

## Dispensationalists and Premillennial Dispensationalism

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PLEASE NOTE: The following is an outline of a presentation I made at the invitation of a church Bible study group. I have left in questions I raised to facilitate discussion.

### 1. Dispensationalists

- a. Dispensationalists are not our enemy.
  - 1) We know who the enemy is, Satan and his anti-Christ followers, whom dispensationalists also reject.
  - 2) Dispensationalists are brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we have much in common, indeed the essentials for salvation.
  - 3) I feel much closer to our dispensationalist friends than I do to liberal Protestants who hold to an unbiblical view of Scripture, whose interpretation of the Bible is compromised by an unwarranted commitment to cultural trends (such as abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism), and many of whom can't bring themselves to proclaim Jesus' virgin birth and physical resurrection from the grave. These are the people, including pastors, about whom one lesbian penned an online letter to the church in which she said, "To those of you who would change the church to accept the gay community and its lifestyle: you give us no hope at all." (This is an excerpt of a quote in my book, *What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love*, 371.) Did you sense her pain? Countless homosexuals long to leave the homosexual lifestyle, and thousands are. The book is free on my Website on the Current Issues page at <http://www.fromacorntoak12.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Homosexuality-What-Is-Gods-Will-Concerning-Homosexuality.pdf>.)
- b. Of the many common tenets of the Christian religion that we share with dispensationalists, some we especially appreciate and have affinity with include our agreement that
  - 1) the Bible is the authoritative, unique, and verbally inspired Word of God and that it is all we need for salvation; all earlier and later writings (e.g., the Qur'an, the Book of Mormon, Science and Health, and a multitude of others) are neither equal to God's Word nor necessary for salvation—just the opposite, they are contrary to God's Word and therefore are from the enemy in the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. (Ephesians 6:10-18; Revelation 12-20)
  - 2) Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation and eternal life (He is the way, the truth, and the life, John 14:6.) and that salvation comes to human beings only by faith in Christ whereby the righteousness of Christ is credited to us by our faith.
  - 3) Jesus will return physically, personally, and visibly at a date in the future.
  - 4) We look toward a future phase of the Kingdom of God that will involve the earth, though our understanding of that kingdom differs from theirs.
- c. Therefore, this presentation will be charitable toward these brothers and sisters in accord with Christ's command that we should love one another.

- 1) As we hear in our celebration of his Last Supper, our Lord commanded that we love one another (John 13:34-35) so that everyone will know that we are his disciples; it is a key witness for Christ.
  - 2) The Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul to write that we are to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) Paul later defined the Greek word used by Jesus and him, agape, as being patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude.... (1 Corinthians 13:4)
  - 3) So I intend to be, as I'm sure you are and will, loving in our speaking of the truth; ***nevertheless* don't make the mistake many do: confusing disagreement with disrespect or being unloving.** We must all assume we are not perfect and be open to corrective feedback from others, especially other believers, as occurs in many places in the Bible, e.g., as Paul and Peter did with one another. (Galatians 2:11 ff.) Sadly, our well-meaning dispensational friends have been misled in a considerable part of their theology.
    - I must say in all candor that many Christians have not been careful enough in their ascertaining of the truth, in particular in finding out what other Christians actually believe before criticizing them. One day I was listening to a dispensational radio program, and I heard one of their leading speakers, David Jeremiah, talk about what he called the three main views of interpreting the millennium. (Actually, there are four views: historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism must be distinguished and separated, since even historic premillennialists disagree with dispensational premills.) He said, "Now I'm going to tell you what the amillennialists believe; they believe five key tenets." Then he proceeded to identify what he thought were the five key propositions of amillennial interpretation. When he finished with his explanation of the fifth tenet, I said to myself, "Now isn't that interesting! I subscribe to the historic amillennialist position, and I don't believe even one of those tenets he cited!"
- d. I view dispensational teaching as one of those "disputable matters" about which Paul wrote in Romans 14:1 ff. where true Christians can disagree on matters of interpretation of certain texts in the Bible that do not affect salvation. Christians who agree on the core matters pertaining to salvation have disagreed on the interpretation of Scripture passages since Bible times; we do now; and we will likely do so until the Lord returns. Nevertheless, to recognize this reality is not to minimize or downplay the seriousness and importance of these disputes, some of which have very significant practical implications as well. To emphasize the important point Paul makes in Romans 14, that we must keep in mind as we dialogue with dispensationalists and others, is not at all to sweep these significant matters under the rug. It is simply to say that we must always treat one another as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as we engage in these important discussions.
- e. Before proceeding, let's look briefly at the origin of dispensationalism. Though the view referred to as historic premillennialism has been around since the second century A.D., the theological system known as dispensational premillennialism, or

dispensationalism, is a recent phenomenon, first appearing in the 1800s A.D. in the teaching and writing of a British former lawyer then clergyman, John Nelson Darby, whose work was popularized here in the United States by the *Scofield Reference Bible* and *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, study notes written by C. I. Scofield, an attorney turned pastor at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The dispensational teaching has been further popularized by writers such as Hal Lindsey (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, which contains many differences with historic Biblical and Christian theology) and the Left-Behind series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins in more recent years.

- The word, dispensational, refers to the theological theory that God has divided up all of history into seven periods in which he distributes, or dispenses, grace in different ways (but only “by God’s grace through the work of Christ that was accomplished on the cross and vindicated in his resurrection”). We should be careful to note that nowhere in the Bible does God mention seven different eras in which he is going to be dispensing grace and testing people in seven different ways; this concept is the result of a theological construct that has a relatively recent origin. Anthony Hoekema quotes the definition in *The New Scofield Bible*: “A dispensation is defined as ‘a period of time during which man is tested in respect this obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.’” (Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 188)
- Darby, Scofield, and contemporary dispensationalists are in fact teaching that the historic church has been wrong for 2,000 years (actually for reasons indicated below for at least 3,500 years). That would include, and to say that, the brilliant theologians such as St. Augustine, all the outstanding theologians in the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Stott, Anthony Hoekema, and a multitude of others throughout the history of the church to the present day have all been wrong. Does that assertion alone raise a question to give us pause? It is important to view all of life, including the interpretation of God’s Word, from an historical perspective. How have great leaders in the church throughout the centuries interpreted Scripture, especially the key passages? The dispensationalist departure from long and well-established traditional understanding of such passages, and Scripture as a whole, has only been around for about 150 years.
  - Such a reach has been referred to by the Yiddish word, *chutzpah*, the quality of audacity, deriving from the Hebrew word *ḥutsṗâ* (חֲצִפָּה), meaning “insolence” or “audacity.”

It is informative to note that in recent years, some church bodies that have taught dispensationalism have distanced themselves from that theology and from teaching it. As we prepare ourselves with the understanding presented here, with God’s help, we may help others to do so as well.

2. Critique of Dispensationalism
  - a. **What questions do you have?**

- b. Include the following points, if they are not raised in the Q & A.
- 1) Dispensationalists hold to a different understanding of hermeneutics (interpretation) than has been employed throughout history. Some do not discern and others **disregard the differences in literary genre** employed by the Bible writers (e.g., the use of poetry and apocalyptic writing in addition to straight prose) and the time-honored hermeneutical principles for discerning, e.g., when a passage is to be interpreted literally and when the author is using a figure of speech or a more lengthy literary device that employs a rich use of symbolism in order to communicate Biblical truth in an especially powerful manner. Dispensationalists purport to interpret all Scripture literally, though when it is necessary to support one of their tenets they don't hesitate to engage in figurative explanations.
  - 2) Dispensationalists fail to acknowledge the fundamental continuity and unity of God's people throughout the Old and New Testaments that is grounded in the covenant with Abraham. **The faithful believers in Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church are one.**
    - The word covenant is one example of what Biblical scholars call a major motif, or theme, a concept that runs throughout the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments. The most common word for covenant, *ברית* *berîth*, covenant, occurs 286 times in the Old Testament (OT) and 33 (*διαθήκη* *diathēkē*), in the New Testament. On numerous other occasions references occur to covenants and covenantal relationships apart from the use of the word covenant.
      - When God tells us something over 300 times, we can conclude he's trying to get our attention, right?!
      - Do you recall your mother telling you, and have you said to your children, "How many times have I told you...?!"
      - The covenant is a key to unlocking the meaning of God's revelation, but many Christians, including dispensationalists, ignore, and/or disregard, this key teaching.
- a) Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 17:1-9. (Verse 8 is conditioned frequently in Scripture by such verses as verse 9, 1 Kings 9:1-9, and many related passages. Verses 10-14 together with Galatians 3:26-29 and Colossians 2:9-12 establish the strongest basis for infant baptism, especially when we consider that nowhere in the whole Bible does the Lord rescind the privilege of infants to receive the sign and seal of covenant membership. [Cf. Genesis 17:11])
  - b) The unity and connection between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church is seen very clearly in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT Hebrew, which was the Bible that Jesus and the early church used, "the holy Scriptures" to which Paul refers in 2 Timothy 3:15. In the Septuagint the Greek word, *ἐκκλησία* *ekklēsia*, meaning assembly, congregation, church, and translated church in the New Testament, is used to translate the Hebrew word, *קָהָל* *qāhāl*, assembly or congregation, some 100 times throughout the Old Testament.

- Thus, the word, *ekklēsia*, is also used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, to refer to God’s covenant people whom he has called and set apart to be holy to him. See, e.g., Deuteronomy 9:10; 18:16; Psalm 22:22; 26:12; 68:26; 149:1; Joel 2:16.

- c) The essential unity of the covenant throughout the Old and the New Testaments is also seen clearly in the Greek of the New. In all but one of the references to the new covenant in the New Testament, the Greek word, *καινός* *kainos* (new) is used. The word *kainos* means new in nature or quality, not new in time or origin, which is designated by another Greek word (*νέος* *neos*). See Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8 (quoting Jeremiah 31:31 [38:31 in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament in the third century B.C.]); 8:13; 9:15. The word *neos* signifies something that was not there before in contrast to *kainos*, which means renewed and “different from the usual, impressive, better than the old, superior in value or attraction.” (See Johannes Behm, “*Kainos*” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 447 ff.)

In the one passage where *neos* is used, Hebrews 12:24, the context, including the whole letter, indicates that the author (the same one who in three other preceding places in the same letter used *kainos*) means to emphasize in a unique way the work of Christ as being vastly superior to that which was done in the old covenant (which prepares people for, and points them to, Jesus the Christ). Thus, to emphasize the superiority of Christ’s work and the covenant with Him, the author uses *neos* to indicate that the new covenant is so much greater, higher, and better than the old covenant that it’s almost like being brand new. That said, though, there is no confusion, because the author has in the three previous passages established the framework of thought, the context of the discussion on covenant, that the new covenant is a *kainos* covenant, having continuity with and still being the everlasting covenant, which God made with Abraham. (Genesis 17:7) Since it’s everlasting, (Genesis 17:13) it was still in place and ongoing when the author, who was well aware of Genesis 17:7 and Jesus’ statements about the covenant being a *kainos* covenant, wrote Hebrews, and it’s still in place now.

- d) We have further Biblical evidence that the church was not born at Pentecost. Acts 2:1 uses an important Greek word, not well translated in many new versions of the New Testament: *συνπληροῦσθαι* *sumplērousthai* (> *συνπληρόω* *sumplēroō*, fill completely, become entirely full, complete) = is fulfilled. With New Testament scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, the verse is better translated, “And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled.” The King James Version (“was fully come”) translates the verse more accurately than most newer versions. Thus, we see the link with the rest of Scripture, in particular the immediate context in the beginning of Acts, and the entire Old Testament. The church is not being birthed on the day of Pentecost, but rather

empowered (cf. the context of the passage, e.g., Acts 1:8) and equipped, thus Christ is strengthening his still emotionally beaten up and timid post-crucifixion disciples by sending the Holy Spirit to give his church what they needed to “get the job done” in accord with their, indeed our, calling. (Notice the concept of calling is central to the meaning of the word church [ἐκκλησία *ekklēsia* (church) > ἐκ *ek* (out of), + καλέω *kaleō* (call), thus the church is those who are called out (by God) to serve him on mission in the world. (Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Revelation 7:9)]) In Ephesians 5:25 re read that “Christ loved the church...” If the church didn’t begin until Pentecost, how can Paul say Christ loved (Greek aorist, past, tense) the church?” The context of the passage indicates he is not speaking in a vision of the future. My concern here comes from what I see going on in churches today. (See the article on Pentecost by James Cook.)

- e) Much more Biblical evidence of the continuity between the church in the Old Testament and the New Testament church can be adduced. One more shall suffice. Among many similar Scripture passages, notice the obvious connection the apostle Peter made (in 1 Peter 2:9) with Moses’ account in Exodus 19:6. Moses records the LORD revealing to the Israelites “you [his Old Testament people] will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” With unmistakable clarity and obvious linkage with this Old Testament terminology and the church’s calling and mission, not only in Exodus 19:6 but elsewhere in the OT, Peter writes what the Holy Spirit inspired him to reveal in these words, “But you [the Lord’s New Testament people] are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”
  - f) There is no Scriptural evidence that shows God has a different purpose for Israel and another for the church. Compare 1 Peter 2:9 with Isaiah 43:20 and Exodus 19:5-6. See also to whom Peter wrote his letter. (Cf. 1 Peter 1:1-2 with Acts 2:9-10 and 19:10.)
  - g) Therefore, the church is not a parenthesis between the first and second comings of Christ. Neither is there any Biblical evidence for the believing Jews being favored and treated differently from the believing Gentiles in the new heaven and new earth. Thus, we do not have Biblical authority to refer to this present time as the church age or the dispensation of the church.
- 3) **Jesus’ second coming at the end of the age is not taught in Scripture as occurring in two phases.**
- a) The only text that refers to the phenomenon that is called *The Rapture* (even though the word does not occur there or anywhere else in the Bible) is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and it *nowhere refers to Jesus coming to meet believers in the air and then make a U-Turn and go back to heaven.* In fact, on the contrary, a special Greek word is used in that passage to indicate that

Jesus, together with those who have been with him in paradise, meets believers who are still on earth in the air and then returns with them to the earth. This special Greek word is a technical one in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, εἰς ἀπάντησις (eis apantēsis), translated “to meet;” it is used only three times in the New Testament, and **every time** it is used in its special sense of people going out to meet a highly regarded person on his way to visit them, and they escort him to his destination, to their event. It is never used to indicate a U-Turn following the meeting. In secular Greek, the word was used to refer to the cultural practice of the people in a community seeing a dignitary yet far off who is on his way to visit them, going out en masse, to meet the dignitary and escort him to their village or town. The three uses in the New Testament are in

- 1- Matthew 25:6 (The wise virgins go out to meet the bridegroom and then went in with him to the wedding banquet. v. 10);
- 2- Acts 28:15-16 (The brothers came out from Rome to meet Paul and then returned with him to Rome.)
- 3- 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Thus, when Paul chooses this special, technical, and rare word to refer to Christ’s people meeting him in the air, it is hard to justify interpreting it to mean a U-Turn away from the destination of this visit of the Greatest Dignitary of all time and eternity.

- b) Another conflict with the Bible is seen in dispensational teaching about the rapture, when we consider the word *parousia* (literally, presence; usual translation in this context, coming). In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul speaks of Jesus coming (παρουσία *parousia*) with those who have been with the Lord in paradise, in order to allay the main concern of the Thessalonians (the main point that he addresses in this passage) in which he assures the Thessalonians that those who have already died would certainly not miss out on Jesus’ Second Coming. Paul assures the Thessalonians that in no way will those who have died in Christ miss out—in fact they’ll be coming with him!
- c) Now notice 1 Thessalonians 3:13. Paul uses the same word, *parousia*, referring to Jesus’ coming with all his holy people who’ve been with him in paradise, which, according to the pretribulational dispensationalists (the majority of them) is supposed to occur during the second phase of Jesus’ Second Coming (that is nowhere specified in the Bible). See also 2 Thessalonians 2:8, where Paul also uses *parousia* in describing what will occur in Jesus’ Second Coming, specifically when he will destroy the lawless one, the antichrist, but that, too, is not supposed to occur until the second phase of the Lord’s Second Coming according to the “pretrib” dispensationalists. The same is seen in a study of the words ἀποκάλυψις *apokalypsis* in 1 Corinthians 1:7 and in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 and 2:8 and ἐπιφάνεια *epiphaneia* in 1 Timothy 6:14 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8.
- 4) Nowhere in the New Testament texts dealing with the Second Coming of Christ do we see taught that the church will be taken away from the earth before the

tribulation begins. See Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20 (shortened on account of the elect). Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 with Matthew 24:29-31; here we do not see any reference to a rapture before the tribulation—on the contrary we see in verse 29 the rapture of the church as occurring after the great tribulation (*eutheōs de meta tēn thlipsin*, “immediately but after the tribulation”).

- 5) Much more could be said. For more on this subject and on the rest of Biblical eschatology, I refer you to the most excellent book on this subject that I’ve seen, *The Bible and the Future*, by the outstanding and highly regarded Calvin Theological Seminary theologian, Anthony A. Hoekema. Regarding the teaching of the Bible on the Second Coming of Christ, Hoekema writes, “We conclude therefore that there is no Scriptural basis for the two-phase Second Coming taught by pretribulationists. The Second Coming of Christ must be thought of as a single event, which occurs after the great tribulation. When Christ returns, there will be a general resurrection, both of believers and unbelievers. After the resurrection, believers who are still alive shall be transformed and glorified (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). The “rapture” of all believers then takes place. Believers who have been raised, together with living believers who have been transformed, are now caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). After this meeting in the air, the raptured church continues to be with Christ as he completes his descent to earth.” (170-171)
- 6) **The New Testament contrasts two ages: the present age and the age to come. Nowhere in the NT do we read of a third age inserted between the present age and the age to come.** The clear and main point of the NT is that when Jesus comes again he will begin the new age. See Matthew 25:31, 46 (Jesus’ throne is not a millennial throne but one of judgment where the judgment brings on immediately the finality of the Lord’s decisive action. See also Acts 3:19-21, especially v. 21, “**He [Jesus] must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.**” Here we see that Jesus’ Second Coming (no third coming is ever mentioned anywhere in the Bible) is just before he brings on the events that usher in the new heaven and the new earth. In 2 Peter 3:10-13, Jesus’ Second Coming is clearly revealed to be followed immediately by the destruction of the present earth, essentially all the sin and evil in it, and the creation of the new (*kainos*) earth. Recall from what we considered above on page five in section 2. b. 2) c) that the two main Greek words for new in the New Testament are *kainos* and *neos*. The Greek word for new in nature or quality is *kainos*, contrasted with the other Greek word for new, *neos*, meaning new in time or in origin. See also Revelation 21:1-5 where the word for the new heaven and the new earth is *kainos*, signifying that it will be a renewed heaven and earth with unity and continuity with the present, except for sin and evil which will be gone. See Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21:24-27. (For further explanation of 2 Peter 3:10-13 see Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 185-186.)



- 7) **A millennial existence for God's faithful in Christ who have been in glory would negate the Biblical concept of the finality of their glorification.** Not only is there no mention in the Bible of believers in Christ, having been in glory in paradise, being required to leave and come back into a state of existence where they would have to put up with sin again, but who would ever want to do so? Why should Jesus have to put up with sin and evil, that he conquered so majestically, for one minute, let alone 1,000 years?! Does not the Scripture teach that Jesus has defeated Satan, the demons, and their ilk, and that when he returns he will do so not to institute an interim period of mixed blessings integrated with sin but to institute the final state of perfect joy? Where in the Bible does it say he will lead his glorified saints back into such a sinful and evil existence?
- 8) The only passage in the Bible where we read the term, "the signs of the times," essentially refers, not primarily to what is coming in the future, but to what God has done in the past and is continuing to disclose in the present. (Hoekema, 129)
- Jesus said, "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." (Matthew 16:3)
- 9) **The concept of the postponement of the Kingdom is not supported by Scripture.** Keep in mind that references to the Kingdom of God involve the Kingdom being here now already as a result of Christ's First Coming (Luke 17:21), but it is not here in its fullest; that occurs when Christ returns in his Second Coming.
- 10) **The millennium is going on now, between Christ's first and second comings.** Jesus is reigning in heaven during these "1000 years," which is only mentioned in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Revelation. Before we go further, it is important at this point to remember the historic principle of Biblical interpretation that no doctrine should be based on only one passage of Scripture. It is also necessary for the most accurate interpretation of a passage in the Bible, to ascertain whether the words are to be taken literally or figuratively. Here in Revelation 20 we observe that John is writing in the genre of apocalyptic literature, which was familiar to Christ's people to whom he was writing (as, e.g., sections of Daniel are written in this genre) and which employs much symbolism. Thus, the number 1,000 is a symbolic number, like all the other numbers in Revelation. What does it mean? The number 1,000 is the cube of 10, 10 being a round number symbolizing fullness and completeness, and the number three, a spiritual number, here of course representing the triune God, indicating that God (specifically the Second Person of the Trinity, Christ Jesus, [Ephesians 1:17-23]) is in full control, ruling over the whole time between Jesus' first and second comings, so the church does not have to worry about anything, even the harshest events it experiences between now and the Lord's return.

This was great and encouraging news to the church, which was being cruelly persecuted by the especially vicious tyrant, Domitian, the Roman Emperor in the mid-90s of the first century A.D., when John penned the book of Revelation from

prison on the Island of Patmos, just off the eastern coast of Asia Minor (now Turkey) where the seven churches to whom he was writing were located. In fact, John wrote the whole book of Revelation to comfort the persecuted church, which makes it especially helpful now in these days, where the church is being persecuted more than at any other time in the history of the world, more Christians being martyred in the last 100 years than in all the previous 20 centuries combined!

The Lord will reign on earth in the period of the new heaven and the new earth, when he returns to restore all things. This explanation has been called the amillennial view of eschatology. The word amillennial (no literal thousand year period), while correct in its denotation, can convey a misleading connotation that those of us who hold to that interpretation are negative and do not proclaim the joy of the realities expressed in God's Word especially pertaining to the reign of Christ already now. Far from it! For this reason, I prefer the term Anthony Hoekema presents in *The Bible and the Future*, "realized millennialism."

11) There is **no justification for the current state of Israel being a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.**

- a) The Genesis 17:8 promise is conditioned upon obedience. See e.g., 1 Kings 9:1-9. God made this reality very clear to Solomon and his descendants.

<sup>6</sup>But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, <sup>7</sup>then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

<sup>8</sup>And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, "Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?" <sup>9</sup>People will answer, "Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them." (1 Kings 9:6-9)

This disobedience is precisely what Solomon and his successors did, and God fulfilled his promises. This is why there is no temple on the temple mount in Jerusalem today. It can be argued that the attempt to rebuild it without God's command or agreement would be in violation of I Kings 9:8-9. The temple ruins observed today are a continuing visual aid reminding all people of the seriousness of God's command to be holy to him, how he keeps his promises, and of the new and essential meaning of temple in the New Testament, as Jesus indicated in John 2:19-21.

Nowhere in the Bible has God promised to bless disobedience; on the contrary, disobedience will be judged. Thus, when people wonder “Where is God in all of this?” they should examine how they have been living. God is where he always is, with us, his people (Immanuel). Yet, when they live their lives ignoring his will and failing to nurture their faith in Christ, they should not expect that God will bless their disobedience. However, for his true believers, who are living in faithfulness to him, he is always there for us. (Joshua 1:5-9; Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 13:5)

- b) In the New Testament, the land that is portrayed as to be inherited by God’s people is broadened to include the whole earth. Contrast Psalm 37:11, “But the meek shall possess the [promised] land” with Matthew 5:5 where Jesus proclaims, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” See also Romans 4:13.

12) There is **no justification for reinstating the temple sacrifices as dispensationalists want to do; Jesus performed the once-for-all sacrifice**, ending any need for sacrifices after his death on the cross.

- a) I am informed that the materials to reconstruct the temple on Mount Zion have already been gathered: stones hewn, furnishings constructed, and the red heifer found and is being bred for sacrifices. The only thing needed is for those two mosques, the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, to be torn down, and if that occurs we could be in another major war, all due to a faulty theology based on a misreading and interpretation of the Bible.
- b) The reinstatement of the sacrificial system would effectively disregard Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice and be a sop to the favored Jewish Christians. Dispensationalists try to counter by saying that the sacrifices would no longer be propitiatory; rather they would be sacrifices of thanksgiving. However, that explanation does not fully account for the meaning of the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, which were not only propitiatory but involved the shedding of blood for a specific reason. God told Adam and Eve that if they sinned they surely would die. (Genesis 2:17) Immediately following their sin, where they died spiritually, God instituted his plan where they could be saved from eternal death by the vicarious atonement of Jesus, alluded to in Genesis 3:15, which involved the shedding of blood according to the principles of life for life (Exodus 21:23) and life being in the blood: “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” (Leviticus 17:11) The sacrificial system was an educational means that God used, in his progressively unfolding plan that he was revealing, to teach his people these basic principles that pointed to, and prepared them to understand, the perfect once for all (Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18) sacrifice of Christ whose death would reconcile repentant sinners to God in His redemption of his creation.

Thus, the dispensational attempt to justify the reinstitution of the sacrificial system on the basis that these are thank offerings is a contorted and confused casuistry that fails to explain how the death of animals in a vicarious shedding of blood that was designed to point to and explain the once for all sacrifice of Christ is necessary. The shedding of blood in the death of an animal was to signify the resultant vicarious atonement for the sinner, *which would also have to be repeated*. Why is this still necessary when *Jesus has performed the once for all sacrifice* that provides the all-sufficient vicarious atonement for the believer in Him? We can and should acknowledge the need for constant thankfulness to Jesus the Christ for his atoning death for us, but that thanksgiving need not and cannot be done by shedding the blood of animals, which always was intended to be a temporary phenomenon. It was to be temporary because animals could not fully provide the needed sacrifice to atone for mankind's sinfulness. It was not the animals who sinned; the reason Jesus Christ had to die was because it was a human being who sinned and caused the corruption of the cosmos, and it would have to be a human being who made restitution. (Ezekiel 18:4; Hebrews 2:14-17) Jesus did restitution perfectly, and completely, and once for all. The animals are off the hook.

Moreover, as Hoekema has well said in response to the dispensationalists' contention that the sacrifices in the new temple will be memorial offerings without expiatory value, "But what would be the point of going back to animal sacrifices as a memorial of Christ's death after the Lord himself has given us a memorial of his death in the Lord's Supper?" Further he adds, "Even to suggest, however, that these will be memorial sacrifices violates the principle of the literal interpretation of prophecy [which the dispensationalists argue is one of their premises]. For the Hebrew word used to describe the purpose of these sacrifices in Ezekiel 45:15,17, and 20 is the *piel* form of *kaphar* (rendered 'to make reconciliation' [KJ] or 'to make atonement' [ASV, RSV]). But this is precisely the word used in the Pentateuchal description of the Old Testament sacrifices to indicate their propitiatory or expiatory purpose (see Lev. 6:30; 8:15; 16:6, 11, 24, 30, 32, 33, 34; Num. 5:8; 15:28; 29:5) If the sacrifices mentioned in Ezekiel are to be understood literally, they must be expiatory, not memorial offerings." (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 205).

Recall also Jesus' words, "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent [Jesus' disciples]." (Matthew 12:6-7) As Lenski comments, "When the Pharisees condemned the disciples, who were utterly guiltless, having transgressed not even a ceremonial law, they revealed that Hos. 6:6 (and every other gospel word similar to that) was foreign territory to them. Men's actions reveal what affinity they have for God's Word and how they meet or fail to meet what God really wants."

- 13) When interpreting the Bible use time-honored, traditional, hermeneutical principals, e.g.,
  - a) Consider the context, which is not just the verses immediately preceding the passage being examined, but the whole chapter, the whole book, and the whole Bible.
  - b) Read with exegesis, not eisegesis.
  - c) Consider the literary genre you are seeking to interpret.
  - d) Scripture is its own best commentary. Yet, a key exegetical principle is to interpret an obscure passage in the light of a clear passage. Do not make the mistake of many (including historic and dispensational premillennialists) who interpret a verse or passage that is highly symbolic and open to more than one interpretation as a clear, propositional, literal statement.
  - e) Remember the prophetic principle: prophets frequently telescoped near and far fulfillment in the same passage, i.e., part of the prophecy dealing with an event soon to come or in Jesus' First Coming and part in his Second Coming. (E.g., Isaiah 11:1-3a and 11:3b ff.)
  
3. In sum, then, we see that as much as we love our dispensational brothers and sisters in Christ, dispensationalism makes serious departures from historic and time-honored interpretations and applications of Scripture, well-grounded in the original Hebrew and Greek texts, that the church has made for well over 2000 years, some even from the time of Abraham. Thus, on some very important Biblical texts, dispensationalists are not "rightly dividing (Greek, KJV; "handling," Greek, NIV; "explaining," NRSV) the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) Keep to the historic traditional interpretation of the Bible, the Word of God.