

A Look At Dispensationalism

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Introduction

<http://www.apostasynow.com/topics/trib/pretrib08.html>

Dispensationalism has risen to become a very popular system of biblical interpretation. It is taught in a large number of Baptist, Evangelical and Conservative Churches in the United States as the only correct view. Yet its origins are very recent. This article looks at how Dispensationalism originated, and examines the key doctrines it teaches. Paul warned Titus to 'avoid Jewish fables'. It is my view that Dispensationalism is in fact a revival of the type of Jewish fables that Paul warned against, having been influenced by first century apocryphal writings and Rabbinic ideas. Indeed, no other doctrines have as good a claim to be the ones intended by Paul's words here. These doctrines have travelled down to us through the Gnostic heresy which so troubled the early Church, down to the restoration of these ideas by Counter – Reformation Jesuits, in order to destroy the great work of the Reformation, and was later enthusiastically championed by the Irvingites, and from them, to the Plymouth Brethren, until in our day it has spread its branches as a great tree in all directions.

This paper comes as a result of reading the book "There Really Is A Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology" by Dispensational writer Renald Showers. A dispensational pastor friend loaned the book to me and asked me to read it, which I did, and this paper is based upon the reply that I gave to him. The book presents a more classic form of Dispensationalism, but the doctrine has had many variations within it. Hyper Dispensationalism goes to even further extremes, and this paper just as well answers that basic position. There has been a shift to a more moderate form of this doctrine, a shift that believes that salvation has always been by faith, and this is becoming dominant in the United States. Sometimes moderates even accept that Jesus is reigning as king now.

Showers refers to these doctrines as 'a system of theology' and as a 'philosophy of history', (There Really Is A Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology, 1990, Chapter 1, By Renald E. Showers). But were we to ever force upon Scripture a philosophical grid through which to interpret it? Nor can the thinking of the carnal mind intrude itself into the great mysteries of the faith, which are to be received by those whose hearts are right before God. It is not on the basis of learning and intelligence, as though we could go to a Seminary or College and learn these things as we would learn some subject. One writer says it well:

"...the apostles doctrine cannot be set out in some so-called 'Systematic Theology' or intellectual form of philosophy entirely outside of scriptures" (Marks of the New Testament Church by Metcalfe).

When Paul said 'beware of philosophy' he was not simply warning against one particular form of philosophy, but against the whole concept behind it of constructing systems of thinking according to the ways of this world. For it is 'not in words which man's wisdom teaches', for the 'natural mind receives not the things of the Spirit of God'. And so we are to 'hold fast the form of sound words.' No wonder he said that God is opposed to the wisdom of men. We must beware of the cunning craftiness of men. Whether Reformed, Dispensational, Watchtower, or the oral teachings of the Pharisees, no matter, all have their systems of man-made interpretations that are opposed to the Truth, for Truth is not a system of theology.

The History of Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism did not exist in the early Church. While some of the Church Fathers did teach concerning the different dealings of God under the different covenants, they did not do so in a way markedly dispensational. In fact the early fathers taught what would now be called 'replacement theology'. Even the ones who believed in a literal millennium (like Justin), even those ones taught that the Church is spiritual Israel, and that the blessings promised to Israel have been transferred to the church. They certainly

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were never dispensational. Dispensationalism is modern in origin, dating to the Victorian era Plymouth Brethren, and their prominent leader, Mr Darby.

John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby has been called the 'father of Dispensationalism'. It is through him that the system was developed. He was born in the year 1800, at Westminster in London, England, of Irish parents. Following a distinguished education, Darby was headed for a career in law. But after becoming concerned for his soul, Darby dropped law, against the high expectations of his father, and became an Anglican clergyman, serving in Ireland. Darby proved faithful in little, travelling his parish by horseback, teaching and instructing the poor parishioners, and spending what little money he had on the local schools and charities. The people loved him, and he presided over a small revival, with Roman Catholics becoming Protestant at a rate of 600-800 a week. But Darby grew disillusioned with the State church, and with the state of the Church in general, comparing it to the Church as it was in the beginning. He wrote: "the careful reading of the Acts afforded me a practical picture of the early church; which made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state."

In Ireland he met other like minded believers, including godly Anthony Norris Groves, and the Lady Powerscourt, who had began conferences in her mansion for the study of the end times. It is from these conferences that some have marked the beginning of the secret rapture doctrine, owing to a prophetic word given at the Powerscourt meetings. These meetings were modelled on similar prophetic conferences held in Surrey, under Henry Drummond and Edward Irving. Irving had translated a commentary on Revelation written by a Chilean Jesuit priest of Spanish descent named Manuel de Lacunza. To avoid the threat of exposure by the Roman Catholic authorities, the book was written under the guise of being authored by a converted Jew by the name of Rabbi Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra. Lacunza's book, which was published in 1812, contained a futuristic interpretation of the Revelation. All of the prophecies of the book were seen as having a future fulfilment in a short space of time just prior to the return of the Lord. Protestants and Evangelicals of the day, and since the Reformation, and even further back than that, unanimously interpreted these prophecies as referring to the Papacy and to the history of the Church.

Darby left the Anglican Church, and by 1828 began meeting together with others of like mind to break bread. Independently in England, especially around Bristol and Plymouth, other believers were becoming concerned about gathering together on the basis of the name of Jesus only, and not on some denominational basis. One of the leaders at Plymouth, B W Newton, brought about a visit of Darby to Plymouth in 1832. Darby was familiar with Irving's translation and notes, which was published in 1827, and began enthusiastically preaching these new found prophetic ideas. Darby eventually emerged as the leader of the whole movement, which became known as the Plymouth Brethren. The Plymouth Brethren in England felt that they were returning to a more apostolic church pattern.

There were some very good and godly men among them like Charles H Mackintosh, William Kelly, John Butler Stoney, Anthony Norris Groves, George Müller, and others, men of exceptional insight, godly devotion, and strong learning. The Brethren movement was a sincere effort to return to church unity, which unfortunately soon went into error and further schism. Separation from other churches, or 'the Ruin of the Church' as it was called, and meeting as brethren gathered to the name of Jesus alone, became the testimony to which the Brethren bore witness. Darby would later split with the Plymouth assembly, when Newton and others at the assembly refused to embrace some of Darby's teachings on the 'secret rapture', Dispensationalism, and on the ministry (for more on the Ministry see The Apostolic Ministry). Newton believed that the conversion of the Jews would occur before the Rapture, not after. He, and others such as Müller and Groves, rejected the Secret Rapture teaching.

The early Brethren Biblical textual critic Samuel P. Tregelles wrote that the Christian hope was "not some secret advent, or secret rapture to the Lord, as Judaizers had supposed might be the case..." (Premillennial Advent, The Christian Annotator, June 16, 1855, p. 190. Quoted from Dave MacPherson 'William Kelly's Journal', www.lasttrumpet.com.) Tregelles believed that the secret rapture doctrine began with a prophetic utterance in Edward Irving's church. Newton believed that the 'crude and mistaken statements' of Darby and others discredited their own views of the end times, which included belief in the millennium (Newton, On the Prophecies Respecting the Jews and Jerusalem). However they rejected the idea that Christ would reign on a throne literally in Jerusalem, teaching that he would continue to reign from heaven, though Jerusalem itself would be the earthly centre of His government. From that time (1845) the Brethren split into the Open Brethren, centred on the Plymouth and Bristol assemblies, and the Exclusive Brethren under Darby.

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Darby took on a much more authoritarian approach to leadership, resulting in an irreconcilable division, and Darby considered the Exclusive assemblies as the only ones recognised by God. Even the Exclusives began splitting apart, notably under Darby's disciple William Kelly, who broke with his master. Kelly (1820-1906) was a very able man, lecturing, writing Commentaries, and even producing a critical edition of the book of Revelation. He loved the writings of Darby, and was responsible for editing the 'Collected Writings of J N Darby'. Following Darby's death the Exclusives that he had led became increasingly authoritarian and cultic, until under James Taylor Senior the Exclusives could no longer be considered a Christian Church, but as an heretical and authoritarian cult (The 'exclusive brethren' believe that if you wear a tie or live in an apartment, listen to a radio, or eat with someone not in the exclusives, that you are a false Christian. More seriously, they deny the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus). Some of the ideas of 'exclusiveness' later came into the Charismatic Church through the teaching on 'Authority' by Watchman Nee, whose 'Little Flock' was much influenced by the Exclusives.

The more moderate Brethren called the Open Brethren became a major force in British evangelicalism up to about the 1960's. They were the most active in evangelism and Bible study and a lot of Christians were part of it. Then in the '60's many dropped the dispensationalism and joined the British Restorationist or house Church movement (Centred around men like Arthur Wallace, Bryn Jones, John Noble, Terry Virgo and Gerald Coates). Many others of the open Brethren left at the same time as a result of the in fighting that consumed this movement, and joined other non conformist groups such as the Baptists.

It must be remembered that dispensationalism began in the 19th century, at a time when many new doctrines were emerging, like the Adventists, Campbellites, Cooneyites, Christadelphians, and Mormons. England at the time saw the rise of liberal theology, and Christians were wide open to a new system that would return to a 'more literal' method of translation and hold back the forces of modernism. The new doctrine also gave the Brethren an identity which set them apart from the rest of 'Christendom'.

Dispensationalism Arrives in the USA

Darby during his lifetime travelled very extensively ministering and establishing Brethren assemblies in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies. Darby spent nearly seven years between 1862 and 1877, ministering in the United States. A similar though slightly later trend towards liberal theology was developing in the US which was to lead to the famous 'monkey trials'. I suspect that at the time evangelicals wanted a more 'fundamentalist' approach to theology to counter this tide of liberalism that had swept over the traditional denominations. At first Darby tried spreading Brethren doctrines; that people should leave the denominations and gather in what he called the unity of the One Body, meaning Brethrenism. This was unsuccessful, and so by the 1870s he was limiting his teaching to Brethren eschatology, without the call to leave the churches. This found a ready audience in an evangelicalism already experiencing a revival in millennial teaching. His views on prophecy were adopted by James Hall Brookes, pastor of the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, A J Gordon, pastor of the Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston, by D L Moody, though with reservations, Harry Ironside, pastor of the Moody Memorial Church, and by C I Scofield.

Brookes became leader of the popular prophetic conferences, which later became known as the Niagara Bible Conferences. The Niagara Conferences continued every summer between 1883 to 1897, and were especially attractive to the conservative ministers battling the tides of liberalism and higher criticism. William Bell Riley, a dispensational leader, called pre- millennialism "the sufficient if not solitary antidote to the present apostasy." The conferences came to an end after splitting into two camps, one favouring the secret rapture teaching, and one opposing it. Gordon, Torrey, Moody and others represented some of the most influential evangelical leaders of the day. They institutionalised Dispensationalism through the schools they set up, such as the Moody Bible Institute (1886), the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1907). The future leaders of evangelicalism, coming through the schools, were thoroughly dispensational in their theology.

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921) was an Attorney who learned Dispensationalism from Brookes. With the backing of some prominent businessmen, Scofield started work in 1903 on his 'Reference Bible'. The work was completed five years later in 1908, and was published early the next year by the prestigious Oxford University Press. The notes in this Bible had a strong dispensational flavour, and influenced hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom unconsciously accepted Scofield's views.

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A Literal Interpretation?

No one would disagree with God's progressive method of revealing himself to man, though we would disagree on the purpose of it. It was because God was preparing the world and people in different ways for the ultimate plan of revealing his Messiah who would die for the sins of the world. Dispensationalism cannot have this as the central theme of God's dealings, but rather substitutes a Jewish earthly kingdom as God's supreme purpose, and the death of the Messiah as a dispensational afterthought following the rejection of Jesus as King by the Jews. But that is not true. God chose Abraham so that he could make a covenant, thus establishing the legal framework through which he could bring the Messiah. Christ was to be the seed of Abraham, and later, the son of David. Dispensationalism cannot handle the harmony of the dispensations, just as Covenant Theology cannot handle the differences.

Dispensationalists charge others of not adhering to a consistent literal interpretation. This is not true. The demands of the historical-grammatical method is that literature be interpreted consistently with the type of literature it represents. I.e. it treats history books as history etc. All schools interpret passages allegorically!!! I have yet to meet a dispensationalist who believes that a literal seven-headed beast is going to pop up out of the ocean. Revelation was sent and signified by the angel to the apostle John. You cannot interpret it literally! In Dispensationalism locusts, bows and arrows, and horses, become machine guns, tanks, Fighter Jets, military helicopters and so forth. Dispensationalism interprets allegorical passages literally and literal passages allegorically!!!!

II Thessalonians Chaps. 1 and 2 literally say that when the Lord returns, all of the ungodly will be destroyed with everlasting destruction. Yet dispensationalists teach that whole nations will be spared this judgment, in contradiction to the literal words of this passage. II Peter chapter three literally says that at the return of the Lord the heavens and the earth will be burned up, and that we are to look for a new heaven and a new earth, yet the Dispensationalism says that we are to look to being taken away for a thousand years first. I Thessalonians Chapter 4 says we will be alive until the coming of the Lord, but the dispensationalist reads 'until the rapture of the church'. The same passage speaks of the shout, and the trumpet, yet no-one hears a thing according to the dispensationalist. Jesus said that the Kingdom was at hand, they say it was postponed and will manifest two thousand years later. He said you have to be born again to see it. They say you have to be Jewish. The Bible says that Paul preached the gospel of the Kingdom to gentiles; they say it will be preached to the Jews in the Tribulation.

And what of James' 'spiritualising' of prophecy when he says:

"...Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called...." (Acts 14: 14-17).

The two major theological schools of the early Church were those of Antioch and Alexandria. Alexandria gained a reputation for having a tendency to 'spiritualise' Scripture; indeed they did tend to find in passages of Scripture strange and fanciful allegories. However the school of Antioch knew nothing of the literalistic approach to prophecies that Dispensationalists have become known for. It was the Jewish community of Sinope which in the second century "was developing literal approaches to reading the Hebrew scriptures to counteract Christian allegorical claims on Jewish sacred texts." (Christianity, A Global History, by David Chidester, Chapter 4, p.45, Harper and Collins.)

The Secret Rapture of the Church

This teaching of a secret rapture occurring as a separate event from the second coming is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture and of every minister and teacher sent from God from the church fathers onwards up until the advent of the Plymouth Brethren. It was virtually unknown before the 19th century and not popularised in the United States until the early 20th century. Paul the apostle is clear that the day of Jesus' second coming will be marked by the angels pouring out eternal damnation upon the ungodly, and he plainly told Christians to look for that day, and further told them that that day (of his coming and out gathering together to meet him) will not come until the man of sin is revealed first. See 2 Thessalonians chapters 1 and 2.

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Will the Rapture be Secret?

Nor will the rapture be a secret event, known only by the evidence of the saints disappearing. In fact Paul says that at the rapture 'The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a SHOUT, with the voice of the archangel, and with the TRUMPET of God.' This has all of the marks of a public appearing. Incidentally we are told that the rapture trumpet is not the last trump, and that there will be another trump at another second coming, as recorded in Matthew 24, and that following that there will be another seven trumpets.

So the rapture will not be at the second coming according to this view. Yet Paul says, 'Now we beseech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord, and by our gathering together unto him...' And what does he beseech them? That 'that day' will not come until the falling away (apostasy) comes first, and the man of sin is revealed. Yet we are told that the man of sin is revealed after. We are told that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit. Yet the greatest revival is meant to occur after this at a time when the Holy Spirit is gone! Historically people have always pointed toward the papacy as the fulfilment of these verses regarding the Man of Sin, with the restrainer being the Roman power. This was the view of the Fathers, and Martyrs, the Reformers, Anabaptists, Baptists, Methodists, and nearly all Christians until the Plymouth Brethren. The 1260 days of Revelation were believed to be 1260 years corresponding to the mediaeval period when the papacy rose to temporal power and exercised authority over the kings of the earth and made war with the saints with crusades and the inquisition.

We are told that the rapture is not 'the coming of the our Lord', yet Paul puts them both together and calls it 'the day of Christ' and 'that day.' (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3). Further Paul says 'We that are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 4:15). So we are left with two second comings. Twice he descends from heaven, the first time with the last trumpet and the second time with another trumpet (presumably). Yes his coming will be as a thief in the night. But Peter adds, 'in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with a fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.'

Then why as a thief? Because it will come upon the world un-expectedly. But Paul says that that day will not come as a thief to the saved, for they are not ignorant of the times and the seasons that that day should overtake them as a thief. But it will overtake the wicked as a thief. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4. Why? Because of the wrath that will be revealed in that day as the angels destroy the wicked in flaming fire, in sudden destruction. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. This is the wrath of God – angels coming in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction. Not tribulations. We are appointed to tribulation, but not to wrath. When will they be punished with everlasting destruction? Verse Ten of the first chapter of the second epistle to the Thessalonians – "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints"

The Dispensation of the Millennium

"Obscure passages, symbolic usage, allegorical imagery, on this the premillennialists depend to place the thin end of their wedge in the Bible. Into that (Revelation.20), they false every veiled prophecy from the Old Testament, every strained interpretation of the book of Daniel...But this is folly, clean contrary to the use of numbers in the book of Revelation...the book of Revelation is expressed in terms of graphic, vivid imagery. But II Peter chapter 3 is written in the most unambiguous doctrine. Then, the former is to be interpreted in the light of the latter..." (John Metcalfe. Premillennialism Exposed.)

Is Metcalfe being unfair? Revelation is full of imagery. Not to belittle its importance. When understood correctly it is very important. But do we take a book of images and interpret it contrary to the plain sense of scripture in other passages such as II Peter 3, which appears to plainly say that when the Lord returns, the heavens and the earth will be destroyed? Does not scripture say that Jesus is reigning now, and that he shall reign UNTIL his enemies are made his footstool? When are they made his footstool – 'he shall reign until his enemies are made his footstool, and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death' – so says the apostle.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

He will reign until his enemies are made his footstool. Therefore he is reigning! The last enemy is death. It will be destroyed at his coming when we are changed:

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“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.”

As the Psalms say, Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, and the Lord has said to him “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool”, as Peter bears witness:

“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel [And all dispensationalists] know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

His throne is in the heavens where he reigns by the inward anointing from the Heavenly Zion. And when he returns and destroys the last enemy, the ‘end’ will have come.

Then what is the significance of the words ‘a thousand years’, and of the two resurrections? A day with the Lord is as a thousand years. The One Hundred and Tenth Psalm, which speaks of the reign of the Lord at the right hand of the Father says

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth”

I believe that the ‘day of his power’ represents the ‘Lord’s Day’, which is the day in which he reigns from Zion, which is the Church (Hebrew 12:22). The Sun of righteousness being ascended into the heavens, from whence he will descend again, bringing everlasting darkness upon the world of the wicked. As for the two resurrections, it seems to me that John writes of these in his gospel. When he wrote Revelation he wrote it in a way that presupposed knowledge of his other teachings. Hence the first resurrection is a spiritual one. Just as Paul said, we have been made alive again, and seated in heavenly places in Christ. The thrones are the same thrones mentioned in chapter 5 of the Revelation, with the 24 elders seated upon. Revelation 20 does not teach that the Jews shall reign, but the saints. It does not teach a rebuilt Jerusalem, an earthly throne of David, renewed sacrifices and rebuilt temple, which things the book of Hebrews says have been done away with. So is Metcalfe unfair when he further says:

“...the premillennialists undermine the cross, the judgement of the world, and the condemnation of the flesh...they put a lie in the apostles’ mouth, who said that between Jew and Gentile, ‘There is no difference’, by saying, There is a difference... Paul says ‘Circumcision profiteth nothing’, yet they say it profiteth everything...Galatians 2:18 informs us that if we build again the legal covenant of works and ceremonies, we become transgressors, destroying the work of Christ. But these make God do it, and their excuse is that he does it in their mythical hole in time and space, though it should overturn the dispensations, trample the gospel, reintroduce the law of commandments contained in ordinances, and manifest again what has forever vanished away...The premillennialist will have the temple rebuilt, sacrifices reintroduced, ceremonial law re-established, in a word, the Old Covenant returned.”

Strong words, perhaps too strong. He offers another crushing blow to this doctrine:

“Jesus said, ‘Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ But these see it, since they are born Jews... As to righteousness coming by the law – to which the millennial Jew must submit – if righteousness come by the law then Christ is dead in vain... We are assured, Gal.3:7, that they that are under the works of the law are under a curse. But in the millennium blessing and curse are reversed.”

And so he continues. But what deep observations! We believe that God’s unfolding plan is progressive, not regressive. We do not go back to the beggarly elements of the law. We see that both Dispensational and Covenant theology both try to make alive again the law, one in one way and the other in

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another way.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Neither now nor in the future.

“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.”

Yet this setting aside is temporary, according to Dispensationalism, but not according to Paul’s words. We must maintain redemption as the focus and goal of the covenants, not a Jewish political Kingdom, with the age of Grace being a temporary afterthought following Jesus’ supposed failure to set up the Kingdom at his first advent. Certainly the Hebrew Scriptures points toward redemption as the focus –

“...I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26:22-23).

The Abrahamic Covenant

Dispensationalism teaches that the Covenant made with Abraham is an earthly covenant and concerns itself with the promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham’s seed. I do not deny that there is an earthly aspect to the covenant made between God and Abraham. God promised his seed to be as the stars of the sky and as the sand of the seashore, thus showing that there would be a spiritual and an earthly people. But the primary focus is spiritual, and refers to the Gospel, as Paul declares.

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

And again

“Who [Abraham] against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.” Romans 4:18

Showers completely overturns this truth, declaring that the promise to Abraham only pertained to the physical seed. He says:

“The fact that God established the Abrahamic Covenant with the physical descendents of Abraham is made even more clear in Genesis 17:19,21 where he said, “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him...But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto thee” (There Really Is A Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology, 1990, Chapter 6, By Renald E. Showers)

But Paul interprets these things the complete opposite:

“Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Romans 9:7

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” Galatians 3:16

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:29

All of the promises given to the natural seed were fulfilled during the history of the Kingdom of Israel, especially under Solomon as a type of Christ, when the Kingdom reached even to the Euphrates. Whether or not the natural seed of Jacob will ever possess all this land again I do not know, but the emphasis of the Apostolic writings is that we, the true Israelite race, we are the heirs of this promise, being the true children of Abraham through faith.

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One bible teacher said this,

“The first great conclusion Paul presents to the Galatians is that the only true children of Abraham, the heirs to the Abrahamic covenant, blessing and promise, are true believers, whether Jew or Gentile: “Know ye therefore that they which be of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). There can be no appeal from this fundamental statement. In one sentence Paul destroys the entire dispensational, pre-millennial and post-millennial edifice. It is foundational to all three systems that Jewish privilege and a special Jewish future must be maintained on the basis that the Abrahamic covenant was exclusive to the natural (i.e. Jewish) seed of Abraham.

But Paul shows in these two chapters that the “seed of Abraham” is Christ, and that they who are Christ’s (and no one else) are “Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise”; that this “seed” abolishes all distinction of birth or privilege, for “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for all are one in Christ Jesus” (See Gal. 3:16,28,19). Moreover, the promise (of redemption in Christ) took precedence over the law by 430 years - the time lapse between Abraham and Moses. The Law itself, with its apparatus of temple, priest and sacrifice, was only added “because of transgression” to bridge the gap till Christ came Gal. 3:17-19...The conclusion of this chapter (vv. 26-29) is the charter of the New Testament Church and the ground of her invincible claim to be the lawful successor of Abraham, the true Israel, the true circumcision (not in the flesh but in the spirit), the inheritor of the promises and privileges and hope of Old Testament Israel. Hence-”If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (v.29).

This glorious sentence winds up the Old Covenant, abolishes the law, the temple, and circumcision, terminates the mission of the Jewish nation, ends their exclusive rights and privileges, and provides the key to the understanding of the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets of the Old Testament...Chapter four contains Paul’s final argument, proving these two things: (1) That the work of “adoption” performed in the hearts of all true believers demonstrates that they are the legitimate successors of the Israelitish church of the Old Testament. (2) He reinforces this by an allegory built upon Abraham’s history, showing that the natural Jew is not Israel at all but Ishmael; and that the church of Jew and Gentile believers is the true and only and exclusive Israel of God...His last word to the Galatians is, “So then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free” (Gal. 4:3 1). This he writes to the most Gentile of all the churches, showing that to the Gentile church has passed the covenant, the glory, the birthright, the privilege and the redemption hope...

Our last word is that of Paul, significantly found in the conclusion of that epistle specifically written to deliver the Church from Jewish error and Jewish pride: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” (Gal. 6:14-16).” (Moses or Christ? Paul’s Reply To Dispensational Error by Charles D. Alexander)

The Davidic Covenant

When Christ, the rightful King, ascended to heaven, the throne ascended with him! The throne is the authority of the King. He now reigns from the right hand of God, from the midst of the heavenly Zion.

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed (Christ), saying, 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” {set: Heb. anointed} Psalm 2:1-6

Mount Zion

Zion is not a hill in Jerusalem! Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (KJV) John 12:15 Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt. He was not referring to women born only on this one hill in Jerusalem.

The Hope Of Israel By Philip Mauro (published in 1922) says this of Zion:

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“... the housing of the ark of God in the tabernacle of David was an event of unusual importance; for it was celebrated by “all Israel” with demonstrations of the most impressive character... it constituted a decided break with the levitical ordinances given through Moses, in that the ark of God’s presence was no longer in the holy of holies of the Tabernacle of the Wilderness (which was then at Gibeon), but in the midst of the Tabernacle of David on Mount Zion; and further that there were no animal sacrifices there, only sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; and no priests, but only Levites, whom David appointed “to minister before the ark of the Lord, and to record,” that is literally to make mention of, or bring to remembrance, or in other words to proclaim or preach the mercies and the marvelous acts of God, “and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel” (1 Chr. 16:4). This was a very remarkable suspension of the system of worship of the Law, and an equally remarkable foreshadowing of that of the Gospel... this sojourn of the ark on Mount Zion is the foundation of the many references in the Psalms and the Prophets to Zion, as the dwelling place of Jehovah, and is what gives to the terms “Zion” and “Mount Zion” their high spiritual meaning...when God speaks by His prophets concerning things to come in the Kingdom of Christ, He ... says ...”I will build again the Tabernacle of David which is fallen down.”...” (The Hope Of Israel By Philip Mauro, 1922, Chap.18.)

And does not God now dwell among His people, as he dwelt on Zion hill when David brought back the ark? Ps 74:2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.

The second Psalm continues:

“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. Psalm 2:7-12

These verses point us to the timing of Jesus’ reign – they commence at the decree “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee”. When was this? When he was begotten from the dead, for so it is written: “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” Acts 13:33, and Colossians 1:18 “...who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.”

Having ascended into the heavens he sat down, where he reigns at the right hand of God.

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” Psalm 110:1-4

No wonder than that Peter could say:

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his [David’s] throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption... For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Acts2: 30-35

The idea that Jesus has yet to fulfil sitting upon the throne of David is contrary to both the Psalms, and the apostolic writings. It is the teaching of the Jewish Rabbi’s who taught that there would be two Messiah’s; the Suffering Messiah, the Son of Joseph, and the Triumphant Messiah, the Son of David. Jesus came as both, and he said that his kingdom was not of this world. Nor will it be. Jesus the King is reigning. He is King of kings. Re 17:14 “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”

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He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek:

“To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.” Hebrews 7:2-3

Revelation 1:9 - “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,”

Dispensationalists claim that the “Unsaved wicked will be present during Messiah’s reign” (Showers, p.95). Yet what of a literal interpretation of Paul’s words:

“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.” 2 Thessalonians. 1:7-10

And again

“ I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” 2 Timothy 4:1

The New Covenant

Dispensationalists say that the New Covenant was made with the people of Israel, and not with the Church. This is a misunderstanding of the fact that the Church is made up of those who are Israel after the Spirit. Consider well these words:

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh” Romans 2:28

Note he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly. The Church has been grafted in and has become members of the commonwealth of Israel, and the natural seed have been dispossessed, though the promise is that one day they will be brought back in though the gospel.

“For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.” Romans 11:30-32

Amillennialists have long believed that this will be fulfilled, that the nation will be saved. But this will be by the gospel, not by keeping the law in a Jewish kingdom.

The Church Fathers and the Millennium

Many Dispensational writers attempt to create the impression that the early Church was Pre-Millennial. It is true that some of them did hold to a Pre-Millennial view, but in a much different sense than that of the Dispensationalists. Some were what would now be called ‘historic Premillennial’, meaning that they did believe in a literal Millennium, but not in a Dispensational sense. While I do not agree with this doctrine, it is something I believe that Christians can differ on. Renald Showers, in Chapter Eleven of his book “There Really is a Difference”, gives a typical presentation of the evidence from a dispensational perspective.

Papias (c. 60-130)

Papias did teach the doctrine of pre-millennialism. In fact he appears to have originated the view

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among Christians. He is the influence behind Irenaeus.

Typical is a quote given by a Dispensationalist, leaving out the parts not favourable to his point. The passage is Eusebius, the Fourth century Church historian, relating some of the teachings of Papias. Highlighted is the part Showers quotes on page 119 of his aforementioned book, and underlined is what I feel is especially significant, yet not quoted:

“The same writer gives also other accounts which he says came to him through unwritten tradition, certain strange parables and teachings of the Saviour, and some other more mythical things. To these belong his statement that there will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth. I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses. but it was due to him that so many of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion, urging in their own support the antiquity of the man; as for instance Irenaeus and any one else that may have proclaimed similar views.”

Eusebius further quotes showing that Papias did not base his doctrines on the Bible but on what was related to him:

“If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders,-what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice.”

Of course Showers mentions none of this. Nor does he give an example of the Papias' extravagant teaching:

“The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five-and-twenty metretes of wine (About 225 gallons). And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, “I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me.’ IV. (12)

Albertus Pieters claimed that Papias got his ideas from Jewish apocalyptic literature, and that the language he used was similar to that used in The Apocalypse of Baruch, and The Book of Enoch. (Studies in The Revelation of St. John (1939 Reprinted under title The Lamb, the Woman, and the Dragon, 1954. p.67.)

Barnabas (Early Second Century)

All sides have claimed Barnabas. Even some Pre-millers have acknowledged that Barnabas was probably A-Mil. The problem is that he appears to link the seventh day with the eighth day:

“This meaneth: when His Son, coming [again], shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the sun, and the moon, and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day. Moreover, He says, “Thou shalt sanctify it with pure hands and a pure heart.” If, therefore, any one can now sanctify the day which God hath sanctified, except he is pure in heart in all things, we are deceived. Behold therefore; certainly then one properly resting sanctifies it, when we ourselves, having received the promise, wickedness no longer existing, and all things having been made new by the Lord, shall be able to work righteousness. Then we shall be able to sanctify it, having been first sanctified ourselves. Further, He says to them, ‘Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made, [namely this,] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”

Whatever the case, he did not teach a millennium of rebuilt temples and renewed sacrifices, nor did he

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envison any other than those who 'God has sanctified'. He saw none other than the righteousness living at this time. Barnabas strongly taught along the lines of the nation of Israel being set aside for the Church. He taught that all of the Old Testament prophecies were given to the church, including the promise of inheriting a land full of milk and honey! (Epistle of Barnabas Chap. 6)

Justin Martyr (c. 110-165)

Justin is a man I have much respect for. His writing, the Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, gives an excellent account proving the truth of the gospel out of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is probably the best I have ever come across in interpreting Old Testament types, shadows, and prophecies. He did believe in a literal millennium. However Showers' work contains a dishonest presentation! He quotes Justin, as given below in bold, to the affect that he was "asserting that Premillennialism was the orthodox view in his day." p.121. Nothing could be further from the truth! Consider below the quote in context:

"And Trypho to this replied, "I remarked to you sir, that you are very anxious to be safe in all respects, since you cling to the Scriptures. But tell me, do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came? or have you given way, and admitted this in order to have the appearance of worsting us in the controversies?"

I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.

... But I and others, who are fight-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare." Chap. 80

Notice "but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise." This is the opposite of the false impression that Showers would attempt to create! Perhaps this writer, like many others of his school, has simply never read these writings, knowing the quotes only from the works of others. So then why did Justin say what he did? To distance himself from the heretics who taught a millennium. In other words, 'there are right minded Christians who hold to this as well Trypho, not just the heretics who call themselves Christians':

Moreover, I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistical, and foolish. But that you may know that I do not say this before you alone, I shall draw up a statement, so far as I can, of all the arguments which have passed between us; in which I shall record myself as admitting the very same things which I admit to you... For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians...But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years.

Even the Rabbi Trypho seems surprised that Justin held this view! Further it must be stated that Justin expected only Christians to live on into this rebuilt Jerusalem! Justin did not believe the Jews would be there, unless they accept Jesus the Lord in this life:

"And you deceive yourselves while you fancy that, because you are the seed of Abraham after the flesh, therefore you shall fully inherit the good things announced to be bestowed by God through Christ. For no one, not even of them, has anything to look for, but only those who in mind are assimilated to the faith of Abraham, and who have recognised all the mysteries...So that it becomes you to eradicate this hope from your souls, and hasten to know in what way forgiveness of sins, and a hope of inheriting the promised good things, shall be yours. But there is no other [way] than this,--to become acquainted with this Christ, to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah for the remission of sins; and for the rest, to live sinless lives." Chap 45

And though I acknowledge that Justin taught a literal Millennium, yet he also taught that Christ is reigning now, at the right hand of God:

"This is the generation of them that seek the Lord, that seek the face of the God of Jacob. Lift up your gates, ye rulers; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty in battle. Lift up your gates, ye rulers; and be ye lift up, ye

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everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.’ Accordingly, it is shown that Solomon is not the Lord of hosts; but when our Christ rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, the rulers in heaven, under appointment of God, are commanded to open the gates of heaven, that He who is King of glory may enter in, and having ascended, may sit on the right hand of the Father until He make the enemies His footstool, as has been made manifest by another Psalm.” Chap 36

Justin did believe in a literal thousand years in Jerusalem, but he says that other Christians did not hold to this. This shows us that the idea that Amillennialism began with Augustine in the fourth century is erroneous. He certainly was not dispensational for he taught that the church is spiritual Israel, and that the promises given to Israel have now been given to the church.

Irenaeus (c. 140-202)

As we have seen before Irenaeus received his teaching on this from Papias – “And these things are bone witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John”. Irenaeus in turn taught Hippolytus, bishop of Rome, who held similar views to his master. Irenaeus, unlike the dispensationalists, taught that the Church is the seed, and that the church would receive the inheritance of ‘the land’ at the resurrection.

“Thus did he [Abraham] await patiently the promise of God, and was unwilling to appear to receive from men, what God had promised to give him, when He said again to him as follows: “I will give this land to thy seed, from the river of Egypt even unto the great river Euphrates.” If, then, God promised him the inheritance of the land, yet he did not receive it during all the time of his sojourn there, it must be, that together with his seed, that is, those who fear God and believe in Him, he shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For his seed is the Church, which receives the adoption to God through the Lord, as John the Baptist said: “For God is able from the stones to raise up children to Abraham.” Thus also the apostle says in the Epistle to the Galatians: “But ye, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise.” And again, in the same Epistle, he plainly declares that they who have believed in Christ do receive Christ, the promise to Abraham thus saying, “The promises were spoken to Abraham, and to his seed. Now He does not say, And of seeds, as if [He spake] of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” And again, confirming his former words, he says, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith are the children of Abraham.

But the Scripture, fore-seeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, declared to Abraham beforehand, That in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham.” Thus, then, they who are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham, and these are the children of Abraham. Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Against Heresies Book 5, Chap.32

And so once again Showers does not have much to gain. And once again he has not informed the reader of what Irenaeus taught with regard to these things. He was not dispensational. Once again also, Irenaeus taught that the Christians would reign in the Millennium- “The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead” (Chap.33).

Irenaeus was writing against the growing Gnostic influence. Though earlier groups had taught a literal millennium, the Gnostics appear to have taught against any notion which mixed the ‘evil’ natural realm with the ‘good’ spiritual realm. Todd Seidel adds these remarks about Irenaeus’ acceptance of this doctrine:

“Part of the growing debate reflected a concern over the material nature of the eternal age. In a world where Gnosticism was on the rise, it is easy to understand how a 1,000 year material reign of Christ would serve well. Irenaeus, one of the foremost early millenarian thinkers, was also a leader in the fight against Gnosticism – a movement whose more acetic forms proposed a radical rejection of the material world. A future millennium situated in the material world would certainly help Irenaeus in his fight.” Millenarian History: The Birth, Death, and Resurrection of Neo-Christian Eschatology By Todd Seidel

Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 220)

Tertullian was another early church father who taught an earthly millennium, though like the others he taught that it would be the saints who reign, not the Jews. And it would be from the New

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Jerusalem, not the old.

There is another unfortunate historical misrepresentation by Showers in this passage. Showers says “In a work which he wrote before his association with Montanism, Tertullian stated, “But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth...”” p.123.

Showers does not want to admit that Tertullian wrote this after he became Montanist. The problem here is that this quote is taken from Tertullian’s treatise Against Marcion. There is no doubt that treatise was written after, not before his association with Montanism. How can I say that? Because in the same book, in fact in the same chapter, on the very next line, to the one quoted by Showers, Tertullian says

“And the word of the new prophecy which is a part of our belief, attests how it foretold that there would be for a sign a picture of this very city exhibited to view previous to its manifestation” (Against Marcion Book 3).

Did Showers not even check his quotes? Did he not know that the ‘new prophecy’ was a reference to Montanism? Or did he not see it? The back of the book makes it clear that he is a learned man, having a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Theology and a Doctor of Theology. Ought not this man be able to check his references a little better before going into print? Todd Seidel’s comments regarding Irenaeus could equally apply to Tertullian who wrote against the Gnostic Marcion, especially since Marcion’s doctrine taught against the Old Testament.

Lactantius p.124-6

Yet again he taught that the saints would reign in a rebuilt Jerusalem, not the Jews.

“...it is evident that no hope remains to the Jews, unless, turning themselves to repentance, and being cleansed from the blood with which they polluted themselves, they shall begin to hope in Him whom they denied.” (Epitome of the Divine Institutes Chap. 48)

Brian E. Daley shares these comments:

“Lactantius presents his description of the end of history as “the teaching of the holy prophets,” a secret tradition carefully guarded by Christians alone. Its contents, however, are a curious hybrid of Christian apocalypticism and the speculations of late pagan “prophetic” literature – of works like the non-Christian Sibylline Oracles, the Hermetic tract Asclepius, and the Hellenized Zoroastrian work known as the Oracles of Hystaspes. This eclecticism is undoubtedly due in part to Lactantius’ apologetic and popularizing intentions in writing the work, but it also represents the farthest development hitherto of what would become a much more widespread phenomenon: the blending of biblical eschatology with the elements of folk religion, occult speculation and late antique literary traditions, in a vividly concrete picture of our individual and collective destinies. Brian E. Daley, *The hope of the early church: a handbook of patristic eschatology*, (Cambridge 1991), p.68. Quoted by Seidel.

Showers concludes this section by saying: “This examination of early Church leaders indicates that they were, indeed, Premillennial by conviction”

Well Showers may wish that it were so, but the testimony of Justin is against him. The most he can claim is that the early church was divided. Yet even that is far from the truth. The overwhelming witness is that the Church by and large was against this teaching, and that it did not enter into the church until the second century. Hegesippus lived in the first century, and parts of his writings are preserved via Eusebius. He related how that at the time of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) the grandchildren of Jude, the brother of the Lord, were brought before the King who feared the coming of Christ. Hegesippus relates that:

“...he [Domitian] asked them if they were descendants of David, and they confessed that they were. Then he asked them how much property they had, or how much money they owned. And both of them answered that they had only nine thousand denarii, half of which belonged to each of them; and this

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property did not consist of silver, but of a piece of land which contained only thirty-nine acres, and from which they raised their taxes and supported themselves by their own labour... And when they were asked concerning Christ and his kingdom, of what sort it was and where and when it was to appear, they answered that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly and angelic one, which would appear at the end of the world, when he should come in glory to judge the quick and the dead, and to give unto every one according to his works. Upon hearing this, Domitian did not pass judgment against them, but, despising them as of no account, he let them go, and by a decree put a stop to the persecution of the Church.” (Ecclesiastical History Book 3 Chap. 20)

Even the Apostles Creed says the same, confessing that Jesus will come again ‘to judge the living and the dead’. The Nicene Creed said “He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.” What about the very early writing, The Epistle to Diognetus? It says:

“For God has loved mankind, on whose account He made the world, to whom He rendered subject all the things that are in it, to whom He gave reason and understanding, to whom alone He imparted the privilege of looking upwards to Himself, whom He formed after His own image, to whom He sent His only-begotten Son, to whom He has promised a kingdom in heaven, and will give it to those who have loved Him.” (The Epistle Of Mathetes To Diognetus Chap.10).

Oswald T Allis says that millennial views were extensively circulated in the Early Church through such Jewish or Jewish-Christian writings such as 4 Esdras, Assumption of Moses, Ascension of Isaiah, and Psalms of Solomon. (Oswald T Allis Prophecy and the Church, London 1945 p.287 n.12).

“It appears clearly that at least one of the sources of chiliasm in the early church must be found in Jewish imagination, which originated the ‘Jewish fables’ against which the apostle Paul warns Titus (1:14).” (Pieters quoted in A Critique of the Premillennial View of Scripture and Review of its Historical Development with a consideration of Revelation chapter twenty verses one to six by Alan Nairne, England, 2000)

Seidel sees this link strongly. He writes

“Charges of Judaizing or pagan influence were not uncommon from millenarian opponents. Both Origen and Jerome made such accusations as did other early writers. It is also evident, as we have already suggested, that the connection between millenarian thinking and the Jewish concept of a 6,000 year chronology is indicative of a strong influence from popular Jewish eschatology.”

Origen (c.185-254) described the millennial teaching of his day:

Certain persons, then, refusing the labour of thinking, and adopting a superficial view of the letter of the law, and yielding rather in some measure to the indulgence of their own desires and lusts, being disciples of the letter alone, are of opinion that the fulfilment of the promises of the future are to be looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury; and therefore they especially desire to have again, after the resurrection, such bodily structures as may never be without the power of eating, and drinking, and performing all the functions of flesh and blood, not following the opinion of the Apostle Paul regarding the resurrection of a spiritual body. And consequently they say, that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children, imagining to themselves that the earthly city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt... And these views they think to establish on the authority of the prophets by those promises which are written regarding Jerusalem; and by those passages also where it is said, that they who serve the Lord shall eat and drink, but that sinners shall hunger and thirst; that the righteous shall be joyful, but that sorrow shall possess the wicked...Such are the views of those who, while believing in Christ, understand the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises. Those, however, who receive the representations of Scripture according to the understanding of the apostles, entertain the hope that the saints will eat indeed, but that it will be the bread of life...” (Origen De Principiis Book 2. Chap. 11)

Others traced the influence of millennial teaching to Cerinthus the arch-heretic. Eusebius quotes

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the words of Caius, a presbyter of the Church of Rome during the bishopric of Zephyrinus (AD 198-217):

“We have understood that at this time Cerinthus, the author of another heresy, made his appearance. Caius, whose words we quoted above, in the Disputation which is ascribed to him, writes as follows concerning this man: “But Cerinthus also, by means of revelations which he pretends were written by a great apostle, brings before us marvelous things which he falsely claims were shown him by angels; and he says that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ will be set up on earth, and that the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem will again be subject to desires and pleasures. And being an enemy of the Scriptures of God, he asserts, with the purpose of deceiving men, that there is to be a period of a thousand years a for marriage festivals.”“ Ecclesiastical History Book 2, Chapter 28

The Rise of Amillennialism

It is often claimed that opposition to this doctrine of Pre-millennialism began with the allegorical school of Alexandria. For example Showers says: “...a new theology, known as Alexandrian theology, developed in the Greek Church. This new theology was formed by Origen and other Church scholars in Alexandria, Egypt.” (Chapter 12, p.128). Is this true?

“Though the Antiochene school did hold to a more literal approach to interpretation, neither their methods nor their conclusions had much in common with LaHaye and the dispensational variety of literalism which he represents. Not only were leading proponents of the Antiochene school non-millennarian, they also held many points of agreement with the Alexandrian school. In particular, both schools held to a form of realized eschatology. One of the most influential members of the Antiochene school was Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 352-428).

He argued that Christ’s first coming had ushered in the kingdom, seeing it as a spiritual reality which occurred through union with Christ. The final redemption would deliver believers from the “middle position” they occupied during the present age. The age which followed was to be an eternal one, free from corruption, and united with Christ. Mopsuestia’s successor, Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393-466) also was a strong promoter of the Antiochene school. He believed the Holy Spirit was a foretaste of a future where believers share in Christ’s humanity forever. Daley comments that, “[Theodoret] makes it clear, too, in one strongly anti-millennarian passage, that the good things promised the heirs of God’s Kingdom will not be things ‘of a perishable or temporary kind, but the enjoyment of eternal blessings.’ (Siedel, Ibid.)

Further it is claimed that Augustine developed Amillennialism. If this was true, why is it that one of Augustine’s enemies, a Donatist by the name of Tyconius (d. c. 380s), also taught against this doctrine of Premillennialism?

He “understood Revelation. 20 as representing a picture of the church age. He believed the millennial reign is something the saints presently experience through union with Christ. Tyconius believed that Christ was the first resurrection, and that the picture of the Saints reigning with Christ was a symbolic portrayal of the Church age. (Seidel, Ibid.)

We should note that the Premillennialism of Augustine’s day, which he rejected, was a carnal one:

“And, this opinion would not be objectionable, if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be spiritual, and consequent on the presence of God; for I myself, too, once held this opinion. But, as they assert, that those who rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal. They who do believe them are called by the spiritual Chiliasts, which we may literally reproduce by the name Millenarians.” City of God (Book 20, chapter 7)

Augustine did however introduce a new concept. He believed that the reign of the saints is to be political in this world, and exercised by the Church. He thus used the literalism of a political reign and the idea of a millennium, to bring forth a form of Postmillennialism. Like the medieval Catholic church, and like many modern Reformed Theonomists, who both followed this theologian, he advocated physical force to be used against anyone not submitting to the Church. His works laid a foundation that would bring forth terrifying results in the centuries to come. But the same Jewish error was at its root, for Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world”.

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Anabaptists and the Millennium

Many writers, again including Showers, attempt to paint the Anabaptists as Premillennialists too. This is often seen as an important link, for many dispensationalists see the Anabaptists as predecessors to the Baptists. As we have seen Dispensationalists got their doctrine from the Plymouth Brethren, not the Anabaptists, or even the early Baptists. Let us take a look at the Anabaptists, and also of the early prophetic views of the early Baptists. Many Dispensationalists are Baptist by name, yet true Baptist doctrine is in no way Dispensational. Dispensationalism represents a departure from the historic Baptist faith.

The Anabaptists

It is true that the revolutionary Münsterites were millennial, with terrible consequences. But they did not represent the majority of peaceful Anabaptists. In fact, in his complete works, Menno Simons, a leader among the Dutch Anabaptists, calls it a 'Jewish' interpretation. He further says:

“Observe all of you who persecute the word of the lord and his people, this is our instruction, doctrine and belief concerning baptism (doop), according to the instruction of the words of Christ, namely, we must first hear the word of God, believe it, and then upon our faith be baptized (gedoopt); we are not seditious or contentious; we do not approve of polygamy; neither do we seek nor wait for any kingdom upon earth. Oh no! No! To God be eternal praise; we will know that the word of the Lord teaches us and testifies to, on the subject. The word of the Lord commands us that we, with sincere hearts, desire to die to sin, to bury our sins with Christ, and with him to arise to a new life, even as baptism (doop) is portrayed.” (Menno, Wercken, 17).

So also did the earliest Mennonite Confessions state, such as the Confession of Faith (1617), which in strong terms sets forth the general resurrection at the Lord's second coming, followed by the eternal kingdom.

The Anabaptist concept of the Kingdom was far removed from the Premillennial:

Peter Riedemann, the Hutterian leader, wrote in 1545:

“Christ, the Prince of Peace, has established His Kingdom, that is, His Church, and has purchased it by His blood. In this kingdom all worldly warfare has ended. Therefore a Christian has no part in war nor does he wield the sword to execute vengeance.” (Peter Riedemann, *Rechenschaft unserer Religion, Lehre sod Glaubens, von den Bruedern die Man die Hutterischen nennt*, 105, quoted in *The Anabaptist Vision* By Harold S. Bender, 1944)

Like many modern day Charismatics, the Kingdom was something lived and experienced. Gabriel Ascherham, was a leader of a large Anabaptist community at Rossitz in Moravia, in the late 1520s. He wrote:

“The apostles did not preach anything about community of goods nor order any one to keep it, in the first church at Jerusalem. But when they heard the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God the people believed and came to take part in the visible kingdom of the Holy Ghost. He filled them with joy and fixed their hearts upon heavenly blessings, so that they counted earthly possessions as nothing. Willingly, on their own and without being told, motivated only by the joy in their hearts, they went and sold their property, bringing the money from it to lay at the apostles' feet. Then they distributed to everyone according to his need. The first believers began community of goods without being told, everyone giving out of his own free will. Community of goods, as a result, was an open witness of the kingdom of God that had already come to them. It was not something commanded by men for the sake of the kingdom of God.” From *Vom Unterschied Göttlicher und Menschlicher Weisheit*, first published in 1544. Quoted in *The Secret of the Strength: What Would the Anabaptists Tell This Generation?* by Peter Hoover)

Thus one modern writer on the Anabaptists could say:

“The Jews looked for an earthly kingdom with an earthly Messiah. The Christians, after a few

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centuries, went the way of the Jews. "But the kingdom of God," Jesus said, "does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, here it is, or, there it is, because the kingdom of God is within you!" (Luke 17:20-21).

For some time, right after the Dark Ages, this "inner kingdom," the Kingdom of Heaven, came down to touch the Anabaptist movement. It touched it with the clear light of conviction that shone from the face of the miller's son, only sixteen years old, who could say at the price of his life: "God does not want me to do that." And it led the Anabaptists . . ." (The Secret of the Strength: What Would the Anabaptists Tell This Generation? by Peter Hoover)

While we are looking at the Anabaptists, it would be well for us to remind ourselves that the prophetic views of the Anabaptists were radically different from today's schemes. The Anabaptists interpreted prophecy according to the historicist view of Bible prophecy. In fact this had been the teaching of all of the groups of Christians who lived during the Middle Ages. The Waldensians in their treatise The Noble Lesson, (1100 A.D.) wrote: "Antichrist, the predicted murderer of the Saints, hath already appeared in his true character, seated monarchally in the seven-hilled city." The Bohemian Brethren, in the thirteenth century were said to have taught against the Church of Rome: "The first error, saith he, is that the Church of Rome is not the Church of Jesus Christ, but an assembly of wicked men, and the whore that sits upon the beast in the Revelation. ... They declare the Pope to be the head and ringleader of all errors" (Allix, Ancient Churches of Piedmont, pp. 242-259). The Petrobusians, another group of true Christians from medieval times, also considered the Pope to be the Antichrist (Allix, Ancient Churches of the Albigenses, p. 142). And so also the Lollards, the followers of Wycliffe, taught also (Writings and Examinations of Brute, Thorpe, Cobham, Hilton, Pecoock, Bilney, and Others; With The Lantern of Light, 1842).

The Anabaptists taught that the 'falling away' had occurred historically at the time of Constantine the Great, and that thereafter the 'Man of Sin' had taken his place in the 'Temple of God', the Church, and that from there he had sat in his bishop's seat ruling over the Church. From this seat, the Papacy increased in power until like the beast of Revelation it held sway over the kings of the earth, as God himself, and as Christ's representative. For example Pope Boniface VIII said about himself:

"The Roman Pontiff judges all men, but is judged by no one.

"We declare, assert, define and pronounce: To be subject to the Roman Pontiff is to every human creature altogether necessary for salvation...

"That which was spoken of Christ...'Thou hast subdued all things under His feet,' may well seem verified in me. I have the authority of the King of kings. I am all in all and above all, so that God, Himself and I, the Vicar of God, have but one consistency, and I am able to do almost all that God can do. What therefore, can you make of me but God?" The Bull Sanctum, Nov. 18, 1302

It is true that the earthly power of the Papacy grew out of the decay of the Roman Empire. And so they taught that the 'hindrance' mentioned by the apostle, was this Empire, and that following its demise the Papacy rose from the Church of God showing itself that it was God. That is why Menno Simons could refer to the Pope as "the Antichrist" and as "the abomination of desolation". This view, that the 'hindrance' mentioned by Paul was the Roman power, is an interpretation reaching back into the earliest ages of the Church. Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 220) said "That day shall not come, unless, indeed, there come a falling away, he means indeed of this present empire...and he who now hinders must hinder, until he be taken out of the way. What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms shall introduce Antichrist upon its ruins?" [Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, chap. XXIV.]. John Chrysostom, who died in 408 A.D, writing in his Homily on Second Thessalonians, tells us that there were two views prevalent in the Church of his day, one that the hindrance was the gifts of the Spirit, and the other that the hindrance was the Roman power.

He writes "One may first naturally inquire what is that which withholds, and after that would know why Paul expresses this so obscurely. What then is it that hinders him [Antichrist] from being revealed? Some indeed say the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman Empire, to whom I most of all

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accede. Because he said this of the Roman Empire he naturally ... speaks covertly and darkly. For he did not wish to bring upon himself ... useless dangers. For if he had said, that after ... a while the Roman Empire would be dissolved, they would immediately have even overwhelmed him as a pestilent person, and all the [other] faithful as living and [seeking] this end.” [Chrysostom, Homily IV, 1] We could continue with the testimonies of other men, such as Irenaeus, Jerome, Justin and others, but I trust that this will suffice for now.

For a more thorough dealing of these issues I strongly recommend the commentary on Revelation by Fred Miller available at <http://www.ao.net/~fmoeller/>. Also Romanism and the Reformation by Grattan Guinness and the Horae Apocalypticae, both available at <http://www.historicist.com>.

The early Baptists held various different views regarding the Millennium. Some were Fifth Monarchy men, a kind of Post-Millennial interpretation that looks to the saints taking possession of the Kingdoms of this world. Many of these marched in Oliver Cromwell’s New Model Army. Hansard Knolly, a great leader among the early Particular Baptists represents the view held by many fifth monarchy men. Writing on the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, he takes the coming of the Lord here to be not the physical return of Christ to judge the living and the dead, but a “virtual, spiritual, powerful and glorious coming in his Saints and Sanction as the Bridegroom of his Church, the new Jerusalem, who shall also come down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a Bride adorned for her husband.”

He continues “This is our David’s Mystical Kingdom on Earth among his Saints, when HE shall be King of all the Earth, and all the Kingdoms of this world shall be Christ’s. And when the Lord’s redeemed Ones, whom He has made Kings and Priests to God, shall have the Kingdom and Dominion under the whole Heaven given to them, and they shall reign on Earth.” Jesus he said would reign ‘In and through His Saints’.

Judging from the early Baptist Confessions, such as the London Confessions, many early Baptists were A-millennial, teaching a general resurrection followed by the Judgement at the end of the world at the return of Christ. Others, centred around John Bunyan believed that Jesus would reign from a Davidic throne in Jerusalem for ever. However all of the early Baptists believed in a historical interpretation of prophecy. All of them identified themselves with the ‘woman in the wilderness’ who was hid of God for 1260 years of prophetic days, bearing witness against the Papal Man of Sin. Daniel King in his treatise ‘A Way to Zion’, written in 1656 expresses the old Baptist view when he uses this truth of the woman in the wilderness to show that there has always been a true Church even in the darkest days of Popery. And this same view was the view of the first American Baptists.

For example Roger Williams (1603-1683) was the first Baptist Pastor in America. He spoke of the Pope as “the pretended Vicar of Christ on earth, who sits as God over the Temple of God, exalting himself not only above all that is called God, but over the souls and consciences of all his vassals, yea over the Spirit of Christ, over the Holy Spirit, yea, and God himself...speaking against the God of heaven, thinking to change times and laws; but he is the son of perdition (II Thess. 2).” (Taken from The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers by Froom, Vol. 3, pg. 52.)

The Kingdom of God

“The kingdom of heaven! This is the theme which engrossed the prophets of old, and formed the basis of the revelation of our Lord and his holy apostles. The rule of God’s anointed was the hope of the former, “and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:24). The inauguration of that reign constituted the foundation of the proclamation of the latter. As soon as our Lord had been immersed in the Jordan, and had grappled with the tempter in the wilderness, he launched into his mission. “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). ... We may properly pray for a rule or authority to come or start, but not for a territory or region to do so. In every case where the word is employed in conjunction with the word “preached” it should, without exception, be translated “reign.” For example, “From that time Jesus began to proclaim, saying, Reform, for the Reign of Heaven approaches” (Matt. 4:17)... The words translated by our English word “preach” in their original usage by the Holy Spirit, meant something far different than the modern meaning attached to “preach.” The idea of announcing or heralding was ever present in them...The Jewish world at that time was in a state of great expectancy. All were looking for a restoration of the kingdom to Israel, and the ushering in of a golden age by the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken. Jerusalem, as the capital of the new regime, would be world famous. The Gentiles would become tributaries and would converge upon the Jewish commonwealth with gold and

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silver in abundance.

Much of the thinking centered around a materialistic and earthly speculation. Matthew's account was addressed to the Jews to prove that the Nazarene was the Messiah. The term "kingdom of heaven" was employed to distract their minds from the idea of an earthly prince leading a victorious army. It was intended to point their minds upward and to recognize a higher source of origin and a different type of sovereignty. An appeal of a different nature was necessary to reach the non-Jewish hearers of that day." *The Kingdom Of The Messiah* by W. Carl Ketcherside

Ketcherside is right. Jesus came to bring a different type of Kingdom to that which the Jews expected:

Because of this great hope, it was a monumental declaration that day when Jesus declared to the Jewish mentality, "You must change your way of thinking for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"...The kingdom had come in a person - the King, spirit made flesh; and to see the spiritual kingdom they would have to be born of the Spirit... (Dudley Hall, *Out of the Comfort Zone*, 1991)

Dispensationalists still hold to this earthly concept of a Kingdom. Showers speaks of God "...restoring His Theocratic Kingdom Rule to the earth" when he returns. p.165. So what do we make of the Scriptures that plainly teach that Christ set his Kingdom up at his first Advent?

"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).

What can the dispensationalist do with such a verse?

"And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Mark 9:1

What is the clear sense of these passages? And how can the dispensationalist deny that the Kingdom was set up?

"But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." Matt. 12:28

"Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." Mark 11:10

"And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question." Mark 12:34

"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:21

So also the conditions for entering the Kingdom were far different to what the dispensationalist says:

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 18:3

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:20

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven". Matt. 7:21

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

According to Scripture people were pressing into the Kingdom when the Lord came to earth – "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth

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into it.” Luke 16:16

Amazingly, Showers puts the fulfilment of Psalm 2: 6-9, the Messiah reigning from the heavenly Zion, in the future! Could anyone, reading these Scriptures regarding the Kingdom, come away believing that the Kingdom is a Jewish political Kingdom upon this earth? He further says:

“Prior to His Matthew 16:18 statement [the first mention of the Church, where Jesus says “I will build my Church”], Jesus had been presenting Himself to Israel as its Messiah, the One who would set up the promised Theocratic Kingdom of God. He had claimed to be the Messiah...He had preached the Gospel of the Kingdom: “Repent; for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand...In spite of Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah who would set up the Theocratic Kingdom...Israel was determined to reject Him and His claim...” p.180

The writer goes on to say that from that point Jesus changed his mission to that of dying, that before this He had an option of either bringing in the Kingdom or of dying on the cross. The writer points to the fact that Jesus began telling the apostles of his death and resurrection after the revelation of His Church, and that they were told not to make him known as the Christ. But surely the point of this was that Christ was giving them further indication as to the spiritual nature of the Kingdom. He was not abandoning his original plan! What he says about the Kingdom after Matthew 16 is fully consistent with what he said before! After he says “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 18:3 Did he then abandon the Kingdom as the writer would have us believe? So also Matthew 16, right after mentioning the Church, says “Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” The parallel account in Mark has it: “And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”

There is a connection here that is not readily apparent. It is the ministry of the Son of Man to Israel then, and the coming ministry of the Son of God from glory that He was to bring in after his ascension. This is a not part of the purpose for this paper. But suffice for now to say that Matthew records Jesus saying ‘Who do men say that I the Son of Man am’, with the statement from Peter that he believed that he was ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God’, followed by Jesus’ declaration regarding this being the Rock upon which He would (future tense) build His Church. Mark however, simply records Jesus saying ‘Who do men say that I am?’ with a statement from Peter that He was the Christ, or Anointed One. The point is that Matthew was showing that the ministry as Son of Man was for the Jews, but that there would be a coming ministry, following his death and resurrection, when He would build His Church as the Son of God in glory. And so He began to teach them of his upcoming rejection in Jerusalem, and how He would rise again.

Far from postponing the Kingdom for 2000 years, he declares that it would come with power in the lifetime of some present.

This idea of a Jesus not bringing the Kingdom that he declared to be ‘at hand’ is called the ‘Kingdom offer,’ that is that the Kingdom was offered to the Jews, but that because they rejected this offer, the Kingdom was postponed until the second coming. Presumably, had they accepted it, Jesus would not have needed to go to the cross. And so also the church is seen, not as the purpose of history for the Lord to redeem in one body those who he chose from before the foundation of the world, the true seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise; but rather as a dispensational afterthought, as a new plan not previously made known in the Scriptures.

It might well be asked of our dispensational friends today-What was it that the Lord hid from the wise and prudent Jews of His day and revealed only to “babes” (Matt. 11:25)? If it were “the things” pertaining to His kingdom which He had come to establish on the ruins of Satan’s empire of sin and death, then the “kingdom” which he “offered” to the Jews was entirely spiritual and not natural, and this is the reason why it was concealed from all except those with eyes to see and ears to hear. The reason why the Jews rejected Christ is the same as that for which they still reject Him today-namely, because they expected an earthly kingdom, and Christ did not bring them this. The prevailing prophetic theories, however, insist that Christ did in fact “offer” this kingdom to the Jews and because they rejected the offer, the gospel was brought in as an afterthought or a substitute. What the dispensational theory is saying is that Christ offered to the Jews the very kingdom which they expected, but they rejected Him and it! At the last, says this extraordinary theory, Christ will relent and will in fact give the Jews the very kingdom which they crucified Him for not establishing at His first coming...

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If our friends cannot see the hopeless dilemma in which their theory involves them, we can only marvel at the success of that error of dispensationalism by which evil powers have succeeded in well nigh destroying scriptural exposition and understanding... The truth is that there is not a breath of suggestion that Christ ever offered" to the Jews any other "kingdom" but the gospel: that this was in fact the kingdom which John the Baptist came to present under the keyword "repent," which Christ Himself presented with the same keyword "repent," that the Sermon on the Mount with which He formally introduced His mission was in fact an exposition of the text- "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." In that great sermon Christ promised or offered nothing to anyone except "the poor in spirit," the "mourner for sin," the "meek," the "brokenhearted," and those who "hungered and thirsted" for true righteousness. (C D Alexander, Moses or Christ)

The Church and Israel

I agree that the Church began on the day of Pentecost. The Covenant theologians are wrong when they deny this. However the Dispensationalist is wrong in denying any continuity between the elect remnant or true Jewish nation of the Old Testament, and the Church. The analogy of the olive tree provides a good illustration. The Gentiles, who previously were not the people of God, were engrafted into the good olive tree, or the Israel of God, and the natural branches, the Jews after the flesh but not after the Spirit, were plucked out. This represents the continuity between Israel and the Church. They are not two entirely different entities. The Gentiles have been brought into something, thus making of two one new man. It is the bringing in of the Gentiles which creates the one new man. But there is continuity. The Gentiles were brought into the olive tree. Therefore the olive tree existed prior to the bringing in.

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" Ephesians 2: 11-19

Gentiles have been brought into the good of the Covenant. And now Jew and Gentile, have been made one body through the Holy Spirit, as it is written - Galatians 3:14 "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." That is the Church. Both Gentiles who were aliens to the commonwealth, and those Jews still in the commonwealth of Israel, who remained faithful and were not cast out, they two together by one Spirit baptised into one body. And yes it is true that this mystery was not revealed in times past as it has now been made known. It was known before only in veiled prophecy.

"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into." 1 Peter 1: 10-12

Is Replacement Theology True?

I have read different definitions of Replacement Theology. If by this it is meant that the Church is Israel, and that there is no other, and that the Church has so totally replaced Israel so as to mean that there are no promises left for the natural seed, then the teaching is wrong. Paul makes clear that the natural seed are still beloved of God for the fathers sakes, and that the gifts and calling of God on that nation are irrevocable. However if it means that there are two Israels, one after the flesh and one after the Spirit, and that the Church is the true Israel, being the Israel of God, made up of those who are Jews inwardly, and that it is this Israel, which now includes Gentiles, who are heirs according to the promise, then it is right, for it is what Scripture says. Dispensational teachers attempt to reason, which is what gets them into trouble,

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trusting in their own wisdom and intellect; they attempt to reason that Israel and the Church are not the same. However they fail to 'rightly divide the word of truth' by failing to see that there are two Israels, the natural and the spiritual. The question is this; 'is the Church spiritual Israel, and heir to the promises?' 'Is the Church the legitimate successor to the nation of Israel?' The answer is a resounding yes to both. Paul talks of two Israel's, the Israel after the flesh and the Israel after the Spirit.

"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Romans 11:6 – 8

"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29

This has been a lengthy reply to what is a powerful stronghold in this hour, a stronghold which holds down many in a false sense of security, expecting to be Raptured and whisked away at any moment, and before any trouble comes. It is a doctrine which leads to a pessimistic view of the end times, and of the Church, and is the motivating force behind much of the anti-Anointing teaching which has engulfed the mentality of many evangelicals. It is a teaching which relies upon very questionable interpretations of Bible passages, yet it is widely received and too seldom questioned. It is a teaching which interprets Jesus' words by Paul rather than vice-versa. It is a teaching which opposes the restoration of the Gospel of the Kingdom in this hour. It is a teaching which undermines the central role of the Church in God's purposes for summing up all things in Christ. Nor does it do justice to Israel after the flesh, the natural seed, holding out for them a false hope of salvation without regeneration. May some come to see this system of man made interpretation and fantastic schemes for what it is in truth – fables.

And so we conclude in the words of Paul.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." Galatians 6:15-16

Some Other Sources Used

John Nelson Darby: Defender Of The Faith by Larry V. Crutchfield
Chief Men by Pickering and Inglis

MARGARET'S REVELATION

"It was first the awful state of the land that was pressed upon me. I saw the blindness and infatuation of the people to be very great. I felt the cry of Liberty just to be the hiss of the serpent, to drown them in perdition. It was just 'no God.' I repeated the words, Now there is distress of nations, with perplexity, the seas and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear. Now look out for the sign of the Son of Man. Here I was made to stop and cry out, O it is not known what the sign of the Son of Man is; the people of God think they are waiting, but they know not what it is.

I felt this needed to be revealed, and that there was great darkness and error about it; but suddenly what it was burst upon me with a glorious light. I saw it was just the Lord himself descending from Heaven with a shout, just the glorified man, even Jesus; but that all must, as Stephen was, be filled with the Holy Ghost, that they might look up, and see the brightness of the Father's glory. I saw the error to be, that men think that it will be something seen by the natural eye; but 'tis spiritual discernment that is needed, the eye of God in his people.

Many passages were revealed, in a light in which I had not before seen them. I repeated, 'Now is the kingdom of Heaven like unto ten virgins, who went forth to meet the Bridegroom, five wise and five foolish; they that were foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them; but they that were wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.' 'But be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is; and be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.' This was the oil the wise virgins took in their vessels - this is the light to be kept burning - the light of God - that we may discern that which cometh not with observation to the natural eye. Only those who have the light of God within them will see the sign of his appearance.

No need to follow them who say, see here, or see there, for his day shall be as the lightning to

A Look At Dispensationalism

those in whom the living Christ is. 'Tis Christ in us that will lift us up - he is the light - 'tis only those that are alive in him that will be caught up to meet him in the air. I saw that we must be in the Spirit, that we might see spiritual things. John was in the Spirit, when he saw a throne set in Heaven. But I saw that the glory of the ministration of the Spirit had not been known. I repeated frequently, but the spiritual temple must and shall be reared, and the fullness of Christ be poured into his body, and then shall we be caught up to meet him. Oh none will be counted worthy of this calling but his body, which is the church, and which must be a candlestick all of gold.

I often said, Oh the glorious inbreaking of God which is now about to burst on this earth; Oh the glorious temple which is now about to be reared, the bride adorned for her husband; and Oh what a holy, holy bride she must be, to be prepared for such a glorious bridegroom. I said, Now shall the people of God have to do with realities - now shall the glorious mystery of God in our nature be known - now shall it be known what it is for man to be glorified. I felt that the revelation of Jesus Christ had yet to be opened up - it is not knowledge about God that it contains, but it is an entering into God - I saw that there was a glorious breaking in of God to be. I felt as Elijah, surrounded with chariots of fire.

I saw as it were, the spiritual temple reared, and the Head Stone brought forth with shoutings of grace, grace, unto it. It was a glorious light above the brightness of the sun that shone round about me. I felt that those who were filled with the Spirit could see spiritual things, and feel walking in the midst of them, while those who had not the Spirit could see nothing - so that two shall be in one bed, the one taken and the other left, because the one has the light of God within while the other cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven. I saw the people of God in an awfully dangerous situation, surrounded by nets and entanglements, about to be tried, and many about to be deceived and fall.

Now will THE WICKED be revealed, with all power and signs and lying wonders, so that it is were possible the very elect will be deceived - This is the fiery trial which is to try us. - It will be for the purging and purifying of the real members of the body of Jesus; but Oh it will be a fiery trial. Every soul will be shaken to the very centre. The enemy will try to shake in every thing we have believed - but the trial of real faith will be found to honour and praise and glory. Nothing but what is of God will stand. The stony-ground hearers will be made manifest - the love of many will wax cold.

I frequently said that night, and often since, now shall the awful sight of a false Christ be seen on this earth, and nothing but the living Christ in us can detect this awful attempt of the enemy to deceive - for it is with all deceivableness of unrighteousness he will work - he will have a counterpart for every part of God's truth, and an imitation for every work of the Spirit. The Spirit must and will be poured out on the church, that she may be purified and filled with God - and just in proportion as the Spirit of God works, so will he - when our Lord anoints men with power, so will he.

This is particularly the nature of the trial, through which those are to pass who will be counted worthy to stand before the Son of man. There will be outward trial too, but 'tis principally temptation. It is brought on by the outpouring of the Spirit, and will just increase in proportion as the Spirit is poured out. The trial of the Church is from Antichrist. It is by being filled with the Spirit that we shall be kept. I frequently said, Oh be filled with the Spirit - have the light of God in you, that you may detect Satan - be full of eyes within - be clay in the hands of the potter - submit to be filled, filled with God. This will build the temple. It is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.

This will fit us to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb. I saw it to be the will of God that all should be filled. But what hindered the real life of God from being received by his people, was their turning from Jesus, who is the way to the Father. They were not entering in by the door. For he is faithful who hath said, by me if any man enters in he shall find pasture. They were bypassing the cross, through which every drop of the Spirit of God flows to us. All power that comes not through the blood of Christ is not of God.

When I say, they are looking from the cross, I feel that there is much in it - they turn from the blood of the Lamb, by which we overcome, and in which our robes are washed and made white. There are low views of God's holiness, and a ceasing to condemn sin in the flesh, and a looking from him who humbled himself, and made himself of no reputation. Oh! it is needed, much needed at present, a leading back to the cross. I saw that night, and often since, that there will be an outpouring of the Spirit on the body, such as has not been, a baptism of fire, that all the dross may be put away. Oh there must and will be such an indwelling of the living God as has not been - the servants of God sealed in their foreheads - great conformity to Jesus - his holy holy image seen in his people - just the bride made comely by his comeliness put upon her. This is what we are at present made to pray much for, that speedily we may all be made ready to meet our Lord in the air - and it will be. Jesus wants his bride. His desire is toward us. He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Amen and Amen Even so come Lord Jesus.''