traditional Covenant theology that includes significant alterations, including (1) a denial of the threefold covenant status of works, grace, and redemption; (2) the affirmation that Christians today are only under the law of Christ and not the old covenant which by direct implication includes the rejection of infant baptism; and (3) the affirmation that the church began at Pentecost and not in the OT. However, New Covenant theology still shares the view with traditional Covenant theology that the OT must be understood through the lens of the NT, leading to a typological hermeneutical method when reading the OT. Any national and land promises made to Israel are reinterpreted and typologically transferred to the church. Some New Covenant theologians prefer the nomenclature of "fulfillment theology"

³⁴ Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith G. Kline's Response to the historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, MD: U P of America, 1999), 6; emphasis original.

³⁵ William E. Cox, *Amillennialism Today* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966), 37.

since they assert that "Israel was simply a picture of the true people of God, which the church fulfills."³⁶

In summary, amillennialists support their views of a non-earthly millennial reign by a combination of arguments that entail (1) Israel's promises were historically fulfilled; (2) Israel's promises are being spiritually fulfilled in the church today; (3) Revelation 20:1-6 refers to a Apocalyptic-metaphorical description of Christ's current rule over the church or his reign over saints in heaven; (4) Israel's rejection of Christ portrayed in the NT forfeitures any further OT kingdom promises. Amillennial theologians decidedly argue that OT must be interpreted through the NT christological lenses.

Classic or Historic Premillennialism

Historic premillennialists contend for a future earthly reign of Christ, though almost exclusively based upon the NT and in particular based upon Revelation 20:1-6. This view does promote a progressive view of revelation as portraying future-prophetic events such as the tribulation, millennial reign, and eternal state, leading to a postconsummationalist view of Christ's return. Some historical premillennialists understand the nature of the millennium as a literal one-thousand-year time period while others espouse the one-thousand-years reference as hyperbole simply expressing a long time period. However, no evangelical historical premillennialist understands the thousand-year reign as only a poetic or allegorical description of the future eternal state or as Christ's current reign in heaven.

³⁶ Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (published by Steve Lehrer, 2006), 203. For further review, see Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002) and *The Priority of Jesus Christ: Why Christians Turn to Jesus First* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2005) along with the dispensational critique, Michael J. Vlach, "New Covenant Compared with Covenantalism," *MSJ* 18, no.1 (Fall 2007): 201-19.

Most historical premillennialists also affirm the importance of an earthly reign of Christ's as reversing the curse of Genesis 3. Blomberg writes, "Premillennialism does best justice to God's determination to vindicate his purposes in creating *this* universe as originally perfectly good, despite the corruption that sin introduced, yet without introducing the unrealistic expectation that Christians can produce the millennium apart from God's supernatural intervention."³⁷

Historic premillennists practice a form of replacement theology (also known as supersessionism) to teach that the church has permanently replaced or superseded Israel. Replacement theologians propose that while Israel was God's chosen, unique people in the OT who did receive promises of a future earthly kingdom, Israel nonetheless forfeited those promise in rejecting their Messiah King. Therefore the distinctions between Israel and the church in this present age and in the millennial age are at best minimized. Replacement theologians do support a future turning of ethnic Jews to their Messiah in the last days of the church prior to the millennial reign, but they exclude national, ethnic Israel as having a distinctive national future in the millennium. Historical premillennialists also argue that the Messianic kingdom was inaugurated either during Jesus' life (e.g., Ladd) or at the ascension of Christ; thus they hold an already-not-yet view of the kingdom.³⁸ Since they exclude the OT depictions of the

³⁷ Craig Blomberg, "The Posttribulation of the New Testament," in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to "Left Behind Eschatology,"* ed. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 69.

³⁸ Ladd further illustrates the key differences between the dispensational model and historical premillennial model as he writes, "The main point . . . is that many Old Testament passages which applied in their historical setting to literal Israel have in the New Testament been applied to the church. What does all of this have to do with the question of millennium? Just this: The Old Testament did not clearly foresee how its own prophecies were to be fulfilled. They were

millennial reign for Israel, they also tend to minimize or exclude how the OT portrays the future great tribulation as a time of God's wrath upon national Israel for discipline and preparation for Israel's national regeneration. Hence many historic premillennialists adopt the post-tribulation view of the rapture.

Most importantly in "historical premillennialism the distinction between Israel and the church is not maintained, nor is a consistent literal interpretative method demanded."³⁹ In support of historical premillennialism, Ladd argued that OT prophecies of Messiah must be interpreted in light of the NT portrayal of the Christ event since "'literal hermeneutics' does not work"⁴⁰ when applied to OT Scripture. He describes hermeneutical distinctives of historic premillennialism when he writes, "The New Testament applies Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament church and in so doing identifies the church as spiritual Israel."⁴¹ Thus many historic

fulfilled in ways quite unforeseen by the Old Testament itself and unexpected by the Jews. With regard to the first coming of Christ, *the Old Testament is interpreted by the New Testament*. Here is the basic watershed between a dispensational and a nondispensational theology. Dispensationalism forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and then fits the New Testament into it. A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament. It confesses that it cannot be sure how the Old Testament prophecies of the end are to be fulfilled, for (a) the first coming of Christ was accomplished in terms not foreseen by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament, and (b) there are unavoidable indications that the Old Testament promises to Israel are fulfilled in the Christian church (George Eldon Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert Clouse [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity P, 1977], 27).

³⁹ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 409.

⁴⁰ Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," 23.

⁴¹ Ibid.

premillennialists assert that “a millennial doctrine cannot be based on the Old Testament prophecies but should be based on the New Testament alone”⁴² and the “only place in the Bible that speaks of an actual millennium is the passage in Revelation 20:1-6.”⁴³ Most historical premillennialists would also agree with Ladd that any “millennial doctrine must be based upon the most natural exegesis of this passage [Revelation 20:1-6].”⁴⁴ Historic premillennialism decidedly assigns the NT as the interpretative lens for the OT.⁴⁵

THEOLOGICAL-LITERARY OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONALISM AND THE COVENANTS

Traditional dispensationalists agree that Revelation 20:1-6 is an important passage in describing the premillennial reign of Christ. However, this future theocratic reign and rule is rooted in the OT covenants and expounded by the prophets in their description of a future Eden-like earthly kingdom age in which Messiah-God reigns upon earth and re-establishes his direct sovereign rulership. This reign and rule as rooted in the covenants will be briefly surveyed prior to an overview of Revelation 20:1-6.

Future Theocratic Reign and the Seed Promise of Genesis 3:15

God’s providential, universal rule and reign over mankind is described in Genesis 1-2. Prior to the fall into sin, mankind lived

⁴² Ibid., 32.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Don J. Payne, “The Theological Method of Premillennialism,” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism*, 95.

in direct relationship with God under a kind of untested theocratic rule as God appeared and communicated directly to Adam. Importantly, mankind was to serve as a vice-regent under the direct reign and in dependency of Yahweh. As Pentecost notes, “God was recognized as sovereign and the sovereignty that belonged to God was delegated to man, who was to rule over the earth in an exercise of mediate authority. In this theocracy Adam was seen to derive his authority from God and therefore, since he was called upon to be in submission, the rulership was God’s.”⁴⁶

Each person was created as (or in) the image of God and consequently designed with intrinsic worth to image and mirror God’s moral character (or communicable attributes) as he or she exercised dominion and rule over every creature on the earth. Prior to the fall, the nature of this Edenic theocratic rule involved a perfect harmony of (1) God as direct ruler over mankind; (2) the realm of rule, and (3) man and woman ruling. Since God alone is completely autonomous and independent, when mankind acted independently to follow the Serpent’s word, he challenged and sought to usurp God’s direct theocratic rule. This attempt of independent rule resulted in the fall of man to include the inability to properly image God and a forfeiture of direct access to Yahweh. God’s rule would no longer be direct and immediate in the form of theocracy but rather mediated through his revelation—namely through the prophetic word of promise for final victory in Genesis 3:15—a Seed from the woman would destroy the Serpent. McClain correctly states,

Man’s original dominion, being wholly derived and mediatorial in character, was to be exercised under the direction of God. It was just here that the first Adam dismally failed. . . . This failure of the first Adam, with reference to his mediatorial dominion,

⁴⁶ J Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 435.

introduced into the stream of human history a hiatus which to the present hour has not at any time been wholly remedied.⁴⁷

Christ indeed is the Seed of the woman (Gal 4:4) who was struck on the heel in his death (John 13:1-3; 19:30), and then Christ struck a death blow to the Serpent in his resurrection and ascension to the Father (Col 2:14-15).

Elliott Johnson writes, "An amillennial reading of the passages concludes that Christ reached a spiritual fulfillment of OT promises."⁴⁸ A postmillennial reading concludes that "Christ both reached a spiritual fulfillment and introduced a kingdom that would find fulfillment in the history of the church."⁴⁹ The traditional dispensational premillennial reading seeks corresponding fulfillment to each provision within the Genesis 3:15 promise.

The future earthly reign of Christ upon the earth is directly connected to the seed promise of Genesis 3:15. The promised future seed of the woman would bring complete, total, and final victory over the Serpent and his seed. The Seed of the woman would restore mankind to properly function as image bearers in direct relationship with Yahweh. Since the fall of man and the promise of victory occurred in creation-time, then the victory over the Serpent and reversal of the curse must also occur in

⁴⁷ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BHM, 1974), 43.

⁴⁸ Elliott E. Johnson, "Premillennialism Introduced: Hermeneutics," 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

creation-time.⁵⁰ The conflict between the seed of the Serpent and the Seed of the woman illustrate an extended, earthly, conflict resulting in final, earthly destruction of the Serpent and his rule. The promise of victory through the singular seed of the woman then creates anticipation and expectation of a future, total, complete victory. This is the essence of Messianism, which includes messianic rule and restoration of mankind to God's direct theocratic rule. The remainder of Genesis and the Bible demonstrate the historical development of Yahweh calling out the elect seed of the woman to personally crush the head of the Serpent, thereby removing the curse and re-establishing God's direct theocratic rule.

This first, initial covenant-promise in Genesis 3:15 of blessing through the individual election of the seed of the woman is an unconditional and irrevocable promise. Adam responds by faith to the seed promise as indicated by his naming the woman. Adam named the woman Eve, which means "mother of all living," thereby indicating he believed Yahweh's verbal promise. The woman would not die, but rather she would live; a future seed would indeed come through the woman. Yahweh's gender-specific curses upon the man and woman represent divine judgment within the purview of grace.

These curses serves as a constant reminder to man and woman that (1) they need divine initiative and assistance to overcome evil; (2) the Serpent's word of independent rule is

⁵⁰ Non-dispenational Carl F. H. Henry correctly articulates the essential case for a millennial kingdom is based upon these tenants: "the Old Testament prophets speak so emphatically of a coming universal age of earthly peace and justice that to transfer this vision wholly to a transcendent superterrestrial kingdom is unjustifiable; (2) because the historical fall of Adam involves all human history in its consequences, it requires an historical redemption that extends as far as the curse is found' to complete Christ's victory over sin; (3) the most natural interpretation of Revelation seems to suggest an earthly millennial reign of Christ prior to the inauguration of God's eternal Kingdom" (Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], 6:504).

indeed a lie; and (3) Yahweh's direct theocratic rule would not be immediately re-established. Yahweh's development of this future seed promise illustrates his heavenly, kingly sovereign rule is different than the promised rule in the future theocratic kingdom in which the seed promise is fulfilled. "God's kingdom means God's *reign* and the various times, spheres, and purposes of his overall reign have taken on different forms."⁵¹ God's ongoing always present sovereign rule in administering this Genesis 3:15 seed promise should not be confused with the promise-fulfillment of theocratic rule. There is then a recognized difference between God's heavenly reign in sovereignly bringing the seed promise to fulfillment vs. his actual theocratic rule. The full promise of Genesis 3:15 is not fulfilled until Yahweh's direct rulership and full theocracy is fully restored over mankind-this restoration includes the removal of the curse. Most contemporary traditional dispensationalist believe the seed-promise of Genesis 3:15 is inaugurated during the millennial kingdom and eternally fulfilled in the eternal state.

Old Testament Portrayal of the Messianic Kingdom Age

The OT prophets portray the kingdom age with Eden-like terminology (Isa 11:9; Ps 2:8) as occurring on earth that reverses the curse. Isaiah emphasizes, "And her wilderness he will make like Eden" (Isa 51:3). Ezekiel links fulfillment of his new covenant promise to Israel in declaring that desolate Israel will "become like the garden of Eden" (Ezek 36:35) and that the Lord himself will act on behalf of his name alone in fulfilling the prophecy (Ezek 36:22-38). Hosea writes that even the beasts of the field will all "lie down in safety" (Hos 2:18).

Messiah-God reigns in Jerusalem and exercises Davidic rule upon earth to re-establish his direct sovereign rulership to fulfill

⁵¹ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Ada, MI: Bethany House, 2005), 461; emphasis original.

his promises. The Lord will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over the entire earth (Zech 14:4, 9, 16; Ezek 37:24-25). National Israel will be redeemed and experience full, covenant rest according to OT prophecies (Jer 31:33-34; Zech 12:10; 13:1, 6, 9). The nation will be the Lord's messenger to the Gentile nations.

The millennium government will be a theocracy (Zech 14:9) and though centered in Jerusalem, it will extend in authority throughout the entire earth (Mic 4:1-2; Dan 7:13-14, 27), resulting in world peace and immediate justice for sin (Isa 11:3-5). There will be peace and prosperity throughout the earth (Isa 2:4; 65:21-23; Amos 9:13-15; cf. Isa 9:4-7; Mic 4:3-4) and the curse will be almost removed leading to tranquility in the animal kingdom (Isa 11:6-9) and geological changes (Zech 14:4; Isa 11:15). The Lord's enemies including the heavenly hosts will be confined and imprisoned (Isa 24:21-22). Disease and deformity will be rectified and sickness virtually unknown (Isa 33:24) and long life will be common (Isa 65:20-22). However both sin and death will occur, so this millennial description cannot be confused with the eternal state (Isa 65:20). Joy and gladness of heart will prevail (Isa 25:8-9; 30:29; 60:15; 61:7). The millennial worship will be world-wide though it will also entail a unique place of worship in Jerusalem. A new temple exists where the Lord's glory will be present (Ezek 40-48). Sacrifices will occur though most likely serving as memorial reminder to the blessings of the new covenant. Since Israel was never completely faithful in the old covenant (including sacrifices), the occurrence of sacrifices in the millennium illustrate the faithfulness made available through the new covenant. These sacrifices most likely serve to constantly remind the people of new covenant superiority.

The Seed Promise, Abram, and Covenants

Abram is presented as the person through whom the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 will appear (Gen 11:27-25:11); hence the Abrahamic covenant is represented as an unconditional covenant since it necessarily reflects God's

sovereign and unconditional promise regarding the seed of the woman. "Therefore the existence and continuance of the covenant does not depend on Abram. Since Abram did not make (cut) the covenant he cannot break the covenant. God alone participated in the oath and ratification, binding himself to an unalterable promise and irreversible course of action."⁵² Drumbell observes that Genesis 12:1-3 offers a divine counter to the effects of the fall thus the fivefold occurrence of *blessing* is in direct contrast to the fivefold occurrence of curse in Genesis 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25.⁵³ This Abrahamic promise/covenant includes an aspect of a *land promise, a seed promise, and a blessing promise*. Importantly, the Abrahamic covenant is said to be eternal or everlasting. God's covenant with Abraham is called an everlasting covenant (Gen 13:15; 17:7- 8, 13, 19) which the Psalmist celebrates in writing:

He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations, The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac. Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant, Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan As the portion of your inheritance." (Psalms 105:8-11)

The unconditional nature is affirmed by an unqualified promise that God pledges himself as the protector and guarantor of the covenant.⁵⁴ This covenant was reiterated and

⁵² Rick Bowman, "Abrahamic Covenant," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 31.

⁵³ William J. Drumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 25.

⁵⁴ The Abrahamic promise/covenant entails a divine oath made by YHHW to Abram and his descendants. In summary, the characteristics of the covenant include the following:

1. It is an *unconditional covenant*- its fulfillment is based upon God's faithfulness and ability alone though enjoyment of the blessings or timing of fulfillment is conditioned upon faith. This

confirmed unconditionally in spite of disobedience even while Israel was in covenant judgment for disobedience (Jer 31:35-40; 2 Kgs 13:23; Mic 7:18-20) including even after Israel had rejected the Messiah (Acts 3:25-26).

These aspects of *land, seed, and blessing* were further developed in other promise-covenants in the OT to form the basis of the future kingdom age. All three aspects of these covenants must be satisfied prior to the inauguration of the kingdom age:

- (1) A land promise. The aspect of the land promise is developed in Genesis to refer to a land with actual, spatial earthly boundaries which is an eternal inheritance to select physical descendants of Abraham. The land promise in Genesis 12:1-3 is formalized as a land grant covenant in Genesis 15. The land promise is more fully developed in Deuteronomy 19:1-30:10 as a guarantee that Israel would

unconditionality is supported by the following: (a) It is revealed and stated as unconditional (Gen 12:1-3; 17:7); (b) The literary development in Genesis illustrates its unconditionally as Abram was immediately blessed and his enemies cursed even when Abram was disobedient; (c) Its ratification was unconditional (Gen 15:9-18)—God alone obligated himself to fulfill the terms of the covenant (see Heb 6:13-14). It was ratified in a unique way by blood sacrifice. Customarily, both persons making the covenant passed between the pieces though only God passed between sacrificial pieces (15:12, 17). Hence God obligated himself alone to fulfill the terms of the covenant (unconditional). This covenant is essentially a type of suzerainty treaty or a royal land grant; hence Abram received title deed to the land. Abram is actually put to sleep so that only YHWH passes through the two pieces of animal.

2. It is to be a *literally fulfilled*. The promises of blessing and curses literally corresponded to what occurred in the history of Israel. The promises of an heir from Abram was literally (and miraculously) fulfilled and the promise of land inheritance was partially though literally in the process of fulfillment.

3. It is eternal. God's covenant is repeatedly called an *everlasting covenant*.

be regathered into their land after covenant disobedience results in land displacement. The land boundaries have never been fulfilled nor has Israel ever lived in full covenant peace in the land. During the Messianic, millennial reign, Israel will live at peace in the land (Isa 60:21; Ezekiel 34:11-16).⁵⁵

- (2) A seed promise. This promise unconditionally guarantees future descendants from Abraham to include a great nation. The seed promise is more fully developed in 2 Samuel 7:4-17 as the Davidic covenant. The Davidic covenant guarantees a future human descendant from David to reign and rule over Abraham's physical descendants in a political, national, earthly kingdom; thus "these promises comprise a house, dynasty, throne, and seed."⁵⁶

- (3) Material and spiritual blessing to Abraham and World-wide blessing through Abraham. This aspect is further elaborated in the new covenant promises of regeneration to Israel (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36).

These *land, seed, and blessing* promises become the source of all Pentateuchal theology upon which all the prophets then build their expectation for Messiah's future, permanent reign.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Israel collected tribute from peoples in the land boundaries though they never occupied all the land nor has Israel experienced true covenant rest in the land. Even after the Solomonic reign and the exile, the prophets saw a future possession of the land (Isa 11:1-12; 14:1-3; 27:12-13; 43:1-8; 49:8-13; 66:20; Jer 16:14-16; 23:3-8; 30:1-11; 31:31-40; 32:37-44; Ezek 20:42; 34:11-16; 37:12-14; 39:25-29; Hos 1:10-11; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:8-15; Mic 4:4-7; Zech 8:3-8).

⁵⁶ Ron J. Bigalke Jr., "Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 44.

⁵⁷ Walter Kaiser labeled the three things promised to Abram as an heir, a heritage, and an inheritance (*Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 35, 84-99; J. Dwight

The future kingdom age then entails Messiah's direct reign over a regenerated, ethnic, national Israel as Messiah administers the blessings upon Israel and curses upon Israel's enemies. These covenant-promises are reconfirmed throughout Israel's history in scripture (Ps 89:3-4, 28-37; Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-21; Ezek 37:24-25; Dan 7:13-14; Hos 3:4-5; Amos 9:11) and form the basis for the future kingdom age which the psalmist reaffirms.

My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, and my covenant shall be confirmed to him. So I will establish his descendants forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his sons forsake My law, and do not walk in My judgments, if they violate My statutes, and do not keep My commandments, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But I will not break off my lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. his descendents shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful. (Ps 89:28-37)

THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE FUTURE MESSIANIC KINGDOM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Revelation 20:1-6: Millennial Description

In Revelation 2-3, Satan is seen as actively contesting against the seven churches of Asia Minor. The futurist view of Revelation (advocated here) understands chapters 6-22 describing chronological, progressive future prophetic events

Pentecost and Robert L. Saucy referred to them as seed, blessing and land (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965], 65-94; and Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 42).

yet to occur.⁵⁸ Similar to how OT prophets provided an overarching view of God's plan to encourage Israel, so here John portrays God's overall kingdom program to propel the historical churches to trust and faithfully obey Christ in the midst of trials since he would one day return and reign victorious.

Revelation 20:1-6 provides a graphic chronological and future-prophetic description of God's direct theocratic rule returning to earth. David Mappes writes,

The notion of futurism in prophecy is based on the idea of promise—a declaration or assurance made to a person stating what one will or will not do with respect to the future. . . . Prophecy is a specific type of promise that entails either a foretelling of events (futurism) or a 'forth-telling' of previous promises (application of previous promises in Scripture). . . . foretold or forth-told in rich imagery designed to shock and convince the reader/hearer that the status quo will not continue because the meaning being foretold or forth-told is true— even if the event has not transpired. Prophecy reveals what is otherwise unknowable about God's redemptive plan and his very character.⁵⁹

Some of the promises to these seven churches are later portrayed as fulfilled in the millennium. Promised victory over the second death is fulfilled in 20:6; authority to reign over the nations in 2:26-27 is fulfilled in 20:4 and being clothed in white garments and having a name in the book of life is portrayed in 19:8-9 and 20:12, 15. The promise to sit on thrones in 3:21 is

⁵⁸ The historicist view of Revelation is an interpretative framework that presents the entire book of Revelation as giving symbolic presentations of God's plan that occurs throughout church history—rather than referring to future events. The current popular preterist view (or contemporary-historical view) asserts that Revelation primarily describes first-century experience with no or little prophetic futurism.

⁵⁹ David Mappes, "Recalculating," 33.

fulfilled in 20:4. Other similar promises appear in Scripture indicating that church age believers will indeed participate in reigning with Christ during the millennium. John portrayed these unknowable future events to “shock” and “re-orient” these churches regarding the reality of their future status with Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 20:1-3, John portrays the binding of Satan and the removal of the beast and false prophet as an absolute, new future reality which only occurs when Jesus himself returns to earth. While binding imagery is used throughout the New and Old Testaments to describe God’s sovereign restriction upon the devil, Satan is still portrayed as the active tempter, deceiver, and enemy of God. Prior to the resurrection he deceived Eve by his cunning (2 Cor 2:11; 11:3), induced Judas to betray Christ (Jn 13:2) as well as tried to undermine Peter’s faith (Luke 22:31). After the resurrection though defeated, he continues his deception since he is himself the progenitor of evil (John 8:44) and not yet spatially bound. he motivated Ananias and Sapphira to lie (Acts 5:3), he blinds the minds of those who hear the gospel (2 Cor 4:3-4), deceives the church through false teachers (2 Cor 11:14), takes captive the unsaved (2 Tim 2:26), and is looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8).

However, Christ himself, in the second coming will bring an end to the deceptive activity of the Beast and False Prophet (Rev 19:20), as well as Satan (20:1-3). In 20:1-3, the situation is completely different from other binding imagery. Satan is cast *out of the earth* into a place where he is kept from “deceiving the nations.” Satan is bound in chains, thrown into the abyss which is shut, locked, and sealed so as to prevent him from deceiving the nations. John himself in his letter draws a clear distinction between Satan’s restriction and his actual removal. In Revelation 12, Satan and his followers are prophesied as being cast from heaven to the earth in a future time period. John describes this removal from the heavens as a precursor for heavenly praise while his restriction to earth is described as a “woe to the earth” where he goes forth to increase his deception and persecution of God’s people (13:14; 18:23).

The comparison of the binding imagery of Satan in Revelation 12 and 20:1-3 alone does not support the amillennial recapitulatory view of Revelation 20:1-3. Amillennialists view Revelation 20:1-6 as a theological-metaphorical description of Christ's current reign over the church or as a theological-metaphorical description of Christ's current reign over the saints in heaven.⁶⁰ Rather than viewing Revelation as portraying a chronologically, progressive picture of future events, amillennial theologians posit the book portrays a recapitulation of events that all churches experience. This view of recapitulation asserts "the book of Revelation consists of seven sections [or some number] which run parallel to each other, each of which depicts the church and the world from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of his second coming."⁶¹ This

⁶⁰ Hoekema writes, "Amillennialists interpret the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20:4-6 as describing the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven. They understand the binding of Satan mentioned in the first three verses of this chapter as being in effect during the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, though ending shortly before Christ's return. They teach that Christ will return after this heavenly millennial reign. . . . the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ is ruling his people" (Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 174). Another amillennial view of these two resurrections in Revelation 20:1-6 interprets the first resurrection (20:1-3) as referring to the believer's regeneration and subsequent glorification while the second reference to resurrection as referring to a general bodily resurrection (Ray Summers, *Worthy is the Lamb* [Nashville: Broadman P, 1951], 204-06) and in Ray Summers, "Revelation 20: An Interpretation," *RevExp* 57, no 2 [April 1960]: 180-82). Berkouwer comments that Revelation 20 is "not a narrative account of a future earthly reign of peace at all, but is the apocalyptic unveiling of the reality of salvation in Christ as a backdrop to the reality of the suffering and martyrdom that still continue as long as the dominion of Christ remains hidden" (Gerritt C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ: Studies in Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 307).

⁶¹ Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 273.

model then espouses a preconsummationist view to deny the literal description of Christ's millennial reign in 20:1-6. Beale posits that Revelation 20:1-3 refers to the same or synchronous events described in Revelation 9:1-11 and 12:7-11, thereby concluding that one thousand-year binding imagery refers to Christ's accomplished victory in the resurrection over the powers of darkness and guarantee of the successful preaching of the gospel.⁶² Powell correctly argues, however, that the visions of 12:7-11 and 20:1-3 "cannot contradict one another [and] cannot be synchronous because Satan cannot be using the key to open the abyss to release demonic forces, and at the same time . . . being cast into the abyss and locked in it for 1000 years [so to] interpret the visions as synchronous events does tremendous violence not only to the imagery being used, but also to the plot and story of Revelation itself."⁶³

Traditional dispensationalists argue that Revelation 6-19 describes future prophetic progressive plagues (seal judgments, trumpet judgments, bowl judgments) which are known as the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. Revelation 6-19 then provides detailed future events that will fulfill the OT prophecies including the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy regarding the domination of Gentiles over Israel. The actual plague-judgments are presented in chronological sequence though dispensational scholars do not agree on the relationship of one plague-judgment to another. Most suggest a simple sequence of one plague to another or a telescopic sequence in which the event of one plague continues throughout the entire tribulation time period. These future events in Revelation 6-19

⁶² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 968, 992.

⁶³ Charles Powell, "Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1-6: Some Overlooked Arguments," <<http://bible.org/article/progression-versus-recapitulation-revelation-20:1-6-some-overlooked-arguments>> (accessed 18 August 2012).

are interspersed with interludes. These interludes recap and summarize how the prophetic judgment impacts various events and people in the tribulation. Dispensationalists deny the recapitulation view that John is simply presenting repeated metaphorical descriptions of events that the churches in Revelation 2-3 were facing. Powell further notes, "Revelation 20:1-10 contains the fourth and fifth scenes [or interludes] of the seventh bowl judgment (16:17), which is the last of the seven plagues."⁶⁴ So Christ himself returns to end the last plague in the bowl judgment; thus he himself terminates the tribulation time period. This description corresponds to Daniel's prophecy.

Messianic Kingdom and Messiah's Earthly Reign as Requisite Co-existing Events

Both John in Revelation 20:1-6 and Daniel 2 and 7 portray this future kingdom age as a time when *God himself returns to end all forms of hostile human-mediated rule to establish his kingdom*. Daniel emphasizes that all human temporal kingdoms will cease to exist at the establishment of this God-established kingdom. The fact that this God-established kingdom breaks into creation-time, ends human hostile kingdoms, and is given to the earthly saints of the most high indicates this kingdom is indeed an earthly kingdom (i.e., millennial) rather than just a reference to the eternal state (Rev 21-22). Since this earthly rule also includes an eternal dimension, the millennial kingdom most likely inaugurates the Messianic age, culminating in the eternal state.

Daniel focuses on the eternality and comprehensive nature of God's future rule as he writes, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever" (Dan 2:44). In a later parallel description,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Daniel reaffirms the universal and comprehensive rule of God as he writes, “Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him” (Dan 7:27).

Daniel’s prophecy in 2:44 points to a future God-established earthly, kingdom “which will never be destroyed” and will “crush and put an end to all other these [earthly] kingdoms.” The parallel prophecy in Daniel 7:27 indicate this everlasting earthly kingdom will be given to the “saints of the Highest One.” The “saints of the Highest One” in Daniel 7:27 refer to believing Israelites. Revelation 19:1-21 portrays Christ’s visible judgment upon the nations that opposed Israel; the false prophet and beast and “the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of him who sat upon the horse” (Rev 19:21).

Importantly, Daniel emphasizes in 7:27 that the “destruction of the Antichrist [described in Daniel 7:26] takes place before Christ’s kingdom is established, demonstrating that the kingdom of God in view here did not begin at Christ’s first coming but will be inaugurated at his return.”⁶⁵ Daniel clarifies,

He [the Antichrist] will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him (Daniel 7:25-27).

It is noteworthy that in Daniel 7, the Messianic kingdom and the earthly presence of the Messiah follows the destruction of

⁶⁵ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 216.

the person of the antichrist. The Messianic kingdom does not parallel these Gentle kingdoms but rather erupts to put an end to the Gentile kingdoms. The Messiah forms his Messianic kingdom when he destroys all hostile human rule. There is no hint of both the Messianic kingdom and hostile Gentile nations co-existing contemporaneously. Further, the Messianic kingdom is portrayed in graphic earthly and Israelitish (not heavenly or celestial) nomenclature.

Since the Scriptures require the actual personal presence of Christ to remove all other dominions through his earthly reign, then the kingdom age can only be inaugurated in his return. This same judgment and destruction of all human kingdoms is also portrayed in Zechariah 12:8-10 and in Matthew 24:29-31:

In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David *will be* like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zech 12:8-10)

One purpose behind Daniel's writing was to inform the exiled Jews that while release from Babylonian captivity and restoration to their land would occur after the seventy years of Babylonian captivity as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10), this restoration would not be equated with the Messianic kingdom of God. The nation would still face 490 years (seventy sevens = 490 years in Dan 9:24-27) of continued

Gentile domination and oppression before *everlasting righteousness* (Dan 9:24) would appear and end all other human kingdoms. This Gentile domination would start with the decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem. There would be 69 weeks of oppression (sixty-nine sevens = 483 years) between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (in distress) until the Messiah comes and is cut off. Most traditional dispensationalists understand this decree to refer to the 445/444 BC decree of Artaxerxes to restore and build Jerusalem (Neh 2:1-8) while fewer interpret the passage as referring to the earlier 458-457 BC decree of Artaxerxes to build Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11-26). The 69 weeks was completed when Christ officially presented himself to the nation of Israel and they rejected him, resulting in his crucifixion. The seventy years of Babylonian captivity was due to specific covenant violations while the seventy sevens (490 years) of future judgment would end all transgression and usher in the kingdom age of *everlasting righteousness* (Dan 9:24).⁶⁶

Following the literal 69 weeks, the last 70th week (7 years) would also literally take place during which Israel suffers its last seven years of great Gentile oppression. Just as the first 69 weeks entailed a literal and horrible time of oppression for the Jewish nation, so also this last week. Dispensationalism is the only theological system that accounts for the entire last seven years of this Gentile oppression. The time period between the 69th and 70th week is an undefined, indeterminate prophetic postponement time. Daniel hints at the postponement by his separating the 69th and 70th week. Many OT texts present the Messianic kingdom program as a single event, though with near and far historical aspects. This indeterminate period between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel is understood as an extension of the later hardening of Israel discussed by Paul in Romans 11:7-

⁶⁶ The actual length of Babylonian captivity (seventy years) is linked to the number of years Israel had neglected the seventh year Sabbaths (Jer 34:13-14; cf., 2 Chron 36:21).

10. It is also foreshadowed by the eschatological parallels between Daniel 9 and 12 as discussed later.⁶⁷

This 70th week is the Great Tribulation described in Revelation 6-19. The oppression would then continue until Messiah himself returns and establishes sovereignty for his people. According to Daniel 9:24, the purpose for these 70 weeks (490 years) of Gentile oppression is to (1) finish the transgression, (2) make an end of sins, (3) make reconciliation for iniquity, (4) bring in everlasting righteousness, (5) seal up the vision and prophecy, and (6) anoint the most holy place or thing. It is noteworthy that all six goals are earthly and not all these purposes were accomplished during the first advent of Christ.

This interpretative position is further supported by the eschatological parallel imagery between Daniel 9 and 12 which include a prayer for understanding (9:3/12:8): desolation of the Jewish people (9:27/12:7); three-and-one-half period (9:27/12:7, 11); the abolition of sacrifice (9:27/12:11); and the abomination of desolation (9:27/12:11).⁶⁸ These images refer to an eschatological time frame as Daniel refers to Michael, the great prince guarding Israel in a “time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued” (Dan 12:1) and many “of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt” (12:2) and Daniel is promised that he will also “rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age” (Dan 12:13). It is further supported by Jesus referring to this abomination of desolation in Daniel as future great-tribulation event occurring in the end days just prior to his return (Matt 24:15-24). Jesus emphasized the

⁶⁷ J. Randall Price, “Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 133-65.

⁶⁸ J. Randall Price, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks in Dispensational Interpretation,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 76-78.

absolute unparalleled exclusive nature of this event as he said, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will" (Matt 24:21).

Jesus alluded to this future rule and kingdom in the Olivet discourse in Matthew 24:30 when he said, "The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." His coming introduces both his earthly reign and judgment as Matthew stresses that "when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. . . . Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matt 25:31-34). In Luke 21:27 (cf. Luke 9:26; 17:26, 30) Jesus linked his *future Messianic ministry* with the "son of Man" phrase in Daniel 7:13-14. Mappes explains, "While the phrase 'Son of Man' pertains to different aspects of Jesus' ministries (depending on the context), in Luke 18:8 the phrase portrays Jesus as having ultimate messianic authority to bring about global judgment and ultimate deliverance . . . [in his] return in glory."⁶⁹

In summary, Daniel affirms the earthly kingdom starting when God himself returns to end all human rule. His kingly reign entails first an earthly establishment of the kingdom and then eternal dimensions of that kingdom.

In conjunction with OT prophecies, Paul also taught that God's promise for a national ethnic Israel would be fulfilled. Paul argued that national Israel was not experiencing their kingdom age covenant promises because they had rejected their Messiah King (Rom 11:11-24). Paul indicates "that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom 11:25). In 11:26, after Paul emphasizes that "all Israel will be saved," he then cites a series of OT messianic

⁶⁹ David Mappes, "What is Faith in Luke 18:1-8," *BSac* 167 (July-September 2010): 296.

kingdom texts (Isa 59:20-21; 27:9; Ps 14:7; and perhaps Jer 31:33-34) when he stresses that “just as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come to Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.’ ‘This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins’” (Rom 11:25-26).

Paul is emphasizing a future salvation of national Israel (not just the individual Jews of Paul’s day). Notably throughout this section of Romans 9-11, Israel refers to the ethnic nation in a collective sense rather than select individuals (10:21; 11:1-2, 16-24). Johnson correctly observes that if “Israel” here in Romans 11 “refers to spiritual Israel [i.e., church believers], composed of Jews and Gentiles, what is the meaning of ‘hardening in part has happened to Israel’ . . . [and] if all Paul means in this section is that there is taking place a constant grafting in of believing Israelites into the olive tree . . . [then] why would the question, ‘God has not rejected his people, has he?’ ever have arisen in the first place?”⁷⁰ Paul’s point is that God’s covenant promises to the nation of Israel are not forgotten but will be fulfilled after the hardening of Israel and the fullness of Gentiles is complete.

After Israel rejected her King, Jesus addressed the Jewish nation to say “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it” (Matt 21:43). Then once the “times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24), Jesus would return in his splendor to inaugurate the Messianic age. Thus the Messianic kingdom was postponed and temporarily delayed.

Other NT authors also spoke of this future earthly Eden-like kingdom age where justice would prevail, the creation would be re-aligned and freed from the effects of the curse (Rom 8:18-21), disciples would reign with Christ, and national Israel would be delivered. Presumably, this is why the disciples were asking Jesus, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). In a similar manner, Paul spoke of believers

⁷⁰ S. Lewis Johnson, “Evidence from Romans,” in *A Case for Premillennialism*, 217-18.

ruling alongside Christ in judging the unbelieving world (1 Cor 6:2; 2 Tim 2:12). Geilser notes that “all the basic elements of Old Testament prophetic kingdom are found in Christ’s message and miracles”⁷¹; hence the Messianic kingdom age potential was present with Christ the Messiah while he exercised Messianic and kingdom authority on earth. The Messianic kingdom was anticipated during the time of Christ. It was announced by John the Baptist (Matt 3:1-2), by Jesus himself (Matt 4:17) and his apostles (Matt 10:5-7) along with the seventy disciples (Luke 10:1-11). It was anticipated by such persons as the Magi (Matt 2:1-6), Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43), and Israel.⁷² The transfiguration in Mark 9:2-13 provides a foretaste of the glory of Jesus during the millennial reign. Peter proposed to build tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. The Feasts of Tabernacles in the OT served as a symbol not only for the Lord’s past provision to Israel but also for future time of kingdom age rest for Israel. David Hoffeditz emphasizes that Peter’s response to build tabernacles reveals his mistaken notion that the eschatological rest of the millennium had already begun because he was seeing a glimpse of the glorious kingdom.⁷³ Jesus comment about “suffer[ing] many things and be[ing] treated with contempt” (Mark 9:12) corrects Peter’s misunderstanding.

Revelation 20:1-6 does not form the basis of premillennialism though it does provide clarity on two OT truths; however, (1) Christ’s future reign is described as one-thousand years and (2) Satan is portrayed as completely removed from the earth and bound for the same time period. The prophets envisioned a future earthly kingdom age which they described as both eternal and yet containing punishment

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume Four Church, Last things* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005), 470.

⁷³ David M Hoffeditz, “A Prophet, A Kingdom, and a Messiah: The Portrayal of Elijah in the Gospel of Mark” presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, November 2003, 44-49.

and death (Isa 65:8-25). If the future kingdom age includes both the earthly reign of Christ and the eternal state as many dispensational premillennialist argue, then Revelation 20:1-6 helps resolve this conundrum. Most traditional dispensationalist believe that the one-thousand year earthly reign actually inaugurates the Messianic kingdom age which then flows into the eternal state though the millennial reign and eternal state are separate. The Messianic kingdom, millennial age is not established until Christ himself, personally returns as described in Revelation 19:11-21 and establishes his reign as portrayed in Revelation 20:1-3.

The Rapture and Judgment Seat of Christ

Since Israel is destined for seven future years of God's tribulation-wrath and since the church is specifically not destined for God's wrath, almost all traditional dispensationalist hold to the pretribulation rapture view of the church. The pretribulation rapture is a theological position that maintains Christ will appear in the clouds to instantly catch (take away) the church before the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy begins. It is the *instantaneous gathering up of the whole church by resurrection and direct translation (of those alive) from the earth and transformation into new spiritual bodies to meet Christ in the air and be with him forever* (1 Thess 4:13-18).⁷⁴

The strongest exegetical basis for the pretribulation rapture is the fact that the church is not destined for the wrath of God and that the wrath of God is poured out on the entire world throughout the entire tribulation time period. While on earth Jesus described his return in two different ways. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus elaborated on the future seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy when he spoke of the abomination of desolation with impending destruction, judgment, and signs of

⁷⁴ David Mappes, "An Overview and Analysis of Apocalyptic Views Relating to the Year 2012 as the End of the World," *JMAT* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 149.

warning. In this discourse Jesus answered the disciples' questions expressed in Matthew 24:3 regarding when he would return to "judge this generation" (Matt 23:36) and bless Israel (Matt 23:37-39). During the Upper Room Discourse a few days earlier, Jesus provided a very different description of his return. Rather than portraying intense tribulation and the day of the Lord, he announced that he would be preparing a place for them and that he would return to take them to the Father's house (John 14:3).⁷⁵ Regarding Jesus' different description in John 14, Ellison writes,

Whereas the Olivet Discourse described his final coming to Israel to prepare the remnant for the Messianic kingdom, the Upper Room Discourse announced his coming to receive them to the Father's house. Two different groups are addressed, though he spoke to the same disciples. They first represented the faithful of Israel, a remnant of which would be on earth when he returned to set up his kingdom. But they also represented the new body of the Church who would be taught and empowered by the Holy Spirit till he comes to take them to the Father's house.⁷⁶

Certain signs and events necessarily precede the second personal, visible return of Christ to this earth in establishment of his earthly kingdom (Matt 24; 1 Thess 5; 2 Thess 2). Conversely the rapture of the church is associated with imminency (1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:13-18) which requires no sign or event to occur. Therefore the rapture must occur before those certain signs and events which are necessarily associated with the earthly reign of Christ. This notion of imminency then strongly supports the pretribulational position. This attitude and ethos of imminency that the church expected Jesus to return

⁷⁵ David Mappes, "Overview and Analysis of Apocalyptic Views," 151.

⁷⁶ Stanley A. Ellisen, "The Apostasy as It Relates to the Lord's Return," 2, <<http://www.pre-trib.org>> (accessed 5 February 2010).

at any time occurs throughout the NT (John 14:2-3; 1 Cor 1:7; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 1:9-10; 4:16-17; 5:5-9; Titus 2:13; James 5:8-9). Imminence itself is a theological deduction while the actual exegetical proof centers around the notion of being exempt from God's wrath.

While the wrath of God is poured out upon the earth during the tribulation, the raptured church-age saints will undergo the *judgment seat of Christ*. This judgment is described with a building inspector metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. Christ will evaluate how each person built up the body of Christ and will receive various rewards (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10). Paul clearly indicates this evaluation is not in respect to salvation but rather to Christian service as he writes, "If any man's work is burned up he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved so as through fire" (1 Cor 3:15). Since this event occurs in heaven there is no specific indication as to its length or when the evaluation takes place. However, this evaluation occurs in preparing the bride (which is the church) to return with Christ (the Bridegroom) and reign during the millennium and throughout eternity (Rev 19:7-8; 11-16). The bridal garments of honor in preparing the bride may well be a reference to the rewards of believers for their "righteous acts" (Rev 19:7-9). The bridegroom Christ will be married to his bride the church. The *judgment seat of Christ* must therefore take place prior to Christ's return to earth and is completely different than the great white throne judgment in Revelation 20:11-15.

Christ's Return

The marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9) occurs after this heavenly evaluation of believers. There is no consensus among current traditional dispensationalists if this supper of the Lamb only occurs in heaven or throughout Christ's millennial reign. Since national Israel is not redeemed and since the OT saints are not resurrected until the Lord returns (Dan 12:12-2; Rev 20:4), the bride in Revelation 19:7 cannot refer to Israel. Rather it exclusively refers to the church in heaven (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:31-32). The marriage feast most likely occurs

throughout the millennial reign to include all the redeemed of all ages; this is the inauguration of the messianic age. In the eternal state the bride metaphor is expanded to portray the New Jerusalem which includes both Israel and the church (Rev 21:12, 14). However it is clear that Christ returns to the earth with his bride (the church) to execute fiery judgment upon the wicked. The Lord will return to defend Israel as Zechariah prophesied:

And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zech 12:9-10)

At Messiah's return, "his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives . . . and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south" (Zech 14:4). And "the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and his name the only one" (Zech 14:9). At his return, all human enemies are destroyed, Satan, the beast, and false prophet are removed and national Israel responds to their Messiah and the nation is regenerated as they experience the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36.

This is followed by the general resurrection of tribulation martyrs and OT saints (Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19; Rev 20:4, 6). Thus both OT/tribulation believers and church age saints stand together though as separate groups who are enthroned with him as "priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years" (Rev 20:6). Following the millennial reign of Christ, Satan is released to deceive the nations one last time.

This last revolt indicates that even the Edenic-like conditions of the millennial kingdom such as improved environment, social justice, economic equity, righteous

government, world-wide knowledge of God, judgment, and the control of overt sin will not meet mankind's ultimate and most basic need. These rebels will be destroyed with fire from heaven and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity (Rev 20:10).

John then describes a general resurrection of all nonbelievers who are pronounced guilty before the great white throne judgment after which the eternal state is described. The New Jerusalem coming down from heaven in chapter 21 contains the names of the twelve apostles and twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 21:12-14). God himself is said to dwell with man (Rev 21:3, 22). As Jerusalem was the center of Christ's rule and worship during the millennium so also the New Jerusalem will be the corporate expression of Christ's rule and worship throughout eternity. Interestingly, both the church and Israel are portrayed as maintaining their distinction though jointing worshipping and reigning with God throughout eternity. Similarly, Jesus emphasized to his apostles that "you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28). Both the bride of Christ (the church) and Israel (the twelve tribes) inhabit the New Jerusalem throughout eternity as all promises by God are then eternally fulfilled.

Preaching the Epistles

*Dr. William Arp
Professor of New Testament and Greek
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania*

INTRODUCTION

I have heard sermons preached from passages in epistles in which the preachers interpreted and then preached from the passages as though they were independent paragraphs with no connection to the argument of the entire epistles.¹ In fact, the preachers did not mention any arguments for the epistles. They did not mention any arguments contained in the passage itself. They paid no attention to the structure of the passages. They paid no attention to the main propositions, minor propositions, and the conjunctions which joined the propositions to each other. Instead, the preachers focused on “principles” in the passages which were selective, subjective, and syntactically uneven,² rather than on propositions which build the argument. By doing this they completely disregarded the author’s logical argument. Also, they made no reference to the function of the theology which the author included in the passage. Is this a satisfactory way to preach from epistles? I think not. I want to propose a different way than this to preach epistles which conveys the authors’ intended arguments, both in the entire epistle and in the individual paragraphs, more effectively.

¹ This paper was originally presented at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, 3-4 October 2012, in Houston, TX.

² The preachers made parallel “principles” from sentences, clauses, phrases, and words although they have different syntactic function and value in the paragraph structure.

PURPOSE

How then should we preach from someone else's mail? This is an appropriate question when one considers preaching from an epistle³ (whether Pauline or non-Pauline) since epistles are actually someone else's mail. They were not addressed to present-day readers. Rather, epistles were sent to historical churches and individuals who existed many years ago. Paul's letters were communication designed to accomplish his apostolic goals in absentia and make his presence felt among the recipients.⁴ As a result letters are one half of a dialogue.⁵ They contain answers to questions which present-day readers do not know. This does not mean that epistles are not important. They are God's eternal word. Even though epistles were written in historical particularity, they have a continuing relevance. Paul expected his letters to be read aloud in the churches so that he might instruct the lives of the hearers, and epistles continue to tell readers what to believe and how to behave.

PREPARATION

Since preparation precedes (or at least should precede) preaching, this paper focuses on preparation for preaching epistles. Since preparation is concerned with discovering the message of an epistle which one then preaches, this paper suggests an exegetical procedure which will help one discover the message which the author intended to communicate in his

³ This paper assumes that "epistle" and "letter" are interchangeable terms for the same NT documents.

⁴ Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 75.

⁵ James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 36.

epistle.⁶ It will also help one to convey the authors' arguments more clearly by reflecting the authors' main points and modifying points in his sermon. This procedure is proposed for any who have opportunity to preach epistles. The procedure is not unique. Therefore, some of you may be familiar with the procedure (or a similar one) and are presently preparing to preach accordingly. However, many may be following other procedures that do not enable them to convey the authors' intended meaning effectively. This procedure assumes that the goal of exegesis (and an exegetical procedure) is to discover the author's intended meaning as expressed in the text of an epistle. It assumes that the author was a thinking person who consciously willed to write a text for the purpose of communicating something meaningful to a reader.⁷ The contemporary preacher needs to communicate that message to his congregation. This paper will give examples of this procedure from Paul's letters to the Thessalonians.

Epistles Are Occasional Documents

The crucial thing to note when reading and interpreting epistles is that they are technically *occasional documents*.⁸ This means that they arise out of and are intended for specific situations. There was some need in the church at Thessalonica which prompted Paul to write to it. The Thessalonians were confused and concerned about believers who had died and the day of the Lord, and Paul writes to instruct them in these areas.

⁶ This exegetical procedure assumes that the preacher is preaching through an entire epistle and not preaching topically from an epistle.

⁷ Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 19.

⁸ Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 58.

Epistles were not written as general treatises on some theological topic intended for all time.⁹ They are not abstract philosophical or theological essays that explain the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Rather, they were occasioned by some circumstance from the readers' side. The letters were written to help the readers as they face everyday life. The readers had some kind of behavior which needed changed, or a doctrinal error which needed correcting, or a misunderstanding which needed clarifying. An epistle is a "word on target as the author addresses the specific circumstance."¹¹ The writers wrote their various epistles to address specifically the needs that were present in the churches to whom they were writing.

The contemporary reader ascertains the original readers' needs by repeatedly reading the epistle. He tries to discover the readers' situation which the author is addressing from the content of the epistle. For example, when Paul tells his readers that he does not want them to be ignorant about those Thessalonians who have fallen asleep (1 Thess 4:13), he is most likely referring to some situation related to the death of believers. When Paul asks the Thessalonian believer the rhetorical question, "What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?" (1 Thess 2:19), he is alluding to the charge that he abandoned them. One can also get information about the occasion from Paul's opening prayers. When Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians' work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope (1 Thess 1:2-3), he

⁹ Some interpreters consider Romans and Ephesians to be theological treatises. However, there is good reason to regard them as occasional.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Reading the Epistles," in *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible*, ed. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 131.

¹¹ Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*, 4th ed. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1998).

gives information about their response to the missionaries' ministry.

Epistles Have a Historical Context

Because epistles are occasional, it is helpful to reconstruct the historical situation which caused the author to write his letter. The nature of letters demands that the reader seek to understand the situation, community, and circumstances being addressed.¹² Epistles were not written in a time-space vacuum. Rather, they were written by historical persons to historical churches and individuals in a particular historical period. The responses to the circumstances determine the content of the letter.¹³ Each epistle has its own "epistolary situation" which requires one to investigate the specific historical context of the author and his readers.¹⁴ The life-setting of epistles is important for proper interpretation.¹⁵

Reading epistles is like listening to one side of a phone conversation without the benefit of hearing what the person on the other end is saying.¹⁶ The means one needs (as much as possible) to reconstruct the other end of the conversation. He or she needs to understand the historical context of what the author writes.

¹² Bailey and Vander Broek, *Literary Forms*: 29.

¹³ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL, 2006), 38.

¹⁴ John D. Grassmick, "Reading Ancient Letters," in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist Fanning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 237

¹⁵ Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 1.

¹⁶ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 58.

How does one reconstruct the historical situation which occasioned a letter? The Book of Acts may provide some information for Paul's letters to churches which he had visited. One learns from Luke's account that Jews, Greeks, and leading women were persuaded (believed) and joined with Paul and Silas (17:4). This indicates that Paul is writing Thessalonians to young converts who need to be rooted in faith. The reader also learns from Acts 17 that the city authorities forced Paul and Silas to leave Thessalonica after the Jews agitated the crowd (Acts 17:5-10). In fact, the magistrates took security from Jason, an act that required him to make Paul leave and made Jason responsible for seeing that Paul did not return to the city.¹⁷

One also gets information from the author's explicit statements that he gives in his letter. Paul writes that the Thessalonians welcomed Paul's message and turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess 1:5-10). They are experiencing persecution as he writes (1 Thess 3:1-5) to such a degree that they thought that the Day of the Lord had come (2 Thess 2:2). This situation is serious enough to prompt some of the readers to stop working (2 Thess 3:6-13). Paul is writing to a group of believers who are experiencing persecution, who think they are in the Day of the Lord and some of whom have stopped working and become a burden to other believers. These details help the reader understand Paul's encouragement and exhortations. Understanding the situational nature of epistolary correspondence is the heart of the exegetical task.¹⁸ One can also get background information from

¹⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 280.

¹⁸ Bailey and Vander Broek, *Literary Forms*, 29.

Paul's prayers. Paul's wish-prayer for the Thessalonians¹⁹ (1 Thess 3:11-13) points that he wants to visit them, that the Thessalonians need to love both believers and non-believers more, and that they may need to be more holy.

Finally, one also gets information about the historical situation from the text itself by practicing "mirror reading." Mirror reading is the determination that each command or argument (or some commands or arguments) of a letter is tied to a specific problem being experienced by the audience of the letter.²⁰ As a mirror reflects, so the content of epistles reflect something of the historical situation. In this way mirror reading provides clues about the situation from the text itself. For example, according to mirror reading, Paul's defense of his ministry (1 Thess 2:1-12) reflects his opponents' accusations concerning his ministry. Paul is responding to his opponents' accusations.

Mirror reading can be an effective method for reconstructing the historical situation behind a letter, but it can also overconstruct the situation. The reader needs to use it with discretion and realize that it is open to circular reasoning and subject to abuse.²¹ He needs to discover (as much as possible)

¹⁹ This is one of Paul's wish-prayers so called because Paul uses verbs in the optative mood which is the ordinary way to express a wish in the NT (F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, WBC, [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982], 71). These wish-prayers express a "desire that God take action regarding the persons mentioned in the wish." See Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of Intercessory Prayer Passages in Paul* (London: Cambridge UP, 1974), 22.

²⁰ Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 154.

²¹ For further information on the use and abuse of mirror reading see J. M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73-93; and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 33-38.

the circumstances in the historical situation and circumstances which occasioned the letter. What are the theological and pastoral issues that the author is addressing?

Epistles Have an Argument

After one reconstructs the historical situation in which an epistle is embedded and the circumstances which prompted the author to write, he needs to trace the argument of the epistle. For example, in 1 Thessalonians Paul begins with thanksgiving (1:1-10), moves to an autobiographical section (2:1-3:10), continues with a transitional prayer (3:11-13), follows with an encouragement and exhortation concerning the Lord's coming (4:13-11), gives specific exhortations which deal with their situation (5:12-22), and closes with another prayer (5:22-24). The argument is the logical development of the author's response to the issues which occasioned the letter. Two aspects that comprise the process of tracing the author's argument: (1) studying the whole book to analyze the author's basic argumentation and (2) studying the each paragraph intensively to detect the author's detailed argumentation.²² The synthetic method is one way to trace the basic argumentation,²³ and diagramming is one way to trace the detailed argumentation.

Synthesis

The synthetic method is the analysis of the basic argument of an epistle by repeatedly reading an epistle and then integrating its results.²⁴ This method practices inspectional

²² Osborne, *Spiral*, 40.

²³ For information on the synthetic method, see Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 25-35.

²⁴ This definition is adapted from Tenney's definition (*Galatians*, 25-26).

reading which skims a book to discover its basic structure and major ideas.²⁵ The synthetic method provides one with the context of the entire epistle. This context then becomes the basic unit of meaning for the epistle since interpretation should move from the largest context to smaller ones.²⁶

It is helpful to “think paragraphs” when doing inspectional reading through an epistle. This means one reads through the book paragraph by paragraph and gives “content-titles” to the paragraphs as he reads them.²⁷ The paragraph is the key to the thought development of epistles. The functions of the conjunctions which connect the paragraphs contribute much to understanding the argument of epistles. As one reads each paragraph, he should continually ask, “What is the point?” As one answers this question, he should state the content of each paragraph in a compact way.²⁸ When reading this way, it is important simply to skim each paragraph and summarize its content. One should not get bogged down on details of the paragraph at this stage.

Chart

After he gives content-titles to the paragraphs, one should make a chart²⁹ of the epistle which shows the structure of the

²⁵ Osborne, *Spiral*, 40.

²⁶ Elliott C. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 10.

²⁷ For an example of “content-titles” see Tenney, *Galatians*, 32. See also John D. Grassmick, *Principles and Practice of Exegesis* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary: 1976), 41.

²⁸ Fee and Stuart, *How to Study the Bible*, 65.

²⁹ For information on charting a book see Grant R. Osborne and Stephen B. Woodward, *Handbook for Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 24-32.

author's argument.³⁰ This chart helps one see the author's progression of thought. After one charts the book, he should look for patterns of thought in the progression of the paragraphs. He should look for breaks of thought between paragraphs and then indicate on the chart the paragraph-sections which these paragraph breaks make.³¹ Finally, one looks for major thought pattern breaks and notes the sections they form on the chart.³² These breaks form the major sections of the epistles and include one or more paragraph sections. The goal of this charting is to grasp the flow of the argument as concretely as possible and to produce an outline that shows how all these parts relate to one another.³³ These major sections then form a (tentative) integrated outline of an epistle from which one may preach.³⁴

Epistles Have a Central Message

The paragraph chart also helps readers see the epistle as a whole and grasp its purpose³⁵ and central message.³⁶ Purpose

³⁰ See Tenney's paragraph chart (*Galatians*, 32).

³¹ See Osborne's Chart of Philipppians (*Spiral*, 43).

³² Walter C. Kaiser Jr. lists eight "clues" for discovering "seams" between units of thought (*Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Principles for Preaching and Teaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 71-72).

³³ Moises Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 95.

³⁴ See Tenney's outline (*Galatians*, 35). Osborne reminds us that that this is a preliminary rather than a final outline since it represents our viewpoint. Further study may reveal the author's intended plan (*Spiral*, 45).

³⁵ See Tenney, *Galatians*, 26, and Grassmick, *Principles*, 45. Grassmick gives a provisional controlling purpose, but it is more accurately a suggested central theme.

refers the broad intentions and reasons for writing. For instance, Paul writes to the Thessalonians to defend his ministry with them (1 Thess 2:1-16), to tell them his desire to see them (1 Thess 2:17-3:10), and to instruct them concerning the Lord's coming for believers (1 Thess 4:13-5:11). The central message is the basic argument by which Paul accomplishes his purpose. Knowledge of a book's purpose and central message helps a good deal in determining the contextual boundaries for an epistle's smaller units.³⁷ It provides one with a direction in which to look.³⁸

Reading and charting provides a recognition of the overall sense of an epistle, an awareness of the sense of the whole letter which comes from the individual parts of the epistle.³⁹ Seeing the whole picture protects one from distorting (by isolating) the parts which make up the whole. If one would understand the parts, his wisest course is to get to know the whole. Once he sees the main outlines of the author's thoughts and has grasped

³⁶ Paul's prayers may indicate his purpose or summarize his central message in a letter. For example, G. K. Beale suggests that Paul's prayer (3:10-13) reflects one of the main purposes of 1 Thessalonians: to serve as a temporary communication until Paul is able to return (*1-2 Thessalonians*, IVPNTC [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 112). Gene L. Green writes that Paul's prayers (3:11-13 and 5:23-24) summarize the central message of 1 Thessalonians: Paul's return to Thessalonica and the spiritual progress of the congregation (*The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 175). Also, Gordon P. Wiles proposes that these prayers in 1 Thessalonians summarize and "place the spotlight on the central message of the letter" (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers* [London: Cambridge UP, 1974], 68).

³⁷ Richard J. Erickson, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 63.

³⁸ For instance Titus 3:8—those who believe in God need to be careful to do good works—points to Paul's emphasis on good works throughout the epistle.

³⁹ Johnson, *Hermeneutics*, 81.

his general point of view, one is able to see the meaning of everything else.⁴⁰ The understanding of what the author is saying is conditioned by the sense of the whole that “conditions” the meaning of each part.⁴¹ There is no greater aid in interpreting individual sections of a letter than a good understanding of the whole book.⁴²

Synopsis

Once one has a working knowledge of the central idea and the argument it is helpful to prepare a synopsis of the argument of the epistle. A synopsis is a concise written statement of the essential thoughts of the epistle. A synopsis is not a commentary but a summary which gives a comprehensive view of the whole epistle. The synopsis should reflect the structure of the epistle and the relationship of the paragraphs to each other. Writing a synopsis helps crystallize the thought flow in the interpreter’s thinking.⁴³ A synopsis can be helpful when preaching as it gives the preacher a familiarity with the entire epistle.⁴⁴ Understanding and expressing the central idea and argument of the epistle in a synopsis is the beginning of interpretation. The preacher is now ready to move from the essential meaning of the whole epistle to the exegetical meaning of the individual paragraphs. He is ready to move from the discovery of the argument to the details of the argument.

⁴⁰ J. I. Packer, “Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics and Inerrancy,” in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 144-45.

⁴¹ Johnson, *Hermeneutics*, 74.

⁴² Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 286.

⁴³ Grassmick, *Principles*, 61.

⁴⁴ For an illustration of a synopsis see Grassmick, *ibid.*, 62.

Paragraphs

Epistles are letters with an overall argument. Each writer is pursuing a line of thought in his epistle as a whole. The paragraphs contribute to the argument of epistles. Each paragraph contains its own argument which contributes to the author's overall argument. The paragraphs are connected and make up the overall argument. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the details and structure of the paragraph-argument in order to follow better the overall argument. A helpful way to discover the structure of the paragraph is by diagramming⁴⁵ the paragraph.

A diagram is a graphic portrayal of a sentence which shows the interrelationships of its parts.⁴⁶ The complexity of the syntax of sentences in epistles makes it useful for one to diagram in order to see the relationship of its constituent parts.⁴⁷ The advantage of diagramming is that it forces one to identify grammatically every word in the sentence.⁴⁸ It is difficult for one to comprehend the meaning of a paragraph unless he understands the syntax of the text. And it is difficult for one can claim to comprehend the syntax of a passage unless he is able to

⁴⁵ For information on diagramming see Jay E. Smith, "Sentence Diagramming, Clausal Layouts, and Exegetical Outlining," in *Interpreting the New Testament Text* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 73-134 and Schreiner, *Interpreting*, 69-96.

⁴⁶ Grassmick, *Principles*, 81.

⁴⁷ Gordon D. Fee suggests doing a sentence flow which helps one to visualize the whole paragraph (*New Testament Exegesis*, 3rd ed. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 41-58).

⁴⁸ For inherent drawbacks and liabilities of diagramming see Jay E. Smith, "Sentence Diagramming, Clausal Layouts, and Exegetical Outlining," in *Interpreting the New Testament Text*, 79.

diagram the passage.⁴⁹ Diagramming will enable the pupil to present directly and vividly to the eye the exact function of every clause in the sentence, of every phrase in the clause, and of every word in the phrase--to picture the complete analysis of the sentence, with principal and subordinate parts in their proper relations. The diagram drives the pupil to the most searching examination of the sentence, brings him face to face with every difficulty, and compels a decision on every point.⁵⁰

Diagramming compels the interpreter to slow down and to think carefully about every element of the text. Diagramming also provides the preacher with an outline that reflects the structure of the paragraph. The main propositions become the main points of the outline and the modifying propositions become the sub-points of the outline.

Once the preacher diagrams the paragraph, he needs to trace the argument of the passage. Diagramming precedes this step, because one will have difficulty following the author's argument apart from a diagram which displays the syntax of the passage. Tracing the structure of the argument in epistles is the most important step in the exegetical process. One needs to trace the argument in each paragraph,⁵¹ and then explain how each paragraph relates to preceding and following paragraphs.⁵²

⁴⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner writes that *no one* (italics mine) can claim to comprehend the syntax unless he or she can diagram the passage (*Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 69).

⁵⁰ Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg, *Higher Lessons in English: A Work on English Grammar and Composition*: (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1913), 8, qtd. in Smith, "Sentence Diagramming," 75.

⁵¹ Identifying the roles or functions which the paragraph constituents play as shown by the diagram is helpful in tracing the argument; see George H. Guthrie, "Discourse Analysis," in *Interpreting the New Testament*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 257-58.

⁵² Ibid., 97.

The key to tracing the argument in epistles is to understand the relationship between different propositions in the text.⁵³ Propositions contain the building blocks of the author's argument which reveal his line of reasoning. A proposition is an assertion or statement about something which has a subject and a predicate.⁵⁴ Propositions are either main statements (independent clauses) or modifying statements (dependent clauses). Main statements/clauses form the foundation of the author's paragraph-argument while the modifying statements/clauses add additional circumstantial details. The authors used conjunctions to indicate the relationship between propositions.

Conjunctions are words that connect words, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs. Most of the sentences in Greek New Testament begin with a conjunction.⁵⁵ The author of an epistle is developing an argument, and he connects everything in the paragraph with conjunctions. Consequently, identifying conjunctions and their functions is important in tracing the argument in a paragraph.⁵⁶ Conjunctions introduce semantic

⁵³ Discourse analysis is quite helpful for tracing the argument in epistles. The major objective of discourse analysis is to understand the organization of material as related to a given context (Guthrie, "Discourse," 253-55).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁵ Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 179. Since many sentences in English translations do not begin with conjunctions, it is beneficial when interpreting a passage to look at the Greek text to see where conjunctions occur.

⁵⁶ When words, clauses, and sentences are not joined with conjunctions it is asyndeton ("not bound together"). In such cases the relationship between units is implied from the literary context; see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 658, and Young, *Intermediate*, 180.

nuances (i.e., nuances of meaning) within a clause or to the relationship between clauses.⁵⁷ Conjunctions indicate both coordinate and subordinate relationships. Coordinate relationships occur between main clauses; subordinate relationships occur between main clauses and modifying clauses. The relationship of clauses forms the structure of the argument.⁵⁸

Epistles Contain Task Theology

The occasional nature of epistles means that they are not theological treatises.⁵⁹ They contain theology, but it is always “task theology.” Task theology is theology which the author writes for or brings to bear on the “task” at hand.⁶⁰ The task at hand relates to the occasion—behavior problem, doctrinal error, or misunderstanding—which prompted the author to write his epistle. “Task-oriented” theology results from the author’s sense of mission.⁶¹ Epistles were not written simply to expound theology. They contain theology, but the theology is directed to a particular need. For example, Paul writes about the coming of Christ and the rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:13-18) because of the Thessalonians’ confusion concerning believers who have died. He writes so that they might comfort

⁵⁷ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, England: JSOT P, 1994), 204.

⁵⁸ Prepositional phrases also help form the structure of the argument and provide details related to it. Wallace writes that a proper understanding of prepositions is vital to exegesis (*Grammar*, 357).

⁵⁹ The danger of reading letters as theological treatises is that one might draw unwarranted conclusions from reading only one letter. See Schreiner, *Understanding*, 31.

⁶⁰ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 58.

⁶¹ Erickson, *Guide*, 118.

one another. The authors apply theology to specific issues facing the churches or individuals. This use of theology comes out of the author's concern for the ongoing spiritual formation of his readers. His goal is to guide his readers toward a way of life.⁶² The specific contexts which the authors are addressing shape the theology which they include in their letters. Consequently, one needs to uncover to what problem the author is directing the theology and how the he applies that theology to his readers.

Epistles Contain Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art of effective communication.⁶³ It is the craft of effective communication, especially argumentation and the art of persuasion.⁶⁴ Rhetoric is a stylistic method for getting across a message.⁶⁵ Rhetoric relates to how the author put his epistle together. It reminds us that epistles are carefully structured. Although we may question whether authors actually structured letters in accordance with rhetorical handbooks,⁶⁶ it seems obvious that they employed rhetoric to convey their intended message. The authors attempted to persuade or dissuade their readers concerning certain attitudes and actions. Consequently, one should be aware of what the author is

⁶² For the view that Paul's letters were "pastoral letters" see Michael J; Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 77.

⁶³ Patrick Gray, *Opening Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 85.

⁶⁴ Matthew S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 109.

⁶⁵ Osborne, *Spiral*, 51.

⁶⁶ See Richard R. Melick Jr. "Literary Criticism of the New Testament," in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 445-57.

attempting to persuade his readers to think or do or not to think or do and how he structures his argument to accomplish this. His preaching should then follow the same goal and means of persuasion.

Epistles Have Parenesis

The authors employ rhetoric in the parenetic sections of their epistles (Rom 12:1-15; Gal 5:1-6:10; 1 Thess 4:1-5:22; Col 3:1-4:6; 1 Pet 4:12-5:11) where they attempt to persuade readers to behave a certain way. Parenesis is ethical exhortation, instruction concerning how or how not to live.⁶⁷ It is characterized by verbs in the imperative mood. A parenetic section of a letter has a series of instructions, commands, and exhortations to live a certain way.⁶⁸ It is an integral part of most NT letters.⁶⁹ In light of the persecution they are experiencing, Paul tells the Thessalonians how they need to continue to walk pleasing to God (1 Thess 4:1). He then follows with moral, ethical, and practical teaching in the remainder of the epistle.

Parenesis seeks to influence behavior, either by persuasion or dissuasion.⁷⁰ These ethical sections provide practical guidance.⁷¹ The occasional nature of epistles seems to require that parenesis contains concrete pastoral advice for epistolary

⁶⁷ Bailey and Vander Broek, *Literary Forms*, 62.

⁶⁸ E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Writing* (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 136.

⁶⁹ There is a distinction between *epistolary parenesis* which is found in concluding sections of some NT letters, and *parenetic style*, which permeates some letters (1 Thessalonians); see David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 191.

⁷⁰ Gray, *Opening*, 80.

⁷¹ Roetzel, *Letters*, 60.

situations.⁷² Paul was especially adept at tailoring general ethics material to specific situations.⁷³ However, some think that some exhortations are general and could be applied in various situations.⁷⁴ Often the parenetic material was a key—if not the key—thrust of Paul's letter.⁷⁵ Therefore, the preacher must identify the parenetic sections and exhortations, discern what behavior the author is persuading or dissuading through these exhortations, and correctly apply the exhortations to his hearer.

PREACHING

When the preacher has finished his preparation and discovered the author's intended meaning (as much as he is able), he is ready to communicate that meaning to his congregation. This paper proposes that preachers concentrate on expository preaching.⁷⁶ Expository preaching is "Bible-centered preaching." It is handling the text "in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the over—all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers."⁷⁷ Expository preaching

⁷² Ibid., 75-76.

⁷³ W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 122.

⁷⁴ John D. Grassmick, "Epistolary Genre," *Interpreting the New Testament Text*, 236.

⁷⁵ Richards, *Letter Writing*, 137.

⁷⁶ For a defense of expository preaching see Stanley Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 12-16 and Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 7-13.

⁷⁷ Merrill Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 33.

describes what is involved in biblical preaching, namely, the exposition of a biblical passage.⁷⁸ Expository preaching can also be defined in this way: "To expound Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey him."⁷⁹ Expository preaching is explanatory preaching and engaging⁸⁰ preaching. It is preaching which explains the meaning of a text (in the context of an entire book) to an audience for the purpose of engagement. Expository preaching aims at spiritual formation.⁸¹ Consequently, biblical preaching must be applied. Application is not incidental to expository preaching: it is essential.⁸² Epistles (and the entire Bible) provide information as a means to spiritual formation. There can be no true spiritual transforming apart from the true meaning of the biblical text.⁸³ Consequently, the preacher must encourage his hearers to respond to the significance⁸⁴ of the meaning of the passage.

⁷⁸ Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 11.

⁷⁹ John Stott, "A Definition of Biblical Preaching," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 24.

⁸⁰ Engaging preaching means that the hearers get involved with the meaning of the passage and its significance for their lives.

⁸¹ Robertson McQuilkin, "Spiritual Formation Through Preaching," in *Biblical Preaching*, 48-53.

⁸² Haddon Robinson, "My Theory of Homiletics," in *Biblical Preaching*, 58-59.

⁸³ Walt Russel, *Playing With Fire: How the Bible Ignites Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2000), 43.

⁸⁴ Significance deals with the relation of the meaning to the reader. It involves a person's reaction towards the meaning of a text and its implications. See Stein, *Basic Guide*, 38-43.

This paper offers the following suggestions based on the character and nature of epistles which may help the preacher communicate the author's intended meaning in a more accurate way⁸⁵ so that he might help his help his congregation see the significance of the meaning so that they might apply it to their lives in a more accurate way.

(1) One might preach a message on the historical background of an epistle (if known). For example, if one were preaching through Philippians, he could preach through Acts 16. If he were preaching through 1 & 2 Thessalonians, he could preach from Acts 17:1-9. He can do this by identifying the background passage. This will provide the congregation with an insight into the historical situation of the original readers to which Paul addresses his letter.

(2) One might preach a message on the entire epistle focusing on the author's main idea, his relationship between sections, and his basic argument structure. He can do this by using his synthetic outline and synopsis. This will provide the congregation with an initial understanding of the epistle.

(3) One might outline each passage and consequent message according to the structure of each paragraph. He can do this from his diagram. This means he will make the main propositions the main points of the outline and will not make the modifying clauses and phrases main points. This will help the congregation understand the basic structure of the paragraph.

(4) One might preach each paragraph as a contributing part to the argument of the entire epistle. He can do this by constantly referring to the main idea of the epistle and relating the main point of the paragraph to it. This will help the congregation learn to study an epistle as a cohesive document.

(5) One might indicate the relationships between the main propositions in his outline. He can do this identifying the

⁸⁵ It is not the purpose of this section to rehearse various homiletic principles since there are many good books on homiletics that focus on those principles. Rather, it is to present some specific principles for preaching epistles.

conjunctions and the function in the structure of the paragraph. This will help the congregation understand better the structural argument.

(6) One might identify the theology in each paragraph and the task which it addresses. He can do this by studying the context in which the theology appears. He can then tell the congregation how the theology applies to their life situation. This will help the congregation see the life-affecting value of theology.

(7) One might pay close attention to the parenetic passages and their relationship to the occasion of the epistle. He might point out what behavior the author is persuading or dissuading. He might also point out how the parenesis is related to the theology of the epistle. He can do this by noting the commands in the passage. This will help the congregation how to behave in situations similar to those of the epistles's recipients.

(8) One might be careful when finding "principles" in the text; making them outline points, and then preaching them as though they are independent and unrelated to each other. (This happens when the preacher says something like, "There are four principles in this passage," and then preaches them as parallel and unrelated points.) Many times the principles are selective, subjective, and syntactically unequal and consequently ignore the author's argument. Instead, he should pay attention to the author's main propositions and conjunctions so that he follows the author's argument. This will help the audience follow the author's argument through the paragraph.

These suggestions might help you preach epistles effectively. I propose them for your consideration to see whether they might help you effectively preach epistles. May God form you spiritually as you prepare to preach an epistle. May he form your congregation spiritually as you preach an epistle. May God bless you both as you preach epistles.

The Usefulness of Archeology for Apologetics

Dr. Kenneth Gardoski
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

We use the term “silver bullet” for a simple and seemingly magical solution to a complex problem.¹ Its origins are the folklore belief that a silver bullet was the only weapon that could kill a werewolf. While Christian apologists might wish for a silver bullet argument—one that would easily and almost magically kill all attacks against the faith, such an argument does not exist. There are many useful and compelling arguments from a range of disciplines like science and philosophy; however, with their usefulness come unavoidable limitations. So it is with the use of archeology in apologetics. Archeology is useful in a powerful way, and yet it has its definite limitations.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the usefulness of archeology for apologetics while at the same time pointing out its limitations. I will not deal extensively with the archeological evidence for the Christian faith.² Instead, I will present just a few representative examples to make this point: while archeology is limited and therefore not a silver bullet that can accomplish all we could wish for it, it still performs an important and valuable task related to the word of God and the Christian faith.

¹ This article was originally written for and delivered as a Faculty Forum paper at Baptist Bible Seminary on 14 December 2012.

² For some good representative treatments see e.g., Gary Gromacki, “The Battle for Old Testament History and Archeology,” *JMAT* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 24–55; Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out: What Archeology Reveals About the Truth of the Bible* (Eugene, OR:

Defining Apologetics

Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith. The word comes from the Greek ἀπολογία, meaning “a speech of defense.”³ The verb form, ἀπολογέομαι, means to “speak in one’s own defense” or “defend oneself.”⁴ The terms were used for the formal defense of legal proceedings. NT occurrences of these words suggest a couple of nuances for the Christian’s defense. First, the Christian needs to defend his faith from false charges brought against it. For example, Paul defended himself before the Roman authorities against the false charges of the Jews (e.g., Acts 25:7–8; 26:1–2). Second, this defense may also take a more positive tack. Peter describes the Christian’s defense as giving “an account for the hope that is in [him]” (λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, 1 Pet 3:15).⁵ While the context of 1 Peter likewise includes the Christian’s defense against false charges (see 2:12, 15; 3:16; 4:14), 1 Peter 3:15 does seem to include giving positive reasons for the hope we have in Christ. Furthermore, this is to take place “always” and with “everyone” who asks us—that is informally and not just in formal legal settings.

These two aspects of the Christian’s defense translate roughly into what Christian apologists call negative and positive apologetics. Ronald Nash describes negative apologetics as answering charges brought against the Christian faith and removing obstacles to belief that people may have. This is a defensive process. Sometimes negative or defensive apologetics is called polemics (refuting false propositions). Positive apologetics, on the other hand, describes “efforts to provide

Harvest House, 1997); and Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His World: The Archeological Evidence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012).

³ BDAG, 117.

⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁵ All Scripture quotes in this paper are from the NASB.

reasons or arguments in support of the Christian faith.”⁶ It is a defense of the faith carried out on the offensive (but not in an offensive manner!).

APOLOGETICS AND ARCHEOLOGY

Archeology is the study of the material remains of past human life and activities.⁷ As such archeology falls under the discipline of history, the study of the past. Its connection with history brings archeology into the arena of Christian apologetics. Archeology enters the apologetic enterprise in both the positive and negative sense. Negatively, archeology can be useful for defending the Christian faith against charges of historical inaccuracy that people bring against Scripture. On the positive side, archeology helps make a case for the truth of the Christian faith by confirming the accuracy of the historical truth claims found in Scripture.

Archeology and Positive Apologetics

What follows are just a few well-known examples of archeological discoveries useful for positive apologetics. However, along with their usefulness come definite limitations, which I will clarify as we go.

The Dead Sea Scrolls: Confirming the Text of the Hebrew Bible

In the spring of 1947 a Bedouin shepherd was searching the cliffs along the western shore of the Dead Sea for a lost goat. As the story goes, the shepherd left his companions in search of his goat and found a cave. He threw in a stone to scare out his goat in case it had wandered in there, but instead of hearing a

⁶ Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 14.

⁷ <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/archeology>> accessed 5 December 2012.

startled goat, he heard breaking pottery. He lowered himself in and saw large ancient jars. He thought he might have found hidden treasure, but was disappointed only to find leather scrolls. He took seven of the best scrolls and let them hang in his tent for almost two years before finally selling them to a Bethlehem merchant. By an interesting turn of events the newly birthed modern state of Israel obtained all seven of those scrolls, and in 1948 the world first learned of this important archeological discovery. In the following years Bedouins and archeologists alike scrambled to discover more scrolls, and by 1956 ten more caves were discovered to contain scrolls. In total quite a number of intact scrolls as well as thousands of scroll fragments make up what we now call the “Dead Sea Scrolls” (DSS).

Among these scrolls and fragments are contained at least part of every book in the Hebrew Bible except Esther. Perhaps the most famous scroll is the great Isaiah scroll, containing all 66 chapters of the Book of Isaiah on a continuous scroll 1 foot high by 24 feet long.

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of the discovery of the DSS. The great biblical archeologist William Foxwell Albright called them “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times.”⁸ Why are they so important? Before the discovery of the DSS, the oldest manuscript of the Hebrew Bible was the Aleppo Codex from AD 935. While old, it was still over 1,000 years removed from the original OT Scriptures which had been copied and passed on for all those centuries.⁹

The DSS, on the other hand, date from around 200 BC to AD 68. So virtually overnight the discovery of the DSS allowed scholars to go back 1,000 years and examine OT manuscripts 1,000 years closer to the originals. What would they discover? What had happened in those 1,000 years with the text of the Hebrew Bible? How accurately had the Jews copied their sacred

⁸ As cited in Price, *Stones Cry Out*, 277.

⁹ For information on the Aleppo Codex see <www.aleppocodex.org> (accessed 10 December 2012).

Scriptures for 1,000 years? What scholars discovered was impressive. A comparison of the Aleppo Codex with the DSS, with a full 1,000 years between them, revealed virtually identical wording. The discovery of the DSS demonstrates that for 1,000 years Jewish scribes had painstakingly copied their Scriptures almost flawlessly, showing us that the Hebrew Scriptures we have today are for all practical purposes identical to the Hebrew Scriptures from the time of Christ.

The DSS are an excellent example of the relationship between archeology and the Bible and positive apologetics. The Christian faith is based on historical events preserved in the Scriptures. The accuracy of those preserved accounts is important. Thus the DSS make a valuable contribution to apologetics: they show that the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted almost perfectly for over 2,000 years. The OT in our English Bibles has been translated from a Hebrew text that is virtually identical to the Hebrew text known and used by Jesus and the apostles as the authoritative word of God. This claim is well founded because of the discovery of the DSS.¹⁰

The DSS have certainly been useful for apologetics, but that usefulness is limited. While they show that the text of the Hebrew Bible has been faithfully preserved through the centuries, they cannot prove that the historical accounts of Scripture are true. They cannot prove that the people, places, and events recorded in the Hebrew Bible were real. So while the DSS help confirm the text of Scripture, they cannot confirm the truth of Scripture. They serve a useful yet limited function for apologetics.

Thankfully that is not the end of the story, for not only has archeology confirmed the text of Scripture, it has also confirmed the truth of its historical assertions. Before we consider just two famous examples, I would like to add this important point.

¹⁰ While the preservation of the Greek NT differs from that of the OT, a similar case can be made for the reliability of the NT text based on archeological discovery. See e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th rev. ed. (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1971).

There have been many examples of archeological discoveries that have touched upon some person, place, event, or object described in Scripture that have confirmed its historical accuracy. Well-known archaeologist Nelson Glueck famously put it this way:

As a matter of fact ... it may be clearly stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a single biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible.¹¹

We will consider just two representative discoveries and highlight how they positively confirm historical events described in Scripture.

The Hittites: A Discovery that Changed History

The Hebrew Scriptures mention a people called the Hittites forty-seven times. The Hittites were among those inhabiting the land which God promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15:20). They were still around many years later because Solomon sold them chariots and horses (1 Kgs 10:29). Scripture presents two notable Hittites. Ephron the Hittite sold Abraham a field and its cave so Abraham could bury his wife Sarah (Gen 23:10–20). Uriah the Hittite was put to death at David's command after David had committed adultery with Uriah's wife Bathsheba (2 Sam 11). Uriah merits mention in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:6).

In spite of these numerous biblical references, just over 100 years ago there was no historical evidence whatsoever that such a people ever lived. This caused Bible critics to claim that the

¹¹ Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1959), 136; cited in Patrick Zukeran, "Archaeology and the Old Testament," <http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4955427/k.3D58/Arc_haeology_and_the_Old_Testament.htm> (accessed 10 December 2012).

Hittites were a fictional people invented by the biblical writers. However, that viewpoint was soon to change. In the late 1800s ancient clay tablets in an unknown script turned up in present-day Turkey. This led to excavations and the discovery of what proved to be the ancient capital city of the Hittites. Excavators unearthed a number of temples, fortifications, and massive monuments.

In one storage room archeologists discovered more than 10,000 clay tablets. Besides proving that the Hittites were a real people, these written records proved valuable on several fronts. For one, they demonstrated that the Hittite language should be classified with the Indo-European languages, the ancestor of English. Furthermore, the clay tablets contain treaties made with people the Hittites conquered, which have provided us with a better understanding of the treaties and covenants recorded in the OT. Finally, the tablets detail many religious ceremonies that Hittite priests performed for purification from sin and purification of their temples. The instructions are very elaborate and lengthy. Critics of the Bible once claimed that the laws and ceremonies found in the Law of Moses are too complex and sophisticated for the time they were supposedly written (ca. 1400 BC). However, the Hittite tablets proved that the 1400 BC ceremonies described in the OT are consistent with the ceremonies of other cultures of the same era.

One author summarizes the importance of the archeological discovery of the Hittites in this way:

Now the Bible picture of this people fits in perfectly with what we know of the Hittite nation from the monuments [discovered]. As an empire they never conquered the land of Canaan itself, although the Hittite local tribes did settle there at an early date. Nothing discovered by the excavators has in any way discredited the Biblical account. Scripture accuracy has once more been proved by the archaeologist.¹²

¹² Fred Wright, *Highlights of Archeology in the Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1955), 94–95; cited in Zukeran, “Understanding Archaeology.”

House of David: A Discovery for the Minimalists

It is certainly true that David is an important figure in Scripture. The Bible mentions him over 1,000 times! He is the primary subject of 62 chapters of the OT, and he was the author of 73 psalms. David is one of the most important people in Jesus' lineage, for Jesus came as the Son of David who would inherit the throne of his father David (Luke 1:32). The covenant God made with David is one of the most important events in all of Scripture.

With all of this said it may come as a surprise that until very recently there was not a trace of evidence outside of Scripture that King David ever existed. Minimalists—those who give the Bible minimal credibility as an accurate historical document—saw this lack of archeological evidence as proof that King David never existed. Minimalists surmised that David was a mythical figure invented out of various hero traditions by the authors of Scripture to explain the formation of the Israelite nation.

However, an important principle of archeology is that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Since so little of the Holy Land has been excavated, to take the absence of archeological evidence as proof positive for anything is questionable at best. Nevertheless, we would think that given David's importance sometime somewhere some piece of physical evidence would have appeared which would at least mention him. After all, excavations have unearthed references to other Israelite kings. Why not David, especially since he was such a key figure in Israelite history?

This situation changed in 1993, when archeologists excavating in northern Israel at Tel Dan made a startling discovery. They unearthed a stele (a monument with an inscription) which contained the words "House of David." The stele was made by the Arameans and dates to around the ninth century BC, about 150 years after David's reign, at a time when the Arameans were at war with Israel. The inscription is written in Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew, and describes how a king of Aram defeated "Jehoram son of Ahab king of Israel and ... Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of the House of David." Second Kings 8–12 describes the lives of these kings and how a

man named Hazael usurped the throne of Aram and made war with both Israel and Judah during his reign. It is very possible that king Hazael of Aram commissioned the stele to commemorate his victories over Israel.

Archeologist Bryant Wood summarizes the importance of the discovery of the Tel Dan Stele:

In our day, most scholars, archeologists and biblical scholars would take a very critical view of the historical accuracy of many of the accounts in the Bible, particularly in the early books of the Bible. Most scholars today would say that anything prior to the kingdom period is simply folk stories and myths, and here is where biblical archeology can play a very important role because in the field of archeology, we can come up with new evidence and new data to help us understand these biblical accounts. Many times the newer discoveries of archeology have overturned older critical views of the Bible. Many scholars have said there never was a David or a Solomon, and now we have a stele that actually mentions David.¹³

Archeology and Defensive Apologetics

Now we will consider two recent discoveries that some have tried to use to disprove the Bible. In these cases archeology becomes useful for defensive apologetics—answering charges brought against the truthfulness of what Scripture teaches. In these cases archeology can serve to disprove those using archeological discoveries to disprove the Bible!

¹³ Cited in Price, *Stones Cry Out*, 173.

***The Tomb of Jesus?*¹⁴**

From the beginning people have tried to overthrow the truth about Jesus Christ. It should not surprise that attempts continue today. On March 4, 2007, just in time for Easter, the Discovery Channel aired a documentary film called *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, claiming to have unearthed the tomb of Jesus and His family.¹⁵ The tomb is called the Talpiot Tomb because of its discovery in the Jerusalem suburb of Talpiot. The news of the discovery created a sensation: if this tomb and the ossuaries (bone boxes) found inside belong to Jesus and his family, then evidence for the mortal remains of Jesus have been discovered inside this tomb, and thus how can Christianity be true?

In making the claim, the Discovery Channel offered a theological disclaimer: even though the body of Jesus might have been moved from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea to this newly discovered family tomb, Jesus might still have been raised from the dead from this newly discovered tomb. Furthermore, even if evidence of Jesus' mortal remains have been found via these ossuaries, this does not rule out a spiritual ascension.¹⁶ So at the same time the Discovery Channel claimed the discovery of the mortal remains of Jesus, they assured us that this discovery

¹⁴ Matthew records the attempt after the resurrection of Christ to circulate the lie that Jesus' disciples stole his body while the soldiers guarding his tomb were sleeping (Matt 28:15). The irony of this account is that the guard was set for the very purpose of preventing such a thing from happening (Matt 27:62–66).

¹⁵ For information on the documentary see <www.dsc.discovery.com/convergence/tomb/tomb.html> (accessed 15 October 2012). One year later, during the 2008 Easter season the media were still talking up the discovery. See: Thomas F. Madden, "Not Dead Yet: *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*—One Year Later," *National Review Online*, <www.nationalreview.com/articles/223979/not-dead-yet/thomas-f-madden> (accessed 15 October 2012).

¹⁶ <www.dsc.discovery.com/convergence/tomb/theology/theology.html> (accessed 15 October 2012).

does not challenge Christian belief in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus!

However, all four gospels record that the resurrection of Jesus took place from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, not from some other tomb (Matt 27:57–28:8; Mark 15:42–16:8; Luke 23:50–24:9; John 19:38–20:8). The idea that Jesus' disciples removed his body was a lie circulated by the chief priests, not what really happened (Matt 28:11–15). Furthermore, the Bible is clear that it was a physical resurrection. No body remained behind; the tomb was empty. Finally, the Bible is likewise clear that Jesus' ascension was physical (Luke 24:38–39, 51; Acts 1:9–11). The whole point of the scriptural account is that Jesus rose bodily and ascended to the Father bodily. One cannot claim to have discovered the box that held the bones of Jesus and still claim to uphold the resurrection and ascension of Jesus as taught in Scripture!

What about this discovery from an archeological point of view? Does the Discovery Channel documentary hold any water for trained archeologists? Many archeologists who do not profess belief in Christianity have stepped forward to say, "No!" For example, the well-known archeologist William Dever says, "I'm not a Christian. I'm not a believer. I don't have a dog in this fight.... I just think it's a shame the way this story is being hyped and manipulated."¹⁷

Another archeologist who weighs in on the controversy is Jodi Magness. I am not sure what her personal beliefs are, but it is clear she does not believe that the Gospel accounts are entirely true.¹⁸ So she does not appear to "have a dog in this

¹⁷ Alan Cooperman, "Lost Tomb of Jesus' Claim Called a Stunt; Archeologists Decry TV Film," *Washington Post* (28 February 2007), <<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-5812531.html>> (accessed 17 October 2012).

¹⁸ Magness says, "Although the canonical Gospels may not be accurate in every detail, most scholars agree that they contain some historical information" ("Has the Tomb of Jesus Been Discovered?" *Biblical Archeology Review* [5 March 2007], originally available at: <www.bib-arch.org/bswbKCTombmagness.html>, accessed 30 April

fight” either. Nevertheless, as an archeologist she literally dismantles the claims of The Lost Tomb of Jesus point by point. Here are the problems Magness sees from the perspective of a professional archeologist:

(1) The authors chose to make their announcement in the popular media instead of at a professional meeting or in a scholarly journal, thus bypassing legitimate academic discourse.

(2) The claim that the Talpiot Tomb is the tomb of Jesus and His family contradicts the four gospels and thus the earliest recorded information we have about Jesus.

(3) Only the upper classes had rock-cut tombs, and ossuaries (bone boxes) are only associated with rock-cut tombs. The poorer classes of society couldn’t afford to own rock-cut tombs; they buried their dead in graves dug in the ground like we do today. The reason Joseph of Arimathea owned a rock-cut tomb in Jerusalem was because he was wealthy.

(4) Jesus’ family was certainly not wealthy; they could never have afforded to own a rock-cut tomb. But even if they had, their tomb would not have been in Jerusalem but in their hometown of Nazareth!

(5) The gospels clearly indicate that Jesus’ family did not own a rock-cut tomb in Jerusalem—if they had, then why would Joseph of Arimathea have needed to place Jesus in his own family’s rock-cut tomb? And if Jesus’ family had no rock-cut tomb in Jerusalem, then they had no ossuaries (bone boxes) with their names on them in a Jerusalem tomb.

(6) The names on the Talpiot ossuaries are extremely common among the Jews of first century Jerusalem.

(7) In first-century Judea it was customary to make distinctions between someone being Judean or Galilean. If the Talpiot ossuaries were really those of Jesus’ family, there would be some indication of

their Galilean origins, but the Talpiot ossuaries indicate a Judean family.

After laying out all these compelling strands of evidence, Magness concludes,

The identification of the Talpiot tomb as the tomb of Jesus and his family contradicts the canonical Gospel accounts of the death and burial of Jesus and the earliest Christian traditions about Jesus. The claim is also inconsistent with all of the available information—historical and archeological—about how Jews in the time of Jesus buried their dead, and specifically the evidence we have about poor, non-Judean families such as that of Jesus. It is a sensationalistic claim without any scientific basis or support.¹⁹

The Wife of Jesus?

The second example of an attack on the historical account of Jesus is hot off the press. On 18 September 2012, at the Tenth International Congress of Coptic Studies in Rome, Harvard Professor Karen King announced the discovery of a papyrus fragment written in Coptic (the language of early Egyptian Christians) containing the words, “Jesus said to them, ‘my wife....’”²⁰ Because of this line King dubbed the source of the fragment the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife (hereafter GJW).

The press loves a juicy story and possible evidence of Jesus being married was too good to pass up. Headlines shouted the tantalizing news: “Was Jesus Married? Ancient Papyrus Mentions His ‘Wife.’”²¹ Harvard Divinity School itself is not

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ B. D. Colen, “HDS Scholar Announces Existence of a New Early Christian Gospel from Egypt,” Harvard Divinity School (18 September 2012), <<http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news-events/articles/2012/09/16/hds-scholar-announces-existence-of-new-early-christian-gospel-from-egypt>> (accessed 17 October 2012).

²¹ Erin McLaughlin, “Was Jesus Married? Ancient Papyrus Mentions His ‘Wife,’” ABC News (18 September 2012), <<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/09/was-jesus->

claiming that the fragment proves Jesus was married. Under Q&A regarding the fragment, the answer provided is,

No, this fragment does not provide evidence that Jesus was married. The comparatively late date of this Coptic papyrus (a fourth century CE copy of a gospel probably written in Greek in the second half of the second century) argues against its value as evidence for the life of the historical Jesus. Nor is there any reliable historical evidence to support the claim that he was not married, even though Christian tradition has long held that position. The oldest and most reliable evidence is entirely silent about Jesus's marital status. The first claims that Jesus was not married are attested only in the late second century CE, so if the Gospel of Jesus's Wife was also composed in the second century CE, it does provide evidence, however, that the whole question about Jesus's marital status arose as part of the debates about sexuality and marriage that took place among early Christians at that time. From the very beginning, Christians disagreed about whether it was better to marry or to be celibate, but it was over a century after Jesus's death before they began using Jesus's marital status to support their different positions. Christian tradition preserved only those voices that claimed Jesus never married, but now the Gospel of Jesus's Wife shows that some Christians claimed Jesus was married, probably already in the late second century.²²

So even though the fragment offers no evidence that Jesus was ever married, King believes that, "The discovery of this new gospel offers an occasion to rethink what we thought we knew by asking what role claims about Jesus's marital status played historically in early Christian controversies over marriage, celibacy, and family. Christian tradition preserved only those

married-ancient-papyrus-mentions-his-wife/> (accessed 17 October 2012).

²² "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife: A New Coptic Gospel Papyrus" (emphasis original), <<http://www.hds.harvard.edu/faculty-research/research-projects/the-gospel-of-jesus-wife>> (accessed 17 October 2012).

voices that claimed Jesus never married. The [GJW] now shows that some Christians thought otherwise.”²³

Of course these assertions assume the fragment’s authenticity. Several scholars specializing in papyrology and linguistics examined the fragment and determined it highly probable that the fragment is authentic.²⁴ Assuming for the moment this is true, it is important to repeat King’s conclusion: the discovery offers no evidence for the actual life of Jesus. While headlines raised the tantalizing possibility that Jesus was married, the fragment even if authentic offers no support to back it up.

However, now that the GJW fragment has gone public, other scholars have raised serious doubts about its authenticity. New headlines soon appeared, such as, “Jesus’ Wife: Internet Plagiarist?”²⁵ The charge of plagiarism came on 20 September 2012, when Francis Watson of Durham University posted a short article arguing that a modern author constructed the GJW fragment out of short snippets taken mostly from the Coptic Gospel of Thomas. Watson offered evidence showing how the GJW fragment not only copies precise words and phrases from

²³ Colen, “HDS Scholar Announces Existence of a New Early Christian Gospel from Egypt.”

²⁴ They reached this conclusion based on the age of the papyrus, the placement and absorption of the ink, the handwriting, and the Coptic grammar and spelling. “Although a final conclusion about the parchment’s authenticity remains open to further examination by colleagues and to further testing, especially of the chemical composition of the ink, these assurances were sufficient for work on the analysis and interpretation of the fragment to begin in earnest” (“Gospel of Jesus’s Wife”).

²⁵ James F. McGrath, “Jesus’ Wife: Internet Plagiarist?” (Patheos, 11 October 2012), <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2012/10/jesus-wife-an-egyptologists-perspective.html>> (accessed 19 October 2012).

the Gospel of Thomas, but also follows the line divisions of modern print editions.²⁶

Another article appeared soon after, "Did Jesus Have a Wife? Scholar Calls Parchment 'Forgery.'" According to this article, "A copied error from an online translation of the Gospel of Thomas may be the 'smoking gun' that strongly suggests the [GJW], a controversial papyrus fragment that supposedly refers to Jesus being married, is a forgery, scholars say."²⁷ This article mentions the work of Oxford University graduate Andrew Bernhard, who published a paper on 11 October 2012 entitled, "How The Gospel of Jesus's Wife Might Have Been Forged: A Tentative Proposal." Bernhard carries Watson's "patchwork" proposal further by arguing that the GJW forger may have chosen the Gospel of Thomas as his source material because tools such as Grondin's Interlinear which parse every word of the Coptic text are readily accessible. The forger would only need a basic knowledge of the language, such as the ability to modify certain nouns and pronouns.²⁸

While the jury is still out regarding the authenticity of the GJW fragment, it bears repeating that even if authentic the fragment offers no evidence that Jesus was ever married or that the gospel writers misrepresent Jesus' relationships with the opposite sex in any way.

²⁶ Francis Watson, "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife: How a Fake Gospel-Fragment Was Composed," *Free Republic*, September 25, 2012, <<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/2936268/posts>> (accessed 19 October 2012).

²⁷ Jeremy Hsu, "Did Jesus Have a Wife? Scholar Calls Parchment a 'Forgery'" *Fox News*, 17 October 2012, <<http://www.foxnews.com/science/2012/10/17/did-jesus-have-wife-scholar-calls-parchment-forgery/>> (accessed 19 October 2012).

²⁸ Andrew Bernhard, "How The Gospel of Jesus's Wife Might Have Been Forged: A Tentative Proposal," <www.gospels.net/gjw/mighthavebeenforged.pdf> (accessed 19 October 2012).

Limitations of Archeology for Apologetics

We have considered some representative examples of how apologetics can employ archeology to defend the Bible and the Christian faith. Archeology can help make the positive case for the Bible by confirming its accurate transmission as well as its historical truth claims. Archeology can also help apologetics by refuting charges brought against the Bible's truthfulness by means of archeological discovery. However, in spite of its usefulness, archeology by its very nature suffers certain limitations that keep it from being the silver bullet of Christian apologetics.

The DSS illustrate a first limitation: while they help confirm the text of Scripture, they cannot confirm its truth. Furthermore, discoveries like the Hittites and the House of David inscription reveal a second limitation. For all their usefulness, such discoveries cannot prove that the Bible is the Word of God. Yes, the Bible makes historical claims, like there was an ancient people called the Hittites, and Israel had a King named David, but the Bible claims to be much more than just an account of historical events. It is no less than that, but it is much, much more: the Bible claims to be the very word of God. The fact that the Bible is the word of God "can't be proved or disproved by archeology any more than God Himself is subject to the limited evidence of this world."²⁹

Value of Archeology for Apologetics

If archeology cannot prove the most important thing about the Bible, that it is God's very word, does that render archeology ultimately worthless? Not at all! Archeology helps validate the history that is recorded in the Bible. Why is this valuable? This is valuable because the historical and theological truth claims of Scripture are intertwined like two strands of a rope which cannot be separated from each other (see diagram below). If the historical claims of Scripture were ever proven incorrect by

²⁹ Price, *Stones Cry Out*, 329.

archeology, on what basis would we have reason to believe that the theological claims of the Bible were really true, and what basis would we have for commending those theological claims to others as true?

On the other hand, however, if the historical claims of Scripture could be proven true by archeology, which they have been time after time, then we have very good reason to believe that the theological claims of Scripture are also true, and very good reason to commend them as true to others. Think about it this way: in the one way in which the Bible can be validated empirically, historically by archeology, it has been validated time after time! Time after time the Bible has been proven to tell the truth historically. This gives weight to our claim that the Bible tells the truth on every subject it touches, the historical as well as the theological.

CONCLUSION

It is true, archeology cannot prove that the Bible is the word of God. The fact that the Bible is the word of God is a spiritual truth—a truth which comes from the Spirit of God himself, and which is embraced by believers as true with the help of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul spoke to the Thessalonians about their acceptance of the truth of the gospel he said this, “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thess 2:13). Why does Paul thank God in this verse? He does so because only by a work of God can a person come to accept the Bible for what it really is, not the mere words of men, but as Paul says, “what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then said to him, “Blessed are you Simon Barjona,

because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 16:15–17). It takes a work of God’s Spirit to enable a sinner to believe that the Bible is the true word of God and that the Gospel message contained in the Bible is truly the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

However, while archeology cannot prove the Bible is the Word of God, it can and does perform a powerful and compelling work. Archeology has proven many times over that when the Bible records history—various peoples, the places they lived, and the events in which they took part—it speaks the truth. These people really lived. These places really existed. These events really occurred. This is important because the history and theology of Scripture are intertwined and inseparable. The theological truth claims of Scripture cannot be validated empirically, but the historical claims can be and have been many times through archeology. So in that one area where empirical validation is possible, the Bible has always passed the test with flying colors. Many times over the Bible has shown itself to accurately record history. This makes a strong case for the theological claims of Scripture to be accurate and true as well.

I close with one final point. It is interesting that perhaps the central theological truth of the Christian faith has been validated for us empirically, albeit indirectly. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, a truth upon which our very salvation hinges (1 Cor 15:13–19), was validated empirically by the numerous eye witnesses who saw Jesus after he was raised from the dead: they saw him, spoke with him, walked with him, ate with him, and touched him, including more than 500 disciples at the very same time (Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21; 1 Cor 15). No, we cannot produce for people today the bodily resurrected Jesus, but we can produce for them the accurately preserved solemn and credible written testimony of the people who saw Jesus with their own eyes:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested,

and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1–3)

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. (John 21:24)

And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. (John 19:35)

John Nelson Darby and the Rapture

Dr. Thomas Ice
Pastor/Teacher, Church Planter
Community Bible Church
Omaha, Nebraska

INTRODUCTION

Supporters of pretribulationism generally believe that John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) revived this lost New Testament teaching through intense Bible study during convalescence from a riding accident in December 1827 and January 1828. Evangelical opponents of pretribulationism often put forth theories that cast Darby in a bad light. For example, some say Darby got it from Edward Irving (1792–1834), while others say it originated from the prophetic utterance of a fifteen-year-old Scottish lassie Margaret Macdonald (1815–1840). Both sources are understood to be tainted since Irving was considered exocentric and heretical and Macdonald’s prophetic utterance is thought to be demonic. What is the evidence that Darby developed his view from his own personal study?

EARLY LIFE OF JOHN NELSON DARBY

John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) was born in his parents’ London house in Westminster, November 18, 1800. W. G. Turner writes, “He was the youngest son of John Darby, of Markley, Sussex, and of Leap Castle, King’s County, Ireland,”¹ the eighth of nine children, six boys and three girls.² Darby’s father

¹ W. G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* (London: C. A. Hammond, 1926), 14.

² Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), 199. Weremchuk has written the most comprehensive biography on Darby, and his writing contributed heavily in the subsequent section.

was a wealthy merchant who had married the daughter of an even wealthier merchant, Anne Vaughan, in 1784.³ In Darby's lineage there is a mixture of service to the Crown, landed aristocracy, and business. Thus, Stunt correctly observes, "Darby was descended from gentry."⁴

Fifteen weeks after his birth, J. N. Darby was baptized on March 3, 1801, at St. Margaret's Anglican Church. His godfather was Lord Nelson, who was not present at the event. J. N. Darby clearly received his first name from his father and his middle name from his godfather, Lord Nelson.

On February 17, 1812, J. N. Darby entered The Royal College of St. Peter in Westminster, more commonly known as Westminster School in London. Even though young John lived only a few blocks from the school, he was a boarder there. All of J. N. Darby's brothers had attended this school since it was considered one of the finest public schools in London. It was a school attended mainly by sons of the wealthy since its fees were too high for the poor. Weremchuk describes the school: "The instruction was given by clergymen, and the subject matter consisted almost exclusively of Latin and Greek, with some English composition."⁵ Records do not show Darby's academic status, but in 1815 he graduated from Westminster and was sent by his father to Ireland for the first time in his life to attend Trinity College, where he commenced studies on July 3, 1815.⁶

³ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 19.

⁴ Timothy C. F. Stunt, "Influences in the Early Development of J. N. Darby," in *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880*, ed. Crawford Gribben and Timothy C.F. Stunt (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster P, 2004), 49.

⁵ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Trinity College Dublin was an Anglican college founded in 1592 as a divinity school. Trinity was the leading academic institution in Ireland and on par with England's premier universities, Oxford and Cambridge.⁷ Darby took many classes in science and classics and graduated on July 10, 1819, as a gold medal winner in classics.⁸ At that time, such an award at Trinity meant that a student was the top student in his class in that academic field.

Darby did not take courses in theology, but was required to study Bible. In 1808, "Richard Graves (1763–1829) moved the college to include instruction in Bible for all students as part of the academic education."⁹ Bible lectures were held on Saturdays, often given by Graves. Further, Graves was a popular tutor in classics and Darby studied under his oversight. Elmore argues that Graves likely influenced Darby in the realm of interpretation as a futuristic postmillennialist, who "expected a future literal kingdom of Christ universally extended over the earth."¹⁰ Darby also adopted Graves's philo-Semitic view of the Jews, their future conversion, and reestablishment in their homeland.¹¹ However, Darby did not adopt Graves's Arminianism, even though Darby may have been a postmillennialist while in college. Elmore observes, "The atmosphere of millennial expectancy in which he was trained

⁷ Floyd Sanders Elmore, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby," (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 52–54.

⁸ Elmore provides a copy of Darby's academic record broken down by semester in Appendix A, "Two Peoples of God," 318.

⁹ Elmore, "Two Peoples of God," 53.

¹⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹¹ Ibid., 57–58.

certainly had its effect on his eschatology. The postmillennialism of Graves dealt very literally with unfulfilled prophecy, and spawned an attitude of anticipation for an imminent change in dispensation.”¹² The influence of Graves upon Darby was significant and inculcated in him ideas and subject that would later become central is Darby’s thought and writings. Nebeker notes, “A key element of Graves’s eschatology was the literal interpretation of prophetic Scripture.”¹³

“Graduates of Trinity College, Dublin,” notes Ernest Sandeen, “were among the earliest and most able defenders of futurism.”¹⁴ This appears to be the case because of a more literal hermeneutic taught by the faculty of the college. The more literal one’s interpretation of Scripture, the more likely he would be to arrive at futurist conclusions in the area of biblical prophecy. As Elmore notes, “The theological grist for Darby’s later synthesis was certainly present at Trinity College in his student days.”¹⁵

DARBY’S CONVERSION AND CALL INTO MINISTRY

Upon graduation from Trinity College, Darby began the study of law and was admitted to Lincoln’s Inn, Dublin, on November 9, 1819.¹⁶ Upon completion of the eight terms in preparation for a legal career, Darby, a newly-minted barrister, “was called to the Irish bar on January 21, 1822.”¹⁷ It was

¹² Ibid., 74-75.

¹³ Gary L. Nebeker, “John Nelson Darby and Trinity College, Dublin: A Study in Eschatological Contrasts,” *Fides et Historia*, 34, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 96.

¹⁴ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 38.

¹⁵ Elmore, “Two Peoples of God,” 73.

¹⁶ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 32.

¹⁷ Ibid.

sometime during his law studies that Darby experienced personal conversion to Christ, around 1820 or 1821. Darby said, "I loved Christ, I have no doubt, sincerely and growingly since June or July 1820, or 21, I forgot which."¹⁸

Becoming a believer in Christ as his Savior about age twenty, having finished college, and being well into law studies, would certainly have been the result of significant intellectual contemplation, as well as spiritual influences. Stunt sees Darby's conversion as a possible result of the "unconscious rejection" of his family's Enlightenment bent: "The attraction of the 'vital' and spiritual Christianity he had encountered at Trinity outweighed the self-confident and manifestly 'human' good works of his family."¹⁹ Shortly after his conversion, while training for the law, Darby sensed a call to the ministry.

On January 21, 1822, Darby was called to the Irish bar. There is, however, no indication that he ever practiced law. Stunt argues that Darby likely engaged in a great deal of theological reading before his ordinations, which would have prepared and qualified him for a rapid ordination within the established church.²⁰ The career shift greatly displeased his father, who disinherited him at that point. However, Darby was given a considerable fortune by his uncle,²¹ as well as some financial resources upon his father's death in 1834.²²

¹⁸ "Darby's Marginal Notes, Next to 2 Timothy 3 in His Greek New Testament" in Weremchuk, *Darby*, Appendix C, 204.

¹⁹ Stunt, "Influences," 52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

²¹ Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2007), 68.

²² Weremchuk, *Darby*, 38.

DARBY'S EARLY PARISH AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

Darby's career in the Church of Ireland began on August 7, 1825, when Bishop William Bissett ordained him as an Anglican deacon in Raphoe Cathedral. The Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee (1766–1831) ordained Darby as a priest on February 19, 1826, and appointed him curate over a large rural parish of Calary in County Wicklow, "one of the most impoverished regions in the Dublin diocese."²³ Of this assignment, Darby said, "As soon as I was ordained, I went amongst the poor Irish mountaineers, in a wild and uncultivated district, where I remained two years and three months, working as best I could."²⁴

Darby was looked upon with great reverence, not unlike that of a saint, by many of the Catholic poor. Archbishop Magee was working hard to generate an "Irish Reformation" to the greater Dublin area and Darby was seen as a key component in achieving this goal.

During Darby's ministry in 1826–27, it is estimated that about 600 to 800 people a week "were converting to Protestantism through the vigorous efforts of the evangelical clergy."²⁵ However, the conversion rate would soon drop to almost zero, as a result of Archbishop Magee's issuance of a petition by "imposing the oaths of allegiance [to the British Crown] and supremacy [acknowledging the King as the Supreme Head of the Church] on all converts from Romanism

²³ Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake*, 68.

²⁴ J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. Darby* (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1971), III, 297.

²⁵ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 45. Stunt notes that this conversion rate was documented in the monthly issues of the *Christian Examiner* from November 1826 to August 1827 in Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–35* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 167.

within his diocese.”²⁶ This act by Magee retarded the evangelistic momentum and deeply discouraged Darby. It seemed to reinforce all of the negative aspects of the state church that Darby had already developed, and now they were driven home hard by the archbishop’s actions.

Darby had been on a search both doctrinally and experientially for the true church that he believed was not to be found in either Roman Catholicism or in the Church of Ireland. He believed neither could be the true church because their head was not Christ, but, either the state or the Bishop of Rome, whom he saw as beholden to the state. “Recalling Jesus’ words to Pilate, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36), Darby was convinced that Magee’s actions compromised the divine calling of the church in a manner not dissimilar to those of Henry VIII, when he asserted civil authority over Rome,” observes Paul Wilkinson. Wilkinson continues, “Since spiritual supremacy belonged to Christ, whose dominion was of a *heavenly* rather than earthly nature, Darby argued that Christ’s ministers should not concern themselves with civil affairs.”²⁷ This view of non-involvement in political affairs became a strong social and civil position of Darby’s followers and the Brethren movement.

Grayson Carter notes that two events throughout 1826 and early 1827 led to the “rapid development of Darby’s anti-Erastianism” shortly after his ordination.²⁸ The first was Archbishop Magee’s staunch words and deeds in defense of a state church under the jurisdiction of the state, including a “petition to the House of Commons for protection against the ‘hostility and calumny with which they and their religion have been, for a length of time, systematically assailed.’”²⁹ The second

²⁶ Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 169.

²⁷ Wilkinson, *For Zion’s Sake*, 75.

²⁸ Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions From The Via Media, c. 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2001), 211.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

event was Darby's response and strong objection to "Magee's decision in 1826, to require all new converts from Roman Catholicism to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy to the English sovereign."³⁰

A PROVIDENTIAL ACCIDENT

At this time, Darby was experiencing a disappointment from a failed spiritual and physical austerity phase in his life, the reality of an Erastian³¹ church that he believed was in ruins and differed little from the unbelieving world, and his search for an assurance of salvation in his conscience. "Darby's Christian understanding and experience were about to change radically,"³² notes Brethren historian Tim Grass. As one who began his ministry as a high churchman, Darby was on the verge of becoming an evangelical dissenter when he experienced a riding accident. Darby describes it as follows:

As soon as I was ordained, I went amongst the poor Irish mountaineers, in a wild and uncultivated district, where I remained two years and three months, working as best I could. I felt, however, that the style of work was not in agreement with what I read in the Bible concerning the

³⁰ Ibid., 212. On Magee and his alienation of clergy within the Church of Ireland due to his views and policies, see Peter Nockles, "Church or Protestant Sect? The Church of Ireland, High Churchmanship, and the Oxford Movement, 1822-1869," *The Historical Journal* 41, no. 2 (June 1998): 457-93. For information on the Church of Ireland in Darby's era, see, Alan Acheson, *A History of the Church of Ireland, 1691-200*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Columbia P., 2003).

³¹ Erastian refers to a proponent of the views of the Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), who argued that the sins of Christians should be punished by the state and not the church in the withholding of the sacraments.

³² Tim Grass, *Gathering to his Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain & Ireland* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006), 17.

church and Christianity; nor did it correspond with the effects of the action of the Spirit of God. These considerations pressed upon me from a scriptural and practical point of view; while seeking assiduously to fulfil the duties of the ministry confided to me, working day and night amongst the people, who were almost as wild as the mountains they inhabited. An accident happened which laid me aside for a time; my horse was frightened and had thrown me against a door-post.³³

This period of Darby's life is known among Darby scholars as "The Convalescence" during which he experienced "The Deliverance."³⁴ After the accident, Darby was taken to the home of Susannah Pennefather (1785–1862), his older sister, in Dublin in order to recover. Darby's convalescence was a time

³³ Darby, *Letters*, III, 297–98.

³⁴ R. A. Huebner argues that Darby's convalescence took place December 1826–January 1827, while Timothy Stunt claims it was December 1827–January 1828. Huebner cites a date on a letter between the Bellett brothers as his dating source (Huebner, *John Nelson Darby: Precious Truths Revived and Defended, Volume One, Revival of Truth 1826–1845*, 2nd ed., augmented [Jackson, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 2004], 8–9). However, Stunt's position appears more feasible because of the letter from Darby's friend John Bellett to his brother George at the end of January 1828 in which John said, "I hope on Friday to see John Darby. You will be grieved to hear that he has been laid up for nearly two months from a hurt in his knee. His poor people in Calary miss him sadly" (*Recollections of the Late J. G. Bellett*, [1895], 27). Stunt says, "The letter was apparently received when George was at Bandon. It is dated 31 Jan. 1827, but Bellett had probably written the previous year's date, as one does, at the end of January. The year must be 1828 for several reasons. First, George moved to Bandon in 1827 and probably after 31 January (D. Bellett, *Memoir of G. Bellett*, 64). Secondly, the evidence for Darby's 1827–1828 convalescence is overwhelming. His references to 'two years and three months' after his ordination (*Letters*, iii: 297) and '1827–8' (*Letters*, i: 185) are explicit. Lastly, F. W. Newman saw him on crutches in late 1827 (see below, ch. 8. p. 206; Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 169).

when “the questions in his mind began to resolve themselves.”³⁵ He wrote, “I was troubled in the same way when a clergyman, but never had the smallest shadow of it since.” He declared, “I judge it as Satan: but going from cabin to cabin to speak of Christ, and with souls, these thoughts sprang up, and if I sought to quote a text to myself it seemed a shadow and not real. I ought never to have been there, but do not think that this was the cause, but simply that I was not set free according to Romans viii. As I have said, I have never had it at all since.”³⁶

The three or more months Darby spent recuperating from his accident were undoubtedly the most formative period in his life and remarked upon it. In one account he states,

I am daily more struck with the connection of the great principles on which my mind was exercised by and with God, when I found salvation and peace, and the questions agitated and agitating the world at the present day: the absolute, divine authority and certainty of the Word, as a divine link between us and God, if everything (church and world) went; personal assurance of salvation in a new condition by being in Christ; the church as His body; Christ coming to receive us to Himself; and collaterally with that, the setting up of a new earthly dispensation, from Isaiah xxxii. (more particularly the end); all this was when laid aside at E. P.'s in 1827; the house character of the assembly on earth (not the fact of the presence of the Spirit) was subsequently. It was a vague fact which received form in my mind long after, that there must be a wholly new order of things, if God was to have His way, and the craving of the heart after it I had felt long before; but the church and redemption I did not know till the time I have spoken of; but eight years before, universal sorrow and sin pressed upon my spirit. I did not think to say so much of myself; but it is all well. The truth remains the truth, and it *is* on that we

³⁵ Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 171.

³⁶ Darby, *Letters*, III, 453–54.

have to go; but the Lord's dealings with the soul, connected with the use of truth, have to be noted.³⁷

Further identification of the date and what Darby believed happened to him spiritually during that time is seen in another statement by Darby in a letter in which he wrote, "I believe at my deliverance from bondage in 1827–8, God opened up certain truths needed for the church."³⁸ What did Darby claim he realized during his convalescence during December 1827 and January 1828? He enumerates five things.

First, Darby says that he realized "the absolute, divine authority and certainty of the Word, as a divine link between us and God,"³⁹ which caused "the scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me."⁴⁰ Darby confirms an evangelical view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

Second, he states, "I came to understand that I was united to Christ in heaven, and that consequently, my place before God was represented by His own."⁴¹ Again he wrote, "Personal assurance of salvation in a new condition by being in Christ; the church as His body."⁴²

Third, Darby understood more fully his present standing with Christ in heaven. Such a heavenly standing becomes the basis for much of Darby's theology that sees the believer already positioned with Christ in heaven: "I was in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, and sitting in heavenly places in Him. This led me

³⁷ Darby, *Letters*, I, 344–45.

³⁸ Darby, *Letters*, I, 185.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 344.

⁴⁰ Darby, *Letters*, III, 298.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Darby, *Letters*, I, 344.

directly to the apprehension of what the true church of God was, those that were united to Christ in heaven."⁴³

Fourth, he says that he realized that he should daily expect the Lord's return: "At the same time, I saw that the Christian, having his place in Christ in heaven, *has nothing to wait for save the coming of the Saviour*, in order to be set, in fact, in the glory which is already his portion 'in Christ.'"⁴⁴ Further he says, "I saw in that word the coming of Christ to take the church to Himself in glory."⁴⁵ Darby speaks of "being in Christ; the church as His body; *Christ coming to receive us to Himself*; . . . all this was when laid aside at E. P.'s in 1827."⁴⁶ Again Darby says of his convalescence discovery, "The coming of the Lord was the other truth which was brought to my mind from the word, as that which, if sitting in heavenly places *in* Christ, was alone to be waited for, that I might sit in heavenly places *with* Him."⁴⁷ Such a cluster of beliefs that were formulated at this time provides the rationale for a pretribulational rapture. Darby had seen the importance of an imminent return of Christ for his bride.

Fifth, Darby saw a change in dispensation. This could mean that it was at this time that shifted in his eschatology from postmillennialism to premillennialism: "Christ coming to receive us to Himself; and collaterally with that, the setting up of a new earthly dispensation, from Isaiah xxxii. (more particularly the end); all this was when laid aside at E. P.'s in 1827."⁴⁸ He writes of his studies in Isaiah: "Isaiah xxxii. brought me to the earthly consequences of the same truth, though other passages might seem perhaps more striking to me now; but I saw an evident

⁴³ Ibid., 515.

⁴⁴ Darby, *Letters*, III, 298 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 299.

⁴⁶ Darby, *Letters*, I, 344 (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 516.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 344.

change of dispensation in that chapter, when the Spirit would be poured out on the Jewish nation, and a king reign in righteousness.”⁴⁹ Isaiah was a very influential part of his studies and change of views during this time. He notes:

In my retreat, the 32nd chapter of Isaiah taught me clearly, on God's behalf, that there was still an economy to come, of His ordering; a state of things in no way established as yet. The consciousness of my union with Christ had given me the present heavenly portion of the glory, whereas this chapter clearly sets forth the corresponding earthly part. I was not able to put these things in their respective places or arrange them in order, as I can now; but the truths themselves were then revealed of God, through the action of His Spirit, by reading His word.⁵⁰

Darby summarized his views that he discovered during his convalescence retreat in Dublin in an issue of *The Bible Treasury* writing:

Isaiah xxxii. it was that taught me about the new dispensation. I saw there would be a David reign, and did not know whether the church might not be removed before forty years' time. At that time I was ill with my knee. It gave me peace to see what the church was. I saw that I, poor, wretched, and sinful J. N. D., knowing too much yet not enough about myself, was left behind, and let go, but I was united to Christ in heaven. Then what was I waiting for? J. G. B. came up and said they were teaching some new thing in England. "I have it!" I said.⁵¹

Francis Newman, who served as a tutor for the Pennefather children for fifteen months during 1827 and 1828, confirms the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 516.

⁵⁰ Darby, *Letters*, III, 298–99.

⁵¹ J. N. Darby, "Thoughts on Revelation XIV., XV., XVI," *The Bible Treasury* 12, no. 281, October 1879, 352.

timing of Darby's textual and doctrinal discoveries. As a tutor in the household daily, he would have been at the Pennefather residence during Darby's convalescence.⁵² Newman speaks of Darby's influence upon him while at the Pennefathers, during Darby's three-month convalescence. "Darby's realization in 1827-28 that earthly Jewish promises should not be appropriated by the Christian church is circumstantially corroborated in Frank Newman's letter to B. W. Newton (17 April 1828)," notes Stunt, "written after Darby's deliverance experience, where he makes a similar distinction between the promises made to Israel and those made to the Church."⁵³

It is helpful to have a witness by another party that basically supports the information provided by Darby during such a formative moment in his life. Such a testimony supports Darby's overall credibility in addition to bolstering these specific claims.

Benjamin Wills Newton (1807-99), writes of his Oxford tutor and friend Frank Newman, "While I was at Oxford and we were friends, F. Newman went to Ireland (1827) and there made the acquaintance of John Darby."⁵⁴ Thus, Newton says that

⁵² ". . . in 1827 I went to Ireland . . . In the Autumn of 1828 I returned to Oxford. . ." (F. W. Newman, *Contributions Chiefly to the Early History of the Late Cardinal Newman*, 21 and 24). "In Dublin (1827-8) . . .," (ibid., p. 62). Cited from Huebner, *John Nelson Darby*, 12, n60. In *Phases of Faith*, Newman says the following, "After taking my degree, I became a Fellow of Balliol College; and the next year I accepted an invitation to Ireland, and there became private tutor for fifteen months in the house of one now deceased" (17).

⁵³ Stunt, "Influences," 59, n56.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Wills Newton, *The Fry Collection*, 61. Newton makes a similar statement about Newman visiting Darby in 1827 on page 235. Timothy Stunt describes *The Fry Collection* as the collection of handwritten "expositions, recollections and conversations" of Newton by one "who greatly valued his teaching," Frederick W. Wyatt. "On Wyatt's death the collection came into the possession of Alfred C. Fry" who assembled the various collections into a single volume and in 1982 Fry "presented his collection to the Christian Brethren Archive (CBA) in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester" (Stunt,

Newman returned from his stay in Ireland, having been influenced by Darby in relation to prophecy, and that Newman wanted Darby to share this prophetic information with his friends at Oxford. This is a second source that confirms Darby's doctrinal discoveries occurred during his convalescence during December 1827 and January 1828.

A third source, John Gifford Bellett (1795–1864), also had interaction with Darby during his convalescence. He wrote the following about Darby:

In the beginning of 1828 I had occasion to go to London, and then I met in private and heard in public those who were warm and alive on prophetic truth, having had their minds freshly illumined by it.

In my letters to J. N. D. at this time, I told him I had been hearing things that he and I had never yet talked of, and I further told him on my return to Dublin what they were. Full of this subject as I then was, I found him quite prepared for it also, and his mind and soul had traveled rapidly in the direction which had thus been given to it.⁵⁵

Bellett stated that he discussed “prophetic truth” with Darby. It was noted earlier in a footnote that in addition to a letter J. G. Bellett wrote to Darby, he also penned one to his brother George and spoke of his impending visit with Darby. The Bellett letter was dated January 31, 1828. John wrote to George saying, “I hope on Friday to see John Darby. You will be grieved to hear that he has been laid up for nearly two months from a hurt in his knee. His poor people in Calary miss him sadly.”⁵⁶ Bellett's statement that Darby was “quite prepared for

From Awakening to Secession, 313–14). This writer has a photocopy of the manuscript which contains a total of 444 pages. See also *Fry Collection*, 240–41.

⁵⁵ John Gifford Bellett, *Interesting Reminiscences of the Early History of “Brethren:” With Letter from J. G. Bellett to J. N. Darby* (London: Alfred Holness, n.d.), 4.

⁵⁶ Bellett, *Recollections*, 27.

it also” is a reference to prophetic discussions during his visit with Darby while Darby was recuperating from his injury. Very likely the phrase, “his mind and soul had traveled rapidly in the direction which had thus been given to it” is a reference to the discoveries that Darby learned through his personal Bible study.

DARBY’S NEW THEOLOGICAL PARADIGM

These five biblical discoveries noted above are the basis upon which Darby builds his new theological paradigm that includes dispensationalism and pretribulationism. From the beginning of Darby’s dissent from the established church, these items were core essentials upon which he began to build his unique theology. Stunt concludes, “It was in these months that finally the questions in his mind began to resolve themselves. Central to his faith from now on was the belief that he and all Christians were ‘united to Christ in heaven’, and delivered ‘by the power of His resurrection.’”⁵⁷ Carter sees “its radical distinction between the Jewish and Gentile dispensations—‘the hinge’, as Darby referred to it, . . . the distinction between these two dispensations forms the basis for Darby’s understanding of both ecclesiology and eschatology.”⁵⁸ These items are important since pretribulationism is built upon first one’s view of ecclesiology that is set within a certain eschatological framework. Darby perceives a clear distinction between Israel and the church. “It is important to notice here that Darby came to the realization of these points alone, without the influence of other men,”⁵⁹ surmised Weremchuk. “Darby’s views, when fully developed later, would prove to be in many points contrary to the ones normally accepted by the church at large.”⁶⁰ It was

⁵⁷ Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, 171.

⁵⁸ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 224.

⁵⁹ Weremchuk, *Darby*, 63.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Weremchuk continues to explain, “Darby, as we noted had been greatly occupied with the early church as described in Acts. What

during Darby's convalescence that the original spark of his ideas burst forth from his personal Bible study and fanned into the flames of his theology during the next decade and beyond.

It has been long recognized that pretribulationism is built upon one's view of ecclesiology as much or more than upon one's eschatology. The greatest pretribulationist scholar of the twentieth century was the late John F. Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary, who recognized the central place of ecclesiology in support of pretribulationism. Walvoord writes,

What is essential to premillennialism becomes an indispensable foundation in the study of pretribulationism. It is safe to say that pretribulationism depends on a particular definition of the church, and any consideration of pretribulationism that does not take this major factor into consideration will be largely beside the point.⁶¹

The point that should not be missed regarding Darby's convalescence discoveries is that they centered on ecclesiology. Darby was concerned about what was happening to the church in which he was involved in Ireland and searched the Bible for answers to his concerns. Stunt notes that one of the assurances Darby received "was the assurance that he (together with all Christians as opposed to Christendom) was risen and spiritually united with Christ in heaven."⁶² This ecclesiastical realization forms the heart of Darby's theology and spiritual hope that extended throughout the rest of his life.

The first two essays written by Darby were both about ecclesiastical issues, which further demonstrates his focus upon

he saw around him he did not like. His views which then developed were 'new'—that is, different from those of his contemporaries. He defended his views as being the 'original' ones that the church very early in her history had lost sight of" (Weremchuk, *Darby*, 63-64).

⁶¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question, Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 37.

⁶² Stunt, "Influences," 58.

understanding the church. The first, though not published until much later, was the one expressing his disagreement with Archbishop Magee's petition and the second, from Dublin in 1828, was "Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ."⁶³

Darby did not just develop an ecclesiology that was isolated from interaction with other areas of theology. Rather, he clearly set it against God's plan for Israel. In one of his convalescence statements he said,

Isaiah xxxii. It was that taught me about the new dispensation. I saw there would be a Davidic reign, and did not know whether the church might not be removed before forty years' time. At that time I was ill with my knee. It gave me peace to see what the church was. I saw that I, poor, wretched, and sinful J. N. D., knowing too much yet not enough about myself, was left behind, and let go, but I was united to Christ in heaven.⁶⁴

Thus, Darby sees the church as distinct from Israel, God's earthly people, since there would be a Davidic reign for Israel in the millennium. On the other hand, Darby saw that he was positionally united with Christ in heaven, a heavenly destiny. Dispensationalists today see such a distinction as their *sine qua non*. Leading dispensational spokesman Charles Ryrie says, "A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct." Ryrie explains:

This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive. The one who fails to distinguish Israel and the church consistently will inevitably

⁶³ Darby, "Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy Who signed the Petition to The House of Commons for Protection," *Collected Writings*, I, 1-19, and "Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ," *Collected Writings*, I, 20-35.

⁶⁴ Darby, "Thoughts on Revelation," 352.

not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will.⁶⁵

Non-dispensational, covenant theologians recognize this essential about dispensationalists as noted by Michael Williams:

The Darbyist church/Israel distinction constitutes the one great organizing principle of classical dispensationalism. The metaphysical and historical distinction between the church and Israel is the axle upon which the theology of Darby, Scofield, and Chafer rides. It is the one great absolutely necessary or essential element of the system. The Darbyist metaphysical distinction between Israel and the church is the *sine qua non* of classical dispensational theology.⁶⁶

Whether dispensationalists or non-dispensationalists, all recognize for dispensationalism the importance of the distinction between God's rule for Israel and his rule for the church.

From the time of his convalescence, Darby developed a theology that taught and supported a dispensational, premillennial, pretribulationism. Essentially Darby came to understand that his place or position was the same as that of Christ, which is in heaven. Thus, the church is a heavenly people, not an earthly people like the established church, in which he was a clergyman. Juxtaposed to the heavenly and spiritual church was Israel, who are composed of a spiritual, ethnic, and national people on earth who have a future in God's plan after the church age.

Darby came to understand that the church could be taken to heaven at any moment without signs preceding that event, in what would later be known as the pretribulational rapture of

⁶⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 46.

⁶⁶ Michael Williams, *This World is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 90.

the church. Darby's realization of a change in dispensations laid the groundwork for the development of dispensationalism, since he saw a distinction between God's plan for the church and His plan for Israel. By this time, Darby also developed a pessimistic view of the visible church, Christendom, and came to believe that it was in utter ruins.

By January 1828, February at the latest, John Nelson Darby had not only come to an understanding of the idea of pretribulationism, but, he had also come to see other components, along with a rationale to support this view. This does not mean that his ideas relating to pretribulationism came out of the womb fully developed along with no internal contradictions.⁶⁷ There was still developmental work to be done. Stunt surmises, "In fact for some years after his experience of deliverance there was something decidedly ambivalent about some of the positions adopted by Darby."⁶⁸ It would take at least another decade for Darby to develop full confidence in his new views and their implications. The basics were in place by early 1828. This was too early to have received seminal influence from others regarding things Darby strongly

⁶⁷ Darby's first published article on eschatology (1829) has some items that do contradict a fully systematized view of pretribulationism (Darby, "Reflections Upon The Prophetic Inquiry and the Views Advanced in it," *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, 34 vols. [n.d.; repr., Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, 1971], 2:31). Darby appears to still harbor elements of historicism, but at the same time Darby displays elements of his new discoveries. He speaks of "two comings" and "to be caught up into the air" (16). He spends a couple of pages describing the rapture and key rapture passages like 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 (16–18). He criticizes his opponent for "a confusion of the Jewish and Gentile dispensations" (18). He speaks of how the church is "to look to the coming of Christ as the prominent object of faith" (26). Even though it will take some time to work out the implications of his new views and to gain full confidence in their implications, they are clearly evident in his earliest writings.

⁶⁸ Stunt, "Influences," 59.

contends he came to understand from personal Bible study alone during his Dublin convalescence.

CONCLUSION

J. N. Darby's pretribulationism appeared as a seminal idea from his own Bible study during a convalescence period of December 1827 through January 1828 while staying at his sister's house in Dublin. Darby was in distress about issues relating to the true nature and purpose of the church during his convalescence, which led to his ideas of the rapture of the church, an ecclesiastical and eschatological issue. Stunt concludes, "We must emphasize that Darby was a very complex person whose understanding of scripture and theology was continually evolving."⁶⁹ Darby possessed the intellect, education, and capability needed for original thinking, and the discipline to develop ideas into a system. There is nothing in the record that indicates that this is not what he in fact did do. Through Darby's own personal testimony on multiple occasions, he provided the theological rationale to support pretribulationism, something that would be unlikely if it was just an idea stolen from another source.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 67.

The Pastor/Musical Worship Leader Relationship

Dr. Donald Ellsworth
Professor of Worship Ministries Leadership
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

Blessed is the church that enjoys a healthy relationship between the senior pastor and the musical worship leader. Note the added word “musical” to the more common title. There are a number of reasons for that addition, but one is based on the fact that real and effective corporate worship can exist without a single note of music being sung or played.

Few, however, would disagree that appropriate music has a long (and biblical) history of significantly enhancing the worship gatherings of the people of God. From the worship responsibilities of the OT priests to those in last Sunday’s services, the most effective worship results would be found in churches where interaction and understanding existed among the “team”: Christ (the highest, truest worship leader), the Holy Spirit (who continues to direct in matters of worship), the musical worship leader (who is spiritually, musically, and theologically qualified), and the senior pastor (who is ultimately responsible at the human level). In many of today’s churches, music can take upwards to 40-50% of a service. It is irresponsible to allow those precious moments to be used carelessly.

Assuming that the church’s worship is its highest priority, the assessment of our effectiveness and practices should be a primary concern. Until recently these concerns typically were not faced by many in the evangelical, free-church tradition. In the seemingly desperate attempt to “catch up,” we have seen multitudes of books, magazine articles, conferences, websites,

blogs, academic programs, worship songs and hymns, and numerous commercial worship aids. Worship has become the buzz word in many places.

All this being true, the purpose of this article is to attempt to deal with none of the above, but to offer thoughts on what may be the most critical matter in successful corporate worship preparation and practice, that of the relationship between the senior preaching pastor and his musical worship leader (MWL). This relationship is critical in maintaining a happy team effort between two people who share the platform every Sunday.

The MWL has in some cases been referred to as the “second preacher.” Some have suggested that the MWL might be the most important theology teacher in the church. Before you disregard that statement, consider the following. Most sermons, after being delivered, are put in the file, rarely to be preached again in that form, in that setting. Sermon outlines and note-taking pages in the bulletin for personal and small group discussion may help, but in a significant number of cases, it is the music that is carried away when the service has concluded.

Despite this not being the preferred outcome, the blending of a true and meaningful text with the musical elements of a singable tune with supporting harmony and rhythm makes a pretty strong case. The power of these expressions can be understood. Remember those commercial jingles of years ago that still linger in your memory, or the hymns and the 1950s and 1960s choruses that continue to appear out of nowhere? Pastors serve a critical function in determining that songs that are sung do not do more harm than good. Rather, songs should be selected because of their theological accuracy, not because of their popularity alone.

Whether or not I have “made a case,” my purpose is to encourage pastors and MWLs to balance the playing field, to get on the same page through mutual respect, understanding, and support with regular open communication, prayer, and mutual planning. One of the top “take away” results in my Theology and

Practice of Worship class has been a new commitment on the part of senior pastors to take more leadership in worship planning, not simply leaving it all in the hands of the MWL.

How would you categorize your approach and attitude to your weekly worship planning? Would you be

A micromanager – Where your MWL is handcuffed and little personal creativity is allowed?

A macromanager – With little interest in the fine-tuned details?

Disconnected – Telling your MWL to simply “Take it and run with it. I’ll see you on the platform Sunday morning”? Often the only communication that takes place is when something goes wrong.

The last two can result in two services, yours and his, often with little or no connection between the two, with no service “flow” or obvious common objective. Preferred are the two serving as part of a team, planning together, even encouraging some good “healthy and creative tension” that could result. And, in the worship service the pastor would be an encourager to the MWL and an example to the congregation in truly participating in the musical worship, not reviewing the morning announcements or going over sermon notes. Congregations notice. MWLs are blessed when they work with a pastor who is more passionate about worshipping the Lord than they are. The MWL, on the other hand, should eagerly and respectfully listen to the sermon. The most critical relationship in planning a worship service is between the pastor and the MWL. It can also be the source of the greatest tension if not approached intentionally.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING THE PASTOR-MWL RELATIONSHIP

Here are a few suggestions:

- (1) **HAVE A WEEKLY MEETING** – Monday or early in the week is the best time. Evaluate last Sunday. Pray, discuss, and plan for future services. Allow for some healthy creative tension. Tension does not have to be something to avoid if it is constructive and if each recognizes the skills and knowledge of the other. Still, the final call is the pastor's. Most MWLs would be happy to have his pastor suggest a specific song or two. It can show he is thinking in musical terms, and he knows what songs would enhance his message.

I'm not convinced that a single specific theme for every worship service is necessary or even a good plan. The primary goal in any service is to offer praise and worship to the Lord. To maintain a weekly worship topic might circumvent that goal. One strong song related to and sung just before the message might have the best effect, as could the selection of a concluding song. These are matters that require close communication not just in planning next Sunday, but for the long-term. MWLs and their musicians will produce a better musical product when they have more time for rehearsal, the specifics of which are better served by early knowledge and planning.

- (2) **UNDERSTAND THE AUTHORITY OF THE SENIOR PASTOR** – But the pastor can cast the vision. Whether a worship setting he has experienced during a visit, a song he has heard that he considers effective, or the creative use of Scripture, drama, or poetry as a link between other worship set elements, a pastor's suggestions can be a wonderful starting point for planning congregational worship. It can open the door for a MWL whose

knowledge of our song repertoire can wisely fill in the gaps in the worship order. Pastors need to value the training, skills, and knowledge of his MWL, and both need to exhibit confidence without ego, just healthy self-esteem. Pastors should be clear on “what really matters.” With rare exception, pastors should feel confident that they will not be surprised on a Sunday morning.

- (3) CLARIFY ROLES and EXPECTATIONS – Without role *clarity* there will be role *confusion* which can lead to role *conflict*. Each should be certain of his role in the planning and practice of the church’s group worship. Usually a MWL is to be more than a musician who leads worship, but rather a *worship pastor*, a pastoral musician, a member of a team. A wise MWL will seek the pastor’s direction and clarity while in no way inferring that the former is clueless in the planning effort. Pastors need to be the church’s watchdog in matters of doctrinal purity and accuracy. Our Bible is inspired; our songs are not (in the same way). Many of the challenges we face in worship today can be assessed by a measurable objective standard we know as our theology. The more subjective part, the music and style, is another issue entirely and beyond the scope of this article. Church musicians frequently fail to make the connection between their Bible and theology training and the songs they ask their people to sing. Pastors can provide an important discipling ministry early in the relationship to safeguard his church’s doctrine while making the MWL sensitive to theological accuracy. Remember: Some of your people may take away more of their theology from the songs than from sermons that are preached once.

Acknowledge who is more “expert” on certain matters, and that neither can be an authority on every subject. Some MWLs are excellent administrators and can be a big help to pastors beyond the scope of the worship/music ministry. Enjoy the process of figuring it all out together. Pastors and MWLs are often wired

differently and under different circumstances may not even seek each other out, so a relationship must be built. Some believe pastors tend to be more objective in their approach to ministry and preaching because they are dealing with objective truth, while they often describe musicians as more subjective, believing that is where music tends to exist. A MWL should know early on how “creative” he dares to be. Healthy creative tension can be beneficial when handled correctly and even welcomed. Meetings are the playground of creatively effective people. Bounce your ideas. Conflict, even criticism, can be tools for creativity if properly understood in the context. For the MWL asking for clarity on roles and expectations is not an acknowledgement of weakness. Rather it should be an indication of his desire to support the pastor’s plans and preferences, making his job more pleasurable.

Begin an *evaluation process*, not of the pastor or the MWL, but of BOTH of you together. Following each service or event send an email seeking evaluation, input, and suggestions to other staff members, selected members of the congregation OR even better, the members of a worship committee.

- (4) DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP OF OPENNESS AND TRUST – The church operates in a very intense atmosphere. The challenges are constant and always changing. Harmony in the leadership is vital. A mutual healthy self-esteem will allow each to be able to admit weaknesses when “I don’t know the answer.” Encourage conversation beyond the worship/music issues. Ask about family and “life,” and listen “between the lines.” What is the message? What is “sensed,” but not said? Be open to honest assessment and feedback. Be on “the same page” on sensitive issues. On any given Sunday there may be an equal number of folk complaining about the “lack of hymns” as those who think you are using too many.

- (5) KNOW HOW YOU WILL HANDLE CONFLICT AND CRITICISM – Whether between yourselves or from outside, work to be on the same page, going the same direction, agreed on the issues, having a common vision. Don't succumb to irrelevant conflict. The "Worship War" can be one of those unless the pastor and the MWL have a solid grasp of a biblical worship theology and the elements of worship that are non-negotiable. Their theology of worship will lead to their philosophy of worship, ending with their practice or methodology of worship, and in each of these they must be united. Criticism will come, if it has not already. Do not take sides. Be agreed on how you will respond so outside pressures won't divide you. A relationship is defined when the going gets tough.
- (6) READ A BOOK TOGETHER and DISCUSS IT – The following are some that I have found helpful:

Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation, by Allen Ross (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).

Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You, by Noel Due (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005).

Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship, by David Peterson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God, by Bob Kauflin (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2008).

The titles of each will give you a sense of the contents and the only one written by a church musician is the Kauflin book. But he writes with great sensitivity for pastors and MWLs from his years of experience, giving very wise counsel to both. Such a practice will help both of you to grow together, spiritually and professionally.

Each of these books will help to create a living, working theology of worship, and by reading together the pastor and MWL will (hopefully) come to the same conclusions. Worship issues have haunted the church for two millennia and in numbers of cases these conflicts have resulted in resolution and practices more appropriate, comprehensive, and fulfilling than much of that which our current worship culture expects. We can benefit by learning what our Christian forefathers and current brothers in ministry have done. We are often entrenched in our own traditions and biases more than we care to admit. Include a “book allowance” in the annual church budget.

- (7) **PLAN AHEAD TOGETHER** –Planning for the future will earn significant dividends to effective worship. MWLs will produce higher quality worship elements when they have more time to prepare. Whereas a preaching pastor has the privilege of surrounding himself, alone, with his materials for sermon preparation, the MWL must research/locate suitable material (songs, Scripture selection), prepare this for the platform participants, and rehearse all of it for Sunday worship. This requires time; the more of it the better. The goal in worship rehearsal and preparation should be to achieve undistracting excellence by those up front. Unless the talent level in a church is abnormally high, a single rehearsal per week, just for the coming Sunday is insufficient. A single short rehearsal/talk through/walk through minutes before a service is even worse, falling short of undistracting excellence. The musical skills and the ability of the musicians to effectively interpret their parts will grow in proportion to the time they have been given over weeks, not a few minutes, and the results in a worship service will be conspicuous. A worthy goal: The pastor and MWL sharing together in the planning of entire services, to create a structure for planning and to discuss details for the next month to six weeks. A good start for achieving this is the senior pastor’s creation of his “Preaching

Calendar.” Long-term planning and information will benefit the church’s worship.

- (8) **ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR MWL and WORSHIP STAFF** – Assuming that you sincerely appreciate your leader and his assistants, acknowledge that privately, in rehearsals, and before the congregation. Depending on the size of the church this could include ushers, sound and light technicians, drama team, and musicians. As the church budget allows, send your MWL (and selected assistants) to a worship conference or to further studies at a reputable college or seminary.
- (9) **CELEBRATE SUCCESSES** – It will help validate and energize your ministry and refresh your spirit. Too many never take time to celebrate, rather just move on to the “next big crisis,” from one event to another. Celebrate God’s blessings. Go out to lunch together. MWLs can invite the pastor to an annual worship team appreciation banquet as a guest speaker or “performer.” Celebrate! Laugh, away from the pressures of weekly planning and preparation. Let your worship staff see the pastor without a tie.
- (10) **FINALLY** – Pastors can (and should) play a key role in the corporate worship of the church. Too many pastors have embraced the current culture more than biblical directives in their worship planning. They and their MWLs must be agreed on the contextualization of the biblical teaching and expectations of worship, those elements that are not negotiable. Getting the big picture biblically can strengthen the relationship between both as they work through the issues TOGETHER. There is good evidence that a number of today’s worship practices and styles are fading, just a fad that will be replaced. Anchoring to a biblical worship theology will help stay on track with the purposes and desires of God.

As Bob Kauflin writes,

God intends your relationship with your worship leader to be one of joy, mutual respect, and fruitfulness. And with confidence in his Word, dependence on his Spirit, and reliance on the gospel, that's exactly what it will be.¹

¹ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 258.