

# PROGRESSIVE COVENANTALISM

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## PROGRESSIVE COVENANTILISM

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

-Jeremiah 31:31-34<sup>1</sup>

And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”

-Luke 22:20

Progressive Covenantalism is a relatively recent term that was coined by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum in their book *Kingdom through Covenant*.<sup>2</sup> They state, “If we were to label our view and to plot it on the map of current evangelical discussion, it would fit broadly under the umbrella of what is called ‘new covenant theology,’ or to coin a better term, ‘progressive covenantalism’.”<sup>3</sup> Concerning their choice of the term “progressive covenantalism,” they write:

Even though it is a new term, it nicely captures our basic proposal. “Progressive” seeks to underscore the progress or the unfolding of God’s revelation from old to new, and “covenantalism” expresses that God’s plan across redemptive-history unfolds through covenants as all of the covenants are terminated, culminated, and fulfilled in Christ and the arrival of the promised new covenant age.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). (Lk 22:20). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation. Henceforth all Scripture quotes will be from this version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding Of The Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 24.

The emphasis of the system is further defined:

In identifying our proposal as “progressive covenantalism,” or a species of “new covenant theology,” we are stressing two points. First, it is a *via media* between dispensational and covenant theology. It neither completely fits nor totally disagrees with either system. Second, it stresses the *unity* of God’s plan which is discovered as we trace God’s redemptive work through the biblical covenants.<sup>5</sup>

*Via media* is a Latin phrase that translates ‘the middle way or road’ and is used to mean “a compromise between two extremes.”<sup>6</sup> This compromise is precisely what Progressive Covenantalism attempts to achieve as it has issues with both Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. The purpose of this paper will be to explore how Progressive Covenantalism is similar and distinct from Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology and to critique the strengths and weaknesses of the system. A brief overview will be presented along with how each system sees the continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Comparisons will be drawn in the key areas of hermeneutics, Israel and the church, the kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the New Covenant. The strengths of Progressive Covenantalism will be explored followed by the deficiencies of the system.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF PROGRESSIVE COVENANTALISM

A biblical philosophy of history deals with the issue of meaning. “It offers a systematic interpretation of history. It covers the entire scope of history...including the *what* and *why* of the future.”<sup>7</sup> Showers lists six necessary elements of a biblical philosophy of history

*First it must contain an ultimate purpose or goal for history toward the fulfillment of which all history moves. Second, it must recognize distinctions or things that differ in history...third...it must have a proper concept of the progress of revelation...fourth...it*

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<sup>5</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/via+media>

<sup>7</sup> Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is A Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ, 1990), 2.

*must have a unifying principle which ties the distinctions and the progressive stages of revelation together and directs them toward the fulfillment of the purpose of history...Fifth, it must give a valid explanation of why things have happened the way they have, why things are the way they are today, and where things are going in the future...Sixth, it must offer appropriate answers to man's three basic questions: Where have we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?*<sup>8</sup>

Since the time of the Reformation, two primary systems have emerged that try to outline a biblical philosophy of history. They have developed into what we now call Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology.

### OVERVIEW OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

“Covenant Theology attempts to develop the Bible’s philosophy of history on the basis of covenants.”<sup>9</sup> Some Covenant Theologians see two covenants, Works and Grace, and others see three, adding Redemption, as “governing categories for the understanding of the entire Bible.”<sup>10</sup> “It is a system of theology that views God’s eternal plan of salvation through the outworking of three covenants – the Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace, and Covenant of Redemption.”<sup>11</sup>

Covenant Theology (hereafter CT) developed after the Protestant Reformation and “the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647...is often viewed as a primary expression of CT.”<sup>12</sup>

Articles II and III of chapter VII state:

II. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

III. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in

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<sup>8</sup> Showers, *There Really A Difference*, 2-6.

<sup>9</sup> Showers, *There Really A Difference*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 214.

<sup>11</sup> Michael J. Vlach, “New Covenant Theology Compared With Covenantalism.” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 18 no 1 (Fall 2007): 202.

<sup>12</sup> Vlach, *New Covenant*, 202.

Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.<sup>13</sup>

CT obviously has strong ties to Reformed Theology which emphasizes continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Covenant Theologian Michael Horton states, “Reformed theology is synonymous with covenant theology.”<sup>14</sup> He expands by saying, “whenever Reformed theologians attempt to explore and explain the riches of Scripture, they are always thinking covenantally about every topic they take up.”<sup>15</sup> Concerning CT, *The Dictionary of Theological Terms* states:

Thus there is a deep sense of continuity between the OT and the NT. The differences are those between types and their fulfilment, between shadows and their substance. It is a matter of historical and spiritual development. But both OT and NT present the same redemptive purpose of God, the same way of salvation, and the same great eschatological hope.

Both Testaments present these truths in terms of “the everlasting covenant.” According to the NT, believers are reckoned in the same covenant as OT saints....

In the NT it is called a new and better covenant, because in the OT it was administered by Moses the servant, whereas in NT times it is administered personally by Christ the Son...<sup>16</sup>

The above description refers to several theological distinctions that accompany CT. One is a hermeneutic that interprets the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament. Because of the idea of one redeemed community, the church becomes the recipient of the specific Old Testament promises made to Israel. CT negates the literal rule promised to David’s seed in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:12-17) and the land promises made to Israel in the Land or Palestinian Covenant (Deut 29:1 – 30:20). In light of this there will be no millennial rule of Christ on earth and the promised kingdom becomes a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of

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<sup>13</sup> “The Westminster Confession of Faith” (online at [http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf\\_with\\_proofs/](http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/), accessed 06/17/2015).

<sup>14</sup> Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Allen Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 113.

men. The New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) which is made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah is now fulfilled by spiritual Israel, the church. This view is clearly seen in the statements of Berkhof:

It is very doubtful, however, whether Scripture warrants the expectation that Israel will finally be re-established as a nation, and will as a nation turn to the Lord. Some Old Testament prophecies seem to predict this, but these should be read in the light of the New Testament. Does the New Testament justify the expectation of a future restoration and conversion of Israel as a nation? It is not taught nor even necessarily implied in such passages as Matt. 19:28, and Luke 21:24, which are often quoted in its favor.<sup>17</sup>

CT Theologian Robert Remond is even more to the point when he states, “The future messianic kingdom will embrace the whole of the newly recreated cosmos and will not experience a special manifestation that could be regarded *in any sense* as ‘Jewish’ in the region of the so-called Holy Land or anywhere else.”<sup>18</sup> Continuity is also seen in the means of salvation:

[CT] insists that Old Testament saints were saved precisely the same way that New Testament saints are being saved, namely, through conscious faith in the (anticipated) sacrificial work of the promised Messiah on their behalf as that work was foreshadowed by Old Testament promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the Jewish people...<sup>19</sup>

Other key ideas of CT that come from Reformed Theology are the practice of infant baptism and the continuation of the Old Testament Law in the New Testament. Vlach writes:

Another key belief of CT is infant baptism. If Israel of the OT used circumcision on its children, then the new Israel – the church – should use baptism on its children as well. Also, many Covenant theologians hold that the Mosaic Law, particularly the Ten Commandments, is still in force. Though the ceremonial and civil aspects of the Mosaic Law are no longer binding, the moral law as found in the Decalogue is still operative. Thus the Mosaic Law has a continuing aspect today.<sup>20</sup>

CT claims a grammatical-historical hermeneutic but part of that hermeneutic is that the

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<sup>17</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 699.

<sup>18</sup> Robert L. Reymond, “The Traditional Covenantal View,” *Perspectives on Israel and The Church: 4 Views*, Chad O. Brand, ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic), 60.

<sup>19</sup> Reymond, “The Traditional Covenantal View,” 17.

<sup>20</sup> Vlach, *New Covenant*, 204-205.

New Testament interprets the Old Testament. “In other words, we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is brought to fulfillment in Christ.”<sup>21</sup> Typology is used extensively in CT and is often used as a justification to spiritualize or change the literal Old Testament understanding of a passage. Gentry and Wellum explain, “Scripture as an entire Canon must interpret Scripture; the later parts must ‘draw out and explain more clearly the earlier parts,’ and theological conclusions must be exegetically derived from the entire Canon.”<sup>22</sup>

Illustrating the method, they write:

For covenant theology, the New Testament helps us understand that the land promise is that which is fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the dawning of the new creation and, as such, is typological of the new creation...Grammatical-historical exegesis needs to be set in the larger context of a canonical reading of Scripture; the parts must be read in terms of the whole.”<sup>23</sup>

In summary, CT teaches a strong continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament based on two or three covenants that are the basis of interpretation. CT uses a hermeneutic that reads the New Testament back into the Old Testament so that the specific promises to Israel as a nation are now fulfilled by the church or will be fulfilled in the new creation. There will be no literal millennial kingdom on earth and the Mosaic Law, at least the moral aspect, is still applicable for the church today. As infants were brought into the community of faith under the Law by circumcision, now infants should be brought into the new Israel, the church, by baptism. Progressive Covenantalism retains many of the particulars of CT but also rejects some areas and expands others. CT strongly upholds the continuity of the Bible. Dispensational Theology, on the other hand, sees many areas of discontinuity in the Bible. A brief look at Dispensational Theology will further set the stage to explore where Progressive

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<sup>21</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 86.

<sup>22</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 86.

<sup>23</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 86.



Covenantalism fits between the two systems.

## OVERVIEW OF DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

Rather than seeing two or three theological covenants as the basis of biblical interpretation, Dispensational Theology (hereafter DT) sees the Bible unfolding through different dispensations or economies that are progressive through biblical revelation. Charles Ryrie defines a dispensation as “a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose.”<sup>24</sup> “Dispensationalists arrive at their system of interpretation through two primary principles: (1) maintaining a consistently literal method of interpretation, and (2) maintaining a distinction between Israel and the church.”<sup>25</sup>

Covenant Theologians often make the claim that DT is a recent theology and thus should not be taken seriously.<sup>26</sup> They claim that DT began with John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) however, a strong case can be made that “the foundations and initial developments of dispensationalism are ancient.”<sup>27</sup> Darby is recognized as “having much to do with the systematizing and promoting of dispensationalism.”<sup>28</sup> Several of the church fathers such as Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-200), Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200), and clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-220) identified different dispensations.<sup>29</sup> French philosopher Pierre Poiret (1646-1719) “wrote a six volume systematic theology entitled *L’O Economie Divine*. In this modified Calvinistic and premillennial work, Poiret presented a seven-fold dispensational scheme....”<sup>30</sup> Clearly, both CT

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<sup>24</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 513.

<sup>26</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 69-86. Ryrie documents this charge and similar ones and defends an earlier origin of Dispensationalism.

<sup>27</sup> Enns, *The Moody Handbook*, 513.

<sup>28</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> Enns, *The Moody Handbook*, 513-514.

<sup>30</sup> Enns, *The Moody Handbook*, 513-514.

and DT were formalized into theological systems during the same time period following the Reformation. DT was popularized in the Scofield Reference Bible in the early 1900s and in schools such as Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary, Talbot Seminary, Grace Seminary, Faith Seminary, and Philadelphia College of Bible.<sup>31</sup>

In defining dispensationalism, Ryrie asks the question “What is the *sine qua non* (the absolutely indispensable part) of the system?”<sup>32</sup> He gives a threefold answer:

1 *A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct...* This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist, and is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive.

2 *This distinction between Israel and the church is born out of a system of hermeneutics that is usually called literal interpretation...* To be sure, literal/historical/grammatical interpretation is not the sole possession or practice of dispensationalists, but the consistent use of it in all areas of biblical interpretation is.

3 *A third aspect of the sine qua non... concerns the underlying purpose of God in the world...* To the normative dispensationalist, the soteriological, or saving, program of God is not the only program but one of the means God is using in the total program of glorifying Himself. Scripture is not man-centered as though salvation were the main theme, but it is God-centered because His glory is the center.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning this third area of glorifying God, Johnson writes:

The value of Dispensationalism features the distinctive view of the believer’s life as a steward of God’s will in his appointed time in history. However, the ultimate purpose of telling the story is to have God’s story move our hearts to worship. For while it is a story of man in history, that story uncovers the glory of God who shares Himself to accomplish His will for His own people who love Him and are called according to His purposes.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to CT, DT believes the covenant promises of the Old Testament to Israel will be fulfilled literally on the earth during the millennial kingdom. The promises made in the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, the Palestinian Covenant, and the New Covenant were made to Israel and will be fulfilled by Israel, not the church. The church is seen as a

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<sup>31</sup> Enns, *The Moody Handbook*, 517.

<sup>32</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 46-48.

<sup>34</sup> Elliott Johnson, *A Dispensational Biblical Theology* (Allen, TX: Bold Grace Academic, 2016), 4.

mystery (Eph 3:1-10) that was not revealed in the Old Testament. “Dispensational ecclesiology defines the church as a distinct body of saints in the present age, having its own divine purpose and destiny and differing from the saints of the past or future ages.”<sup>35</sup> Dispensationalists do not recognize the three theological covenants of CT, the Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace, and Covenant of Redemption. DT does not say that the ideas contained in these supposed covenants are necessarily unscriptural but that “they are ideas that are not systematized, formalized, and stated by Scripture as covenants... the covenant theologian *never* finds in the Bible the terms *covenant of works* and *covenant of grace*.”<sup>36</sup>

DT puts a strong emphasis on the literal historical-grammatical interpretation of the biblical covenants. They believe the Abrahamic, the Davidic, the Palestinian, and the New Covenant are unconditional covenants and depend on God’s promise and faithfulness alone for fulfillment. While DT recognizes some conditions within these covenants that depend on human responses, the ultimate fulfillment will be brought about to Israel just as God promised.

In summary DT is founded on a historical-grammatical or literal hermeneutic that does not read the New Testament back into the Old Testament for the purpose of spiritualizing the promises made to Abraham, David, and the nation of Israel. Israel and the church have distinct purposes in the overall plan of God. DT recognizes the discontinuities of Scripture and sees them in the light of God’s progressive revelation and ultimate goal of His glory. The distinctions between CT and DT will be explored further as Progressive Dispensationalism and Progressive Covenantalism are introduced and compared.

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<sup>35</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 224.

<sup>36</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 220.

## CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

Webster defines *continuity* as “the quality of something that does not stop or change as time passes: a continuous quality: something that is the same in two or more things and provides a connection between them: the arrangement of the parts in a story, movie, etc., in a way that is logical.”<sup>37</sup> Discontinuity is defined as “the quality or state of not being continuous: lack of continuity: a change or break in a process.”<sup>38</sup> CT and DT are often defined in terms of continuity and discontinuity. Feinberg notes:

Evangelical positions can be placed on a continuum running from belief in the absolute continuity of Scripture to belief in the absolute discontinuity of Scripture. Generally, systems that move toward absolute continuity fit more in the mold of Reformed or covenantal theologies. Systems that move toward absolute discontinuity fit more in the mold of dispensational theologies. While there are varieties of both kinds, it is unlikely that any actual systems are exactly at either end of the continuum.<sup>39</sup>

Progressive Covenantalism and Progressive Dispensationalism both move more to the center of the continuity-discontinuity continuum. Before exploring the specifics of Progressive Covenantalism, it will be helpful to compare CT and DT in six key areas to establish the boundaries of the continuum. The areas addressed are: the hermeneutics of each system, the relationship of Israel and the church, the Law, salvation, the kingdom promises and their fulfillment, and the relationship of the New Covenant to Israel and the church. Each comparison is a simple overview, without any detailed defense or criticism of either system, to help set the stage for understanding the distinctions of Progressive Covenantalism.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/continuity>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discontinuity>

<sup>39</sup> John S. Feinberg, “Systems of discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. John S. Feinberg; Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 64.

## HERMENEUTICS

Hermeneutics is defined as the “science and art of Biblical interpretation. Interpretation is a science because there are laws that guide it. It is an art because the laws must be applied skillfully.”<sup>40</sup> Both CT and DT claim that they use a biblical hermeneutic. DT appeals to a grammatical-historical, literal approach to understanding the text of Scripture. Hawley notes, “Literal interpretation does not mean that we do not recognize figures of speech, but that we are seeking the original intention of the author.”<sup>41</sup> Dispensationalists often accuse CT of allegorizing or spiritualizing the literal meaning of Old Testament texts, specifically those that relate to unfulfilled prophecy concerning Israel, and thus changing the original author’s intended meaning. However, CT also claims to use a grammatical-historical, literal approach. The difference is that part of its understanding of a literal hermeneutic is to give the New Testament priority over the Old Testament. CT’s continuity is seen in terms such as “a unified revelation,” or a “thick” way of reading the text, or interpreting with a fuller meaning, an idea that has been labelled “*sensus plenior*.”<sup>42</sup> Gentry and Wellum write, “Once again, hermeneutically speaking, this reminds us that Scripture must be read as an entire revelation, i.e., canonically, in order to discern God’s overall plan, what we have called a ‘thick’ reading of Scripture.”<sup>43</sup> Since the New Testament is later revelation and part of the unified canon, it therefore must have more weight than the Old Testament. Gentry and Wellum expand this concept by writing:

Thus, as more revelation was give over time and through later authors, we discover more of God’s plan and where that plan is going. It is for this reason that the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old Testament becomes definitive in helping us

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<sup>40</sup> Grant Hawley, *The Guts of Grace* (Allen, TX: Bold Grace Ministries, 2013), 17.

<sup>41</sup> Hawley, *Guts of Grace*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 84-85. They label a “thin” reading of Scripture as isolating texts apart from the whole. A “thick” reading is to read every text in light of the entire canon of Scripture. *Sensus plenior* is the idea that the Old Testament authors did not fully understand what they wrote and therefore later revelation given in the New Testament helps to interpret or give a fuller meaning to the Old Testament text.

<sup>43</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 89.

interpret the details of the Old Testament, since later revelation brings with it greater clarity and understanding. In other words, we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is brought to fulfillment in Christ. In this way... the New Testament may expand the Old Testament author's meaning in the sense of seeing new implications and applications.<sup>44</sup>

“Both sides of the debate...claim to be following the grammatical-historical method of interpretation even in matters of eschatology...therefore, it seems that the newer forms of the debate are really more refined ways of talking about whether or not the New Testament should be read back into the Old.”<sup>45</sup> Stallard summarizes the hermeneutics of CT as follows:

- 1 The recognition of one's own preunderstanding
- 2 The formulation of a biblical theology on the New Testament based upon the literal interpretation (grammatical-historical interpretation) of the New Testament text
- 3 The formulation of a biblical theology of the Old Testament based upon the New Testament understanding of the Old Testament text
- 4 The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all of the inputs above to theology including the results of 2 and 3 above<sup>46</sup>

Dispensationalists would argue that if the New Testament reinterprets the Old Testament, “how can the integrity of the OT text be maintained? In what sense can the OT really be called a *revelation* in its original meaning?”<sup>47</sup> Finberg elaborates:

...there is no need to go behind the text to find the author's intention, for it is *in* the text. The intentional fallacy is based upon the false assumption that writers are incapable of expressing their intentions through the texts that they produce. This is simply false, and if it is not, then their intentions must remain a mystery, and it does no good to talk about them...

God has committed his will and truth to a written text, and what is true for human authors' intentions will be true for God's.... If propositional revelation is possible, then God should be more able, not less, to express his intentions in Scripture.

Meaning is associated with authorial intent (in this case the human and divine) and that is to be found in the analysis of the text.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 85-86.

<sup>45</sup> Mike Stallard, “Literal Hermeneutics, Theological Method, And The Essence of Dispensationalism,” n.p. [cited 28 June 2016]. Online: <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Stallard-LITERALHERMENEUTICST.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Stallard, “Literal Hermeneutics,” Online.

<sup>47</sup> Paul D. Finberg, “Hermeneutics of discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. John S. Finberg; Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 116.

<sup>48</sup> Finberg, “Hermeneutics of discontinuity”, 117. The pronoun “his” for God is not capitalized in the quote.

Ryrie states:

Literal interpretation results in accepting the text of Scripture at its face value. Based on the philosophy that God originated language for the purpose of communicating His message to man and that He intended man to understand that message, literal interpretation seeks to interpret that message plainly.

Taking the text at face value and recognizing distinctions in the process of revelation leads to the recognition of differing economies in the outworking of God's program. In other words, consistent literalism is the basis for dispensationalism.<sup>49</sup>

Although Covenant Theologians claim a grammatical-literal hermeneutic, it is not a consistent one. Because they begin in the New Testament and allow it to interpret the Old Testament, the literal meaning of the Old Testament as would have been understood by the readers of that period, is modified and often completely changed. On the other hand, DT attempts to apply the same hermeneutic to both the Old and New Testaments. "One contribution of Dispensationalism is its claim to provide a single and consistent hermeneutic to the whole canon."<sup>50</sup>

In conclusion CT, because of its understanding of continuity, sees the Bible as a unified whole and gives greater weight to the later revelation of the New Testament. This hermeneutic allows the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament and give an expanded, and often unknown, meaning to the original authors of the Old Testament text. DT, by applying the same grammatical-historical hermeneutic to the Old Testament and the New Testament, sees much more God-intended discontinuity between the Testaments.

## ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Probably the clearest illustration of the difference between CT and DT is the understanding of the relationship of Israel to the church. The key issue is whether or not the Old

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<sup>49</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 96-97.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, *Dispensational*, 5.

Testament promises to national Israel are to be fulfilled literally in the future by Israel, or rather has the church become spiritual Israel and thus inherited the promises made to national Israel. CT, because of the continuity of the system, sees the people of God as the same throughout history. “The New Testament Church is essentially one with the Church of the old dispensation.”<sup>51</sup> “Covenant theologians teach that the Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church are one people, one being the continuation and successor of the other.”<sup>52</sup> Berkhof writes, “...the Church existed in the old dispensation as well as in the new, and was *essentially* the same in both, in spite of acknowledged institutional and administrative differences.”<sup>53</sup> Baker expands:

This is one of the chief tenets of Covenant Theology. Most covenant theologians are A-millennial and must therefore argue that the present dispensation is the final one in which all of the Old Testament promises must find their fulfillment. These promises were made to Israel; hence the Church must be spiritual Israel, since the Church comprises God’s people today. Not only must Israel be spiritualized to mean Gentiles, but the physical and material earthly promises must be spiritualized to mean purely spiritual blessings in heaven.<sup>54</sup>

“Concerning the nation Israel, covenant theologians maintain that Israel is now cast aside because she crucified the Messiah and is now no more special to God than any other nation on earth.”<sup>55</sup> “Covenant theologians hand the Old Testament promises over to the church, and leave the threats and curses often found in the same Old Testament texts behind for Israel.”<sup>56</sup>

DT sees discontinuity between Israel and the church. Walvoord states, “Dispensational ecclesiology defines the church as a distinct body of saints in the present age, having its own divine purpose and destiny and differing from the saints of the past or future ages.”<sup>57</sup> Ryrie calls

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<sup>51</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 571.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Assurance Publishers, 1974), 247.

<sup>53</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 571.

<sup>54</sup> Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Grace Bible College Publications, 1971), 526.

<sup>55</sup> Tan, *Interpretation*, 249.

<sup>56</sup> Tan, *Interpretation*, 250.

<sup>57</sup> Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 224.



“...the doctrine of the Church...the touchstone of dispensationalism.”<sup>58</sup> DT recognizes that Israel and the church are always kept distinct in the New Testament and Old Testament.

The book of Acts speaks frequently of the “church” (nineteen times) and “Israel” (twenty times). However, ‘church’ refers to those believing at Pentecost and beyond; while “Israel” refers to the nation – historically and ethnically. The terms are never used synonymously or interchangeably. The church is never called “spiritual Israel” or “new Israel” in the NT; furthermore, Israel is never called “the church” in the OT.<sup>59</sup>

Concerning the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27) Ryrie notes:

It is distinct because of who are included within that body (i.e., Jews and Gentiles as fellow heirs), and it is distinct because of the new relationships of being in Christ and of Christ’s indwelling the members of that body. Both of these distinctives are unique with the church and were not known or experienced by God’s people in Old Testament times....<sup>60</sup>

DT also notes that the church had its beginning in the New Testament.

...an examination of the New Testament indicates the church is a peculiar New Testament entity that had not previously existed. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus declared, “I will build my church,” indicating the building of the church was future. This point is important. It emphasizes that the church was not yet in existence when Jesus spoke these words. He was making a prediction concerning His future building of the church.<sup>61</sup>

Because Israel and the church are seen to be separate entities by DT, the unfilled Old Testament promises to Israel will be fulfilled by Israel in the future. The church age is something new that was not revealed in the Old Testament and the church does not replace Israel.

To summarize, CT, because of its emphasis on continuity, sees Israel and the church as basically the same. Both are the people of God, and the promises to Israel, which CT admits were literal, are now being fulfilled spiritually by the church. The promises to Israel of a literal kingdom, land, and heir of David on a literal throne in Jerusalem are now being spiritually

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<sup>58</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 132.

<sup>59</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, “New Covenant Theology and Futuristic Premillennialism,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (September 2007): 230.

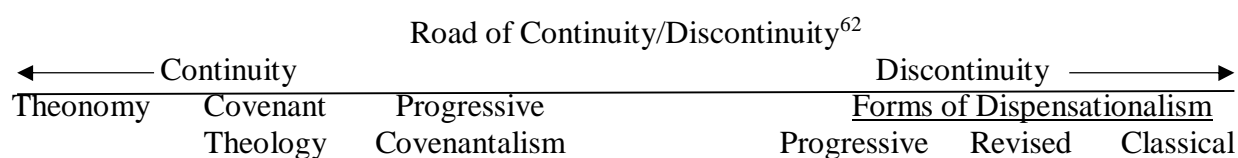
<sup>60</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 144.

<sup>61</sup> Enns, *The Moody Handbook*, 348-349.

fulfilled by the church and will ultimately be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth. DT, on the other hand, sees the discontinuity between Israel and the church and believes that the promises to Israel will be fulfilled literally in the coming millennial kingdom. The church is a new entity that was not revealed in the Old Testament, consisting of Jew and Gentile made one in the body of Christ.

## THE LAW

The continuity or discontinuity of the Mosaic Law between the Old Testament and the New Testament is an area of much disagreement. The continuum can be visualized as such:



“The first two systems of theology stress continuity with respect to the law and NT ethics.

Theonomy<sup>63</sup> has distinguished itself on the far left of the continuity divide because it sees the most carryover from the OT law to NT ethics.”<sup>64</sup> “Both theonomy and covenant theology use the tripartite division of the law consisting of the three categories – moral, civil, and ceremonial.”<sup>65</sup>

“Theonomists contend that the moral and civil laws are still binding today (continuity), while the

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<sup>62</sup> Jason C. Meyer, “The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 71.

<sup>63</sup> Theonomy comes from the combination of two Greek words, *theos*, which means god, and *nomos*, which means law. Theonomists believe that both the moral and civil laws are still binding whereas most Covenant Theologians believe only the moral law is still binding.

<sup>64</sup> Meyer, “The Mosaic Law,” 71.

<sup>65</sup> Meyer, “The Mosaic Law,” 71.

ceremonial laws are no longer binding because of Christ's sacrifice (discontinuity). Covenant theologians hold that the moral law is binding (continuity), but both the civil and the ceremonial laws are abrogated (discontinuity)."<sup>66</sup> For CT the pressing questions are:

In what manner [do] the particulars of the Mosaic Law apply to Christians? Are we to assume that *only* those particulars which the NT *expressly sanctions* (whether in unaltered or modified form) remain in force for believers today? Or are we to assume instead that Christians are bound to obey *all* those particulars which the NT does *not expressly abrogate*?"<sup>67</sup>

Most Covenant Theologians would argue that the portion of the Mosaic Law termed the "Moral Law" is still binding for the Christian. Berkhof expresses this obligation to the Law by writing:

The law lays claim, and justly so, on the entire life of man in all its aspects, including his relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ. When God offers man the gospel, the law demands that the latter shall accept this.... The Gospel itself consists of promises and is no law; yet there is a demand of the law in connection with the gospel. The law not only demands that we accept the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ, but also that we lead a life of gratitude in harmony with its requirements.<sup>68</sup>

Berkhof goes on to say, "The Law is a rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties and leading them in the way of life and salvation."<sup>69</sup> Fuller states, "I have concluded that compliance with the Mosaic law is an 'obedience of faith'...that faith is not merely accompanied by good works as something coordinate with it, but that faith itself is the mainspring for producing good works."<sup>70</sup> The Reformed doctrine of "Perseverance of the Saints" logically flows from this understanding of faith being connected with obedience to the Law. A life that is not characterized by obedience to the Law would indicate that a person is not truly justified. Horton confirms this idea by his statement:

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<sup>66</sup> Meyer, "The Mosaic Law," 72.

<sup>67</sup> Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and The Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. John S. Feinberg; Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 183.

<sup>68</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 614.

<sup>69</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 615.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?; The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), xi.

The New Testament lays before us a vast array of conditions for final salvation. Not only initial repentance and faith, but perseverance in both, demonstrated in love toward God and neighbor, are part of that holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14) Such holiness is not simply definitive – that is, it belongs not only to our justification, which is an imputed rather than imparted righteousness, but to our sanctification, that inner renewal by the Spirit.<sup>71</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, DT says that the Mosaic Law, in its entirety, has come to its end and is not binding after the death of Christ. DT sees the Mosaic Law as being specifically given to Israel but not as a means of justification. “The law presents Moses and the redeemed people with their responsibilities as a theocratic nation under God; obedience to the commandments will bring physical blessing and long life.”<sup>72</sup> “The new covenant has rendered the old covenant inoperative. Just as there was no Mosaic law during the dispensation from Adam to Moses, so also there is a period following the Mosaic era in which the law is no longer the operative principle.”<sup>73</sup> DT does not teach antinomianism but instead believes that Christians are now under the law of Christ and that the power to fulfill Christ’s commands comes by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Strickland writes, “The law of Christ is the new covenant counterpart to the Mosaic law. Just as the Mosaic law was normative for the Jew, the law of Christ is binding for the Christian. Both are specific applications of God’s eternal moral standard.”<sup>74</sup> “Since the Holy Spirit ministers in the life of the New Testament believer on behalf of Jesus Christ, there is no need for any lengthy, detailed, codified, external means of restraint as in the Mosaic law.”<sup>75</sup> Strickland sums up the Dispensational view:

...it is no longer necessary to propose a construct where obedience is the defining element of faith and where Gospel and Law are in absolute continuum. The law is properly understood to reveal the problem of sin and the necessity of grace in

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<sup>71</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 182.

<sup>72</sup> Wayne G. Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View” in *Five Views On Law And Gospel* (ed. Stanley N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 234.

<sup>73</sup> Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 262.

<sup>74</sup> Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 277.

<sup>75</sup> Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 277.

redemption, but the law is not seen as binding for the church saint. Rather the law prefigures the redemption wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ. The regulatory aspect of the law, binding on the Mosaic believer, dealt with sanctification and not justification, and it has been terminated.... As with Paul, the church age believer may rejoice that ‘now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law’ (Gal. 3:25).... Law and grace as methods of justification must not be allowed to mix, or else grace has been lost.<sup>76</sup>

In general, CT sees at least parts of the Mosaic Code as normative in the life of the New Testament believer while DT stresses that the Mosaic Code has ended and the believer is under the law of Christ. Related Scripture will be explored when Progressive Covenantalism is specifically addressed.

## SALVATION

As touched on previously, because of its Reformed Theology roots and view of continuity between the Law and the gospel, CT sees the content of saving faith, based in the covenant of grace, as being the same in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. “The Bible teaches that there is but a single gospel by which men can be saved. And because the gospel is nothing but the revelation of the covenant of grace, it follows that there is also but one covenant.”<sup>77</sup>

Salvation has always been by grace through faith and the Old Testament saint was saved by believing in the coming Messiah just as the New Testament saint is saved by believing in Jesus. However, CT tends to see justification and sanctification as inseparable parts of the same process. Horton says, “Covenant theology sees the justification of the individual before God and the justification of God in the great trial of history as two sides of the same coin. It also sees God’s declaration in justification as crucially related to this verdict’s effect in the new birth,

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<sup>76</sup> Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 279.

<sup>77</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 279.

sanctification, and finally, glorification.”<sup>78</sup> He goes on to say, “In the covenantal thinking we find in Scripture, there is no such thing as true knowledge without love and obedience. To know God is actually...to acknowledge God – that is, to walk after God in the way that a servant walked behind a king in a solemn procession, recognizing his sovereignty.”<sup>79</sup> In other words a believer must demonstrate obedience and live a sanctified life, or otherwise he is not truly saved. While CT tries to maintain faith alone as the basis of justification, often Covenant Theologians make statements that seem contradictory. In the following quote Horton seems to say that justification is different from sanctification but then says they cannot be separated:

While our status before God (justification) is distinguished from our inward renewal (rebirth and sanctification), our status cannot be separated from our inward renewal even for a moment. Thus, because of God’s sworn oath by himself, the justified sinner will also be one who perseveres against doubt, temptation, the world, the flesh, and the devil, one day inheriting by that same royal grant rest from all warfare.<sup>80</sup>

So in CT justification is “distinguished” from sanctification, but it cannot be “separated.”

Another practice CT endorses because of the continuity between Israel and the church is infant baptism “since the Old and New Testaments both describe circumcision/baptism and Passover/the Lord’s Supper as signs and seals of the covenant...”<sup>81</sup> Horton states that “baptism is explicitly linked to regeneration and forgiveness of sins”<sup>82</sup> but then goes on to say, “Baptism, like circumcision, is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, not the cause of election, regeneration, and justification.”<sup>83</sup> He later summarizes, “All these formulations speak clearly of the significance of baptism in mediating redemption; they speak of what happens in and by baptism and not merely of what happened before baptism and of which baptism would only be

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<sup>78</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 76.

<sup>81</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 144.

<sup>82</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 153.

<sup>83</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 153.

the confirmation.”<sup>84</sup> Berkhof states, “In the new dispensation baptism is by divine authority substituted for circumcision as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace.”<sup>85</sup>

Because infants were circumcised under the Law in Israel, and because the church, according to CT, is now spiritual Israel and baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant, infants should therefore be baptized as a sign of the covenant. Berkhof explains, “If children received the sign and seal of the covenant in the old dispensation, the presumption is that they surely have a right to receive it in the new....”<sup>86</sup> Because it cannot be known for certain if infants will actually profess faith in Christ when they come of age, there is the possibility of having those who are baptized into the New Covenant who are actually not saved. CT reasons that just as there were saved and unsaved in the nation of Israel under the Law, there will be saved and unsaved in the church under the New Covenant.

DT also believes that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone but that the content of that faith has differed somewhat over the progress of revelation. Ross states, “...there is a difference of opinion on the content of faith prior to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. What exactly did Abram believe? What did OT believers know about the provision of salvation?”<sup>87</sup> He summarizes:

...we may affirm that according to the eternal purpose of God salvation in the divine reckoning is always by grace, through faith, and rests upon the shed blood of Christ; but we must acknowledge that it was historically impossible that OT saints should have had as the conscious object of their faith the incarnate, crucified Son, the Lamb of God, and that it is evident that they did not comprehend as we do that the sacrifices depicted the person and work of Christ.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant*, 155.

<sup>85</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 633.

<sup>86</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 634.

<sup>87</sup> Allen P. Ross, “The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. John S. Feinberg; Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 169.

<sup>88</sup> Ross, “The Biblical Method of Salvation,” 171.

Because of the discontinuity between Israel and the church, DT does not see baptism as the sacramental means of entering the New Covenant. Baker states:

Practically all dispensationalists agree that there are no sacramental means of grace in effect in this present dispensation of the grace of God. Even those who practice water baptism do so, not for the purpose of conferring the grace of God in salvation, but for a variety of reasons: as an act of obedience to Christ, as a symbol of death and burial, as a testimony to the world, as an initiation into church membership, etc.<sup>89</sup>

Also, most Dispensationalists see discontinuity in justification and sanctification. They do not deny that the norm should be a life of holiness by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit but they do recognize that perseverance in holiness is not the test of justification.

In summary, CT sees salvation as based in the covenant of grace with a strong continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Perseverance in the faith is necessary for final salvation. The sacraments are seen as means of grace and infant baptism is justified because it is seen as the New Covenant replacement for circumcision. On the other hand, DT sees discontinuity between the Old and New Testament and although salvation has always been by grace through faith, the content of that faith is specifically defined in the New Testament. Justification is based on faith alone in Christ alone and sanctification, while expected, is not the test for “final salvation.”

## THE KINGDOM PROMISES

CT denies that there will be a literal fulfilment of the Old Testament kingdom promises by Israel. Because the church has become spiritual Israel in the New Covenant, the promises to Israel, specifically the land promise, a literal throne, and a millennial kingdom, are now being fulfilled spiritually by the church. Christ is presently sitting on David’s throne in heaven, the

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<sup>89</sup> Baker, *Dispensational*, 406.



land promise will be realized in the new heaven and earth, and the millennial kingdom is now present in the hearts of believers. Horton writes:

...we are living in the period described symbolically in Revelation 20 as a thousand-year reign of Christ, to be followed by Christ's return, when he will hand over the kingdom to his Father. This view is usually called *amillennialism* (i.e., "no-millennialism"), but this is a misnomer, at least for those of us who believe that the millennium is not denied but is in fact a current reality. What we reject is a literalistic interpretation of the thousand years, since the book of Revelation employs numbers symbolically.<sup>90</sup>

Berkhof indicates that there will be only one final return of Christ at the end of the age to introduce the eternal state. "Christ will return at the end of the world for the purpose of introducing the future age, the eternal state of things, and He will do this by inaugurating and completing two mighty events, namely, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment."<sup>91</sup>

In contrast, DT sees the kingdom promises to Israel to be fulfilled literally in the plain sense that the Old Testament readers would have understood. Speaking of the Davidic Covenant Walvoord writes, "If a literal interpretation be adopted, the present session of Christ is not a fulfillment of the covenant, and it must be referred to the future. It is clear that at the present time Christ is not in any literal sense reigning over the kingdom of David."<sup>92</sup> He goes on to say, "A *literal promise spiritualized is exegetical fraud*. The point of the Davidic covenant is that the Son of David will possess the throne of His father David. To make His person literal but His throne a spiritualized concept is to nullify the promise."<sup>93</sup> Concerning the literal meaning of the thousand years in Rev 20, McClain states, "In chapters 4-20 of the Book of Revelation there are at least twenty-five references to measures of time. Of these, only two *require* what is called a 'figurative' treatment...."<sup>94</sup> He concludes, "In the thousand years of Revelation 20:1-7, then, we

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<sup>90</sup> Horton, *Covenant*, 120.

<sup>91</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic*, 707.

<sup>92</sup> Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 199.

<sup>93</sup> Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 200.

<sup>94</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness Of The Kingdom*. (Winona Lake: BHM Books, 1974), 493.

have set forth the *precise* length of the Mediatorial Kingdom, which earlier had been stated indefinitely in Old Testament prophecy.”<sup>95</sup>

CT denies the literal one-thousand-year millennial kingdom of Christ on earth and sees the Old Testament promises to Israel being fulfilled spiritually by the church. Christ is now on David’s throne spiritually in heaven. DT sees a future, literal fulfillment of the kingdom promises. Christ will rule for one thousand years from Jerusalem on a literal throne over the covenant people Israel.

### THE NEW COVENANT

As stated by Pettegrew, “The discussion about the New Covenant among the systems focuses on two key questions: (1) Is the new covenant a renewed Old Covenant or a New Covenant distinct from the Mosaic Covenant? (2) Is the ‘Israel’ that is to fulfill the New Covenant really Israel, or is Israel somehow replaced by the church?”<sup>96</sup> He continues, “Covenant theologians argue that the New Covenant is really the Old Covenant updated.”<sup>97</sup> Speaking of the similarities between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, Calvin writes, “Both can be explained in one word. The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation.”<sup>98</sup> Pettegrew notes, “As to who fulfills the New Covenant, traditional Covenant

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<sup>95</sup> McClain, *Greatness*, 494.

<sup>96</sup> Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant and New Covenant Theology” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (September 2007), 186.

<sup>97</sup> Pettegrew, “New Covenant,” 187.

<sup>98</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, (trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 429.

Theology answers that though the New Covenant was made with Israel, it is ultimately fulfilled with the church.”<sup>99</sup>

In contrast, DT sees the New Covenant as new, that is, different from the Old Covenant. Dispensationalists differ somewhat in their understanding of how the New Covenant relates to the church. Some Dispensationalists “teach that the New Covenant was indeed inaugurated in connection with the death, burial resurrection, and ascension of Christ and with the coming of the Spirit in His New Covenant ministries on the day of Pentecost.”<sup>100</sup> Ryrie notes three major ideas:

Some have taught that the church has no relation to the new covenant, only Israel does. Others see two new covenants, one with Israel and another with the church. Others acknowledge that the church receives some of the blessings (or similar blessings) promised in the Old Testament revelation of the new covenant but not all of them... All premillennialists agree that there will be a future fulfillment of the covenant for Israel at the second coming of Christ (Rom. 11:26-27; cf. Heb. 10:16).<sup>101</sup>

Dispensationalists do not deny that the church receives spiritual blessings since the death of Christ, but they all agree the New Covenant was made with Israel and that its ultimate fulfillment will be with Israel. Pentecost notes, “This covenant...has to do with the regeneration, forgiveness, and justification of Israel, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with His subsequent ministries, Israel’s regathering and restoration to the place of blessing, all founded on the blood of Jesus Christ.”<sup>102</sup>

In summary, CT sees the New Covenant as a continuation of the Old Covenant with new distinctions. For CT, the New Covenant has been fully realized in the Church today. There will be no future literal fulfillment of the Jer 31 promises for Israel. DT sees the New Covenant as

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<sup>99</sup> Pettegrew, “New Covenant,” 188.

<sup>100</sup> Pettegrew, “New Covenant,” 192.

<sup>101</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 202.

<sup>102</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come: A Study In Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 116.

inaugurated by the death of Christ with the church receiving spiritual benefits such as the indwelling Spirit and relationship with God through the priesthood of Jesus. However, Dispensationalists recognize that the fulfillment of the New Covenant relates to Israel and will not be accomplished until Christ returns to set up His kingdom.

### MOVEMENT TOWARD THE CENTER

In the past few years there has been movement in both the CT and DT camps towards the center of the continuity-discontinuity continuum. Progressive Dispensationalism (hereafter PD) is the name that is associated with those who have refined the dispensational system. PD had its beginnings, according to Darrell Bock, in 1985 when “twenty-four dispensationalists from several Bible colleges and seminaries gathered in the faculty lounge at Biola University and...talked about personal frustrations.”<sup>103</sup> Bock further explains:

We were committed to dispensationalism, yet we observed how many in the evangelical community, even some of our personal friends, misunderstood and stereotyped us... The group that met that afternoon launched the Dispensational Study Group. It has met at the annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) ever since. What has emerged is unprecedented discussion between covenant theologians, historical premillennialists, charismatics, and the dispensationalists who invited them to the table.<sup>104</sup>

Ryrie notes, “...the label ‘progressive dispensationalism’ was introduced at the 1991 meeting, since, ‘significant revisions’ in dispensationalism had taken place by that time.”<sup>105</sup> While it is difficult to find an actual definition of PD, Ryrie offers the following definition/description:

Progressive dispensationalism (1) teaches that Christ is already reigning in heaven on the throne of David, thus merging the church with a present phase of the already inaugurated Davidic covenant and kingdom; (2) this is based on a complementary hermeneutic that

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<sup>103</sup> Darrell L. Bock, "Charting Dispensationalism: A group of progressive scholars is mapping out a dispensational theology for a new era." *Christianity Today* 38, no. 10 (September 12, 1994), 26.

<sup>104</sup> Bock, "Charting Dispensationalism," 26.

<sup>105</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 190.

allows the New Testament to introduce changes and additions to Old Testament revelation; and (3) the overall purpose of God is Christological, holistic redemption being the focus and goal of history.<sup>106</sup>

Commenting on the hermeneutics of PD, Thomas writes:

Progressive dispensationalists view themselves as a continuation of the dispensational tradition, but realize they are moving toward non-dispensational systems. The movement's desire for rapprochement with other theological systems has involved a hermeneutical shift in its understanding of Scripture. It has replaced grammatical-historical interpretation with a system of hermeneutics called grammatical-historical-literary-theological. Several comparisons that illustrate the differences between the two hermeneutical systems relate to the function of the interpreter, the historical dimension, the 'single-meaning' principle, the issue of *sensus plenior*, and the importance of thoroughness. The bottom line is that a choice between Dispensationalism and Progressive Dispensationalism amounts to a choice of which system of hermeneutics an interpreter chooses to follow.<sup>107</sup>

Ryrie notes that, "One of the major departures, if not the major one, of progressive dispensationalism from traditional dispensationalism and premillennial teaching is that Christ, already inaugurated as the Davidic king at His ascension, is now reigning in heaven on the throne of David."<sup>108</sup> Blasing states, "...the most well-known fact of the New Testament proclamation of Jesus, namely that He is the Christ, is a proclamation that He is the Davidic king, the King of Israel... the consideration of Jesus' Davidic kingship will reveal Him to be the fulfillment of the biblical covenants."<sup>109</sup> Ryrie goes on to discuss seven significant areas in which PD has moved away from traditional DT.<sup>110</sup> The point of this brief discussion of PD is not to interact with the specific differences with DT but to show the definite movement of the system toward the center of the continuum between CT and DT.

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<sup>106</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 192.

<sup>107</sup> Robert L. Thomas "The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 6, no. 1 (1995), 79.

<sup>108</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 196.

<sup>109</sup> Craig A. Blasing and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 175.

<sup>110</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 193-207.

Progressive Covenantalism (hereafter PC) is also a movement away from CT toward of the continuum. As noted in the introduction, PC is a refinement of New Covenant Theology (hereafter NCT). Summarizing NCT, Swanson writes:

New Covenant Theology (NCT) is a relatively new system which, though not yet well defined, attempts to combine strengths of Dispensationalism and Covenant theology and to eliminate the weak points of the two. Its founders have come from Reformed Baptist circles who reacted against key tenets of Covenant Theology in rejecting such doctrines as the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace... NCT's most notable peculiarities include a rejection of Covenant Theology's superstructure, its granting of priority of the NT over the OT, its rejection of OT ethical standards for Christians, and its rejection of infant baptism and the distinction between the visible and invisible church.<sup>111</sup>

In 2002 Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel wrote a book titled *New Covenant Theology* which defends NCT.<sup>112</sup> They state:

The critical point here is this: NT revelation, due to its finality, must be allowed to speak first on every issue that it addresses. This point, of course, is a logical point. No one sins by starting his or her Bible education by reading Genesis, Exodus, etc. first. Nevertheless, the NT holds logical priority over the rest in determining theological questions upon which it speaks.<sup>113</sup>

The priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament is foundational to NCT. To this date, the defining work on New Covenant Theology is the book *Kingdom through Covenant* by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum written in 2012.<sup>114</sup> Four years later in 2016, Wellum joined with Brent E. Parker to edit and publish *Progressive Covenantalism* which is the most recent defense of PC.<sup>115</sup> They state, "This present work is a continuation of KTC. Its purpose is to develop the overall view in more detail and depth."<sup>116</sup> As in any theological system, there are slight variations in viewpoints amongst these three texts. As the three books mentioned above are

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<sup>111</sup> Dennis M. Swanson, "Introduction to new covenant theology." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (September 2007), 149.

<sup>112</sup> Tom Wells and Fred G. Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002).

<sup>113</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant*, 7-8.

<sup>114</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*.

<sup>115</sup> Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*.

<sup>116</sup> Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 4.

the latest works on NCT and the branch called PC, they will be the main texts cited in the cases for and against PC.

### THE CASE FOR PROGRESSIVE COVENANTALISM

PC makes a significant move away from the core beliefs of CT. Commenting on the fact that NCT/PC is parallel to Progressive Dispensationalism in its defining beliefs, Swanson states:

NCT has been characterized as being to Covenant Theology what Progressive Dispensationalism is to Traditional or Classic Dispensationalism. However, this assessment is not accurate. Despite its differences with the traditional or classic position, Progressive Dispensationalism still retains a measure of the core Israel-church discontinuity with the resulting ecclesiological and eschatological schemes essentially intact. On the other hand, NCT entirely abandons all the distinctive fundamentals of Covenant Theology, so that no connection remains or is possible.<sup>117</sup>

Most notably, theologians in the PC system, desiring to ground their views in exegesis, do not recognize the Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace, and Covenant of Redemption since these covenants are not mentioned in the Bible. PC also views the Mosaic Law as a unit that cannot be divided and recognizes that it is no longer operative for Christians today. PC does not find any evidence for infant baptism in the New Testament and rejects the idea that infant baptism is the New Testament parallel of Old Testament circumcision. These issues will now be explored in more detail.

### MOVEMENT TOWARD A MORE EXEGETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE COVENANTS

Gentry and Wellum state:

Biblical theology is concerned with the overall message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole... In making connections between texts,

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<sup>117</sup> Swanson, "Introduction to New Covenant Theology," 158.

biblical theology also attempts to let the biblical text set the agenda... In other words, all theologizing starts with the Bible's own presentation of itself as we seek to live under its authority and teaching and not over it.<sup>118</sup>

They continue, "...we think it best to view biblical theology as primarily a hermeneutical discipline since it is the discipline which seeks to handle correctly the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:14-15). This is why the conclusions of systematic theology must first be grounded in the exegetical conclusions of biblical theology."<sup>119</sup> Gentry and Wellum recognize that CT has some serious exegetical flaws with regard to the covenants and affirm:

Our argument is that the traditional ways of putting together the biblical covenants is not quite right, biblically speaking... we want to argue that the theological conclusions drawn from other ways of 'putting together' the covenants go awry at a number of points and that ultimately, in order to correct this, we must return anew to Scripture and make sure our understanding of the covenants is true to how Scripture unpacks those covenantal relations across redemptive-history.<sup>120</sup>

Wells and Zaspel recognize, "...the renewed emphasis in our day on exegetical and biblical theology as the source of systematics. This has inevitably called into question the way Christians read their creeds and confessions."<sup>121</sup> Later they admit:

While the confessions have tended to control our understanding of Scripture, something even less frequently recognized has added to our difficulty. At least until the present century, our conservative systematic theologies have tended to be expositions of the confessions even when that was not immediately apparent. The reason for this is not far to seek: the systematic theologian doing the writing was usually already bound to a confession by being a member or theologian of a confessional church. He could keep neither his credentials as a minister nor his post as a theological professor if he varied appreciably from the confession of his church.<sup>122</sup>

They summarize, "The central matter is that those who study the Scriptures must have liberty to follow them wherever they may lead. How can we obtain such liberty in a creedal world?"<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 33.

<sup>119</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 36.

<sup>120</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 36-37.

<sup>121</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant*, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant*, 265.

<sup>123</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant*, 266.



NCT and PC have taken a step in the right direction by trying to let the Scripture speak first before appealing to systematics. Wells and Zaspel state, “We are seeing a revival of biblical or exegetical theology, a searching for the meaning of texts and books and testaments prior to, or more accurately, accompanying systematization.”<sup>124</sup> This movement toward exegetical theology caused NCT and PC to reject the idea of the Covenant of Grace. Zaspel writes, “We are not satisfied with the simple ‘one covenant – two administrations’ idea of Covenant Theology. In our judgment this results in a rather ‘flat’ reading of Scripture which fails to appreciate the advance, the distinctively ‘new’ character of this Messianic age.”<sup>125</sup> As opposed to the two, or three, theological covenants of CT, PC sees the proper understanding of the Bible as flowing through the biblical covenants. Gentry and Wellum “...assert that the covenants form the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture and thus it is essential to ‘put them together’ correctly in order to discern accurately the ‘whole counsel of God’ (Acts 20:27).”<sup>126</sup> This movement toward exegesis, based on hermeneutics, has helped PC move away from CT and the dependence on systematic theology over exegesis to a more centered position on the continuum.

### **MOVEMENT AWAY FROM THE MOSAIC LAW AND INFANT BAPTISM**

CT divides the Law of Moses into three parts consisting of the moral, the ceremonial, and the civil. This tripartite division of the Law allows CT to dismiss the ceremonial and civil elements but keep continuity between the Old and New Testament by stressing that the moral

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<sup>124</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant*, 269.

<sup>125</sup> Fred Zaspel, “A Brief Explanation of ‘New Covenant Theology’” n. p. [cited 19 July 2016]. Online: <http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/hermeneutics/nct.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 21. The term “metanarrative of Scripture” is not specifically defined by Gentry and Wellum but they are referring to the “big picture” or the “grand theme” of Scripture. The metanarrative pulls all the parts together to form the main theme. They contend that the Biblical covenants are what the metanarrative is based on.

law is still binding for Christians. DT recognizes the Law, especially when mentioned in the New Testament, to be the entire Mosaic code. McClain writes, "...the law of God in the Bible is one law, including moral, ceremonial and civil elements, and inseparable from its penalties."<sup>127</sup> He goes on to say "...we may say that for one to be 'under the law' in the Biblical sense is to be under the law of God – the entire Mosaic legal system in its indivisible totality – subject to its commands and liable to its penalties."<sup>128</sup> PC moves away from the traditional CT understanding of the usage of the Law in the New Testament toward the Dispensational view. Zaspel writes, "The popular hermeneutical attempt to divide Moses' law into so many parts and then interpret NT statements of the passing of law accordingly is simplistic, and it cannot be maintained exegetically."<sup>129</sup> He continues, "To argue that not the moral (i.e., Decalogue) but only the civil and/or ceremonial aspects of Moses are passed, when Paul says that it is in fact the Old Covenant itself, 'written and engraved in stones,' that has passed away, misses Paul's point. It is Moses *en toto* that he says has gone (2 Cor. 3)."<sup>130</sup> Meyer admits, "Progressive covenantalism's approach to the Mosaic law tilts toward more discontinuity and is closer to progressive dispensationalism...."<sup>131</sup> Explaining how the Law of Moses relates to the church he writes:

One must distinguish between the law of Moses as Scripture and the law of Moses as a law code. The law of Moses has direct authority as Scripture and indirect authority as law; therefore, the law has an indirect application to our lives today. In other words, the mode in which the law of Moses operates today makes all the difference. Mode matters. Covenant theology makes the mode more direct for the Christian, while progressive covenantalism makes the mode less direct.<sup>132</sup>

He further explains, "...a progressive covenantalist approach stresses the escalation of

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<sup>127</sup> Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace* (Winona Lake, BHM Books, 2011), 42.

<sup>128</sup> McClain, *Law*, 43.

<sup>129</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant*, 150.

<sup>130</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant*, 151.

<sup>131</sup> Meyer, "The Mosaic Law," 73.

<sup>132</sup> Meyer, "The Mosaic Law," 91.

progressive revelation with respect to the move from the Mosaic law to the law of Christ.”<sup>133</sup> In stating why the law of Christ is superior to the Mosaic Law he writes:

The law of Christ is a progressive advancement over the Mosaic law in one important respect: the law of Christ more directly and explicitly ties the believer to Christ’s cross. The law of Christ has a greater gospel shape than the law of Moses. The law of Moses was a grace from God and a law of love, but its standard of love falls short of the heights of love found in the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>134</sup>

Thus for PC the Law of Moses has now been replaced by the law of Christ. This is movement toward a more Dispensational understanding of the relationship between the two Testaments.

Infant baptism, or paedobaptism, is a view CT holds based on the implications of the theological covenant of grace. Gentry and Wellum state, “...covenant theology...contends that ...the basic underlying meaning and significance of circumcision and baptism is essentially the same thing.”<sup>135</sup> Since circumcision is the sign of entrance into the covenant community in the Old Testament, and it is performed on Jewish children, then correspondingly, baptism is the sign of entrance into the covenant community in the New Testament and should likewise be performed on the children of New Testament believers. This is sometimes referred to as the “genealogical principle” and is based on Gen 17:7-11 where it is stated that the covenant will be between Abraham and his descendants. In Gen 17:10 God commands, “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.” Because CT sees the Abrahamic covenant in direct continuity with the New Covenant they believe circumcision is replaced by baptism. Gentry and Wellum expand:

[Covenant theologians] have repeatedly argued that their view is an implication drawn from their overall understanding of the ‘covenant of grace.’ In many ways, all other arguments for infant baptism are secondary to this overall line of reasoning. In their

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<sup>133</sup> Meyer, “The Mosaic Law,” 94.

<sup>134</sup> Meyer, “The Mosaic Law,” 95.

<sup>135</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 77.

mind, if one establishes the basic continuity of the ‘covenant of grace’ across the Canon, then their view has been demonstrated. It does not bother them that in the New Testament there is no express command to baptize infants and/or no record on any clear case of infant baptism.<sup>136</sup>

A significant problem with infant baptism is that children who have not professed their faith in Christ are nevertheless in the covenant community, the church. Against this idea Gentry and Wellum note,

...the church must be viewed as a *regenerate, believing* community and not a ‘mixed’ group. The New Testament knows nothing of one who is ‘in Christ’ who is not effectually called by the Father, born of the Spirit, justified, holy, and awaiting glorification.... This is why the New Testament does not apply baptism, the sign of the new covenant, to one who has not professed faith in Christ and testified that they have repented of their sins and believed in Christ.<sup>137</sup>

Mead believes that a better understanding is to see circumcision of the flesh as a type, “...foreshadowing a greater and better heart circumcision, which would bring about the devotion to God signified by the sign.”<sup>138</sup> He concludes:

Baptism, therefore, is not a fulfillment or replacement of circumcision in the flesh, but rather it is an external sign or testimony to the heart circumcision of the member (male or female!) of the new covenant. As a result, it should not be applied to anyone who has not undergone the circumcision of the heart and who has not repented of sin and believed and confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord.<sup>139</sup>

PC sees baptism as a New Covenant sign “...which communicates the grace of God to those who have faith, something which could not be said of circumcision of old.”<sup>140</sup>

In conclusion, NCT/PC makes a strong case against CT in several critical areas. The emphasis on exegesis and biblical theology as the basis for systematic theology is to be commended. This emphasis leads PC to reject the theological covenants of CT. Understanding

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<sup>136</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 694.

<sup>137</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 697.

<sup>138</sup> John D. Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 157.

<sup>139</sup> Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh,” 157.

<sup>140</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 702.

the Law of Moses as a unified code and removing it as binding as a legal system on New Covenant believers is a positive movement toward discontinuity. Its recognition of baptism to be for believers rather than for infants better explains the New Testament pattern. PC also sees “...Sunday as Sabbath, along with tithing...as remnants of the Old Covenant system that some Christians have mistakenly carried over into the New Covenant era.”<sup>141</sup> Overall, PC makes a strong case against CT in the above areas.

### THE DEFICIENCIES OF PROGRESSIVE COVENANTALISM

Although there are areas to be commended in PC and its movement away from CT, Swanson notes that PC “...nonetheless retains the basic hermeneutical concept of the [CT] system.”<sup>142</sup> PC softens the Israel-church distinction but still sees all the covenant promises fulfilled by Christ and by extension the church. Its hermeneutic of allowing the New Testament to supersede the Old Testament and thus change the plain contextual meaning of the covenant promises to Israel is much in line with CT. This hermeneutic causes PC to misinterpret several key Old Testament and New Testament texts. There are also several key passages that are ignored or simply brushed aside without comment. Because of its continuity with CT, PC ultimately compromises the clarity and simplicity of the gospel. PC also retains a strong Reformed-Lordship view of soteriology. These areas will now be explored in more detail.

### A FAULTY HERMENEUTIC

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<sup>141</sup> Swanson, “Introduction To New Covenant Theology,” 162.

<sup>142</sup> Swanson, “Introduction To New Covenant Theology,” 160.

Wells clearly states the priority of the New Testament when he says, "...we must certainly read the rest of Scripture in light of the apex of revelation, which is the NT. Read it all me must! But which testament controls our thinking and which we use for fine-tuning is the all-important consideration."<sup>143</sup> Gentry and Wellum explain, "...given the fact that we live in light of the achievement of Christ's glorious work, we must apply the entire Scripture to us, including the previous covenants, through the lens of the achievement of our Lord and the new covenant realities he inaugurates."<sup>144</sup> Ideas such as "interpreting Scripture as a *unified* revelation,"<sup>145</sup> reading texts "in a 'thick' way,"<sup>146</sup> recognizing the "'fuller meaning' of Scripture or what has been labeled *sensus plenior*"<sup>147</sup> are all ways of saying the Old Testament must be interpreted in light of the New Testament.

Gentry and Wellum present what they call "The Three Horizons of Biblical Interpretation"<sup>148</sup> as an explanation and defense of the hermeneutic of PC. The first is what they call the "...*textual horizon* or the immediate context."<sup>149</sup> They explain:

...biblical hermeneutics has sought to read texts according to the grammatical-historical method, seeking to discern God's intent through the human author's intent by setting the text in its historical setting, understanding the rules of language the author is using, analyzing the syntax, textual variants, word meanings, figures of speech, and the literary structure, including the genre of the text. By paying careful attention to all of these areas, a reader discovers what the authors are seeking to communicate in their texts.<sup>150</sup>

Most Dispensationalists would agree with the above description of a literal hermeneutic.

However, PC does not stop here. Gentry and Wellum point out, "it is important to note that our interpretation of texts does not terminate here, which leads to the second horizon of biblical

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<sup>143</sup> Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, 14.

<sup>144</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 25.

<sup>145</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 84.

<sup>146</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 85.

<sup>147</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 85.

<sup>148</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 92.

<sup>149</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 93.

<sup>150</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 94.

interpretation.”<sup>151</sup> This second horizon of biblical interpretation is what they call “*The epochal horizon*.”<sup>152</sup> They explain, “Here we seek to read texts in light of where they are in redemptive-history, or where they are in terms of the unfolding plan of God... locating texts in their place in God’s unfolding plan helps illuminate *intertextual* relationships between early and later revelation.”<sup>153</sup> In relation to the covenants they write, “...one must locate each covenant in its place in redemptive-history and discern how it relates to what preceded it and what comes after it. Unless we read texts in terms of the ‘textual’ and ‘epochal’ horizons we will misread Scripture and fail to understand how the *parts* of God’s plan fit with the *whole*.”<sup>154</sup> Most Dispensationalists would label this progressive revelation and would not be in much disagreement.

The third horizon of biblical interpretation they defend is called the “*canonical horizon*.”<sup>155</sup> By this they mean that texts must be interpreted in light of the entire Canon. They explain, “...it is only when we read the Scripture in terms of the canonical horizon that we are interpreting it in a truly ‘biblical’ manner – ‘according to its truest, fullest, *divine* intention.”<sup>156</sup> Dispensationalists will notice in this ‘horizon’ a subtle movement away from a literal hermeneutic. The terms ‘truest,’ ‘fullest,’ and ‘divine’ intention hint that the author’s intended meaning might be missed or that there might be a hidden meaning that is not revealed in a literal reading of the text. Under this ‘canonical horizon’ Gentry and Wellum discuss the importance of typology to their hermeneutic. They define typology:

Typology as a New Testament hermeneutical endeavor is the study of the Old Testament salvation historical realities or ‘types’ (persons, events, institutions) which God has

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<sup>151</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 94.

<sup>152</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 94.

<sup>153</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 94.

<sup>154</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 98.

<sup>155</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 99.

<sup>156</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 99.

specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their intensified antitypical fulfilment aspects (inaugurated and consummated) in New Testament salvation history.<sup>157</sup>

Noting the prophetic and predictive element of typology they state, “God intended the ‘type’ to point beyond itself to its fulfilment or ‘antitype’ in a later epoch of redemptive-history.”<sup>158</sup> In their view this typology “is an *organic* relationship ordained by God so that specific types do in fact point beyond themselves to their fulfilment in Christ.”<sup>159</sup> Gentry and Wellum state, “...we are convinced that a crucial point of division between dispensational and covenant theology is over the nature of typology and how these typological structures are related to the biblical covenants.”<sup>160</sup> In their view the covenant promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ. They explain that, “...in order to grasp the unfolding nature of the biblical covenants we must see that all of the covenants, including the various covenant mediators, find their ultimate *telos* and antitypical fulfillment in Christ and him alone.”<sup>161</sup> Applying this principle they explain why, in their view, the church has replaced national Israel in the application of the New Covenant:

Israel also anticipates the coming of the true Son, the true Israel, the true servant, the true vine, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ...Furthermore ...we as God’s people participate in the typological pattern by virtue of our relationship to Christ... It is in this way that the new covenant promises given to the ‘house of Israel’ and the ‘house of Judah’ (Jer. 31:31) is applied to the church. Christ, as the antitypical fulfillment of Israel, takes on the role of Israel, and by faith union in him, his work becomes ours as his new covenant people.<sup>162</sup>

PC, unlike CT, recognizes that the church is not the continuation of Israel but is something new.

However, it is not new in the dispensational sense; it is new in the redemptive-historical sense that, now that the last Adam and the true Israel have come in the fullness of time, both Jew and Gentile now become the ‘one new man’ in Christ in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise (Eph. 2:11-22). In a related way, when it comes to the land, like the

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<sup>157</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 103.

<sup>158</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 103.

<sup>159</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 104.

<sup>160</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 121.

<sup>161</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 120.

<sup>162</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 106.



nation of Israel, it too is typological – looking back to Eden and creation yet also looking forward to that which it points, namely, its antitypical fulfilment in the new creation – which our Lord Jesus has now inaugurated in the new covenant and which he will consummate when he returns again in glory and power.<sup>163</sup>

Reading the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament with typology as the trump card causes PC to dismiss the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel. Pettegrew states, “In actuality, the NT is used like the ‘presidential power of veto’ over legitimate exegetical results in OT passages.”<sup>164</sup> He continues:

Such an inadequate hermeneutic of the OT impacts specifically New Covenant Theology’s understanding of the New Covenant... A confusing hermeneutic such as this leads to a confusing biblical theology, and consequently to an inadequate systematic theology... [In contrast] The consistent use of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic leads to an understanding that the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants made with Israel were declared to be everlasting and irrevocable. Moreover the NT clearly teaches that a gracious and faithful God has not cast off Israel even though the nation was often disobedient and unbelieving.<sup>165</sup>

Although PC has tried to move toward more discontinuity between Israel and the church, its replacement of Israel by the church, as found in Christ, ends up aligning with the replacement theology of CT. This stems from the inconsistent hermeneutic of reading the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament and seeing all of Israel’s national promises as already fulfilled in Christ through the church.

### **FAULTY INTERPRETATION OF KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS**

The scope of this review does not allow for detailed exegesis of all the biblical texts and interpretations that PC puts forth in defense of its conclusions. However, there are several texts that need to be addressed in relation to a PC understanding, or misunderstanding. Also, there are

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<sup>163</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 121.

<sup>164</sup> Pettegrew, “New Covenant,” 196.

<sup>165</sup> Pettegrew, “New Covenant,” 198.

several key biblical passages that PC fails to address. Commenting on Gentry and Wellum's presentation in *Kingdom through Covenant*, Vlach writes, "Key passages that are not adequately discussed include Matthew 24-25; Luke 1-2; and Acts 1-3, etc. There is very little discussion of Romans 9-11 and no treatment of the key millennial passage of Revelation 19-20."<sup>166</sup>

Jeremiah 31:31-40 is the key Old Testament passage referring to the New Covenant. It is clearly stated in verse 31 and restated in verse 33 that the covenant pertains to "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah." In verses 35 and 36 the Lord says that the fixed order of the universe will depart before He will allow Israel to cease from being a nation before Him. God further emphasizes this fact in verses 37 and 38 when He states that the heavens and earth would have to be searched out before He would cast off all the offspring of Israel. The Lord even specifically links this promise to the physical city of Jerusalem in verse 38. Gentry and Wellum recognize this but quickly turn to Luke 22:20 to change the recipients from Israel to all followers of Jesus. They state:

...it is interesting to note that Jesus gives this meal to his disciples. That is to say, the new covenant is not made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah interpreted as all of Judaism indiscriminately in the first century, but rather it is interpreted specifically as those who are followers of Jesus, regardless of ethnicity, Jew first and, later on, also non-Jew.<sup>167</sup>

The shed blood of Jesus is clearly the basis of the New Covenant but to immediately wipe away national promises to Israel and reinterpret it as fulfilled in Jesus ignores the clear statements of the passage. Also, the phrase, "Behold, days are coming" is used at least five times in Jeremiah when referring to God's future blessings upon Israel (16:14-15; 30:3; 31:31; 31:38; 33:14).

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<sup>166</sup> Michael J. Vlach, "Have they found a better way?: an analysis of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through covenant*." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 24, no. 1 (2013): 11.

<sup>167</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 497.

Jeremiah 16:14-15; 30:3; and 33:14-16 specifically tie these blessings to Israel being restored to her land, Jerusalem dwelling in safety, and a “righteous Branch of David” executing justice and righteousness on the earth. Clearly Jer 31:31-34 is a similar promise to Israel for future restoration and blessings under the New Covenant.

Daniel 9:24-27 is another passage on which Gentry and Wellum spend a whole chapter, thirty-three pages, trying to remove a future fulfillment for Israel. An emphasis is put on the “literary structure”<sup>168</sup> and the “role of the Davidic King in ending the exile.”<sup>169</sup> A lengthy discussion of the relation of “Messiah the Prince” in verse 25 to the “prince who is to come” in verse 26 is presented to prove that both references refer to Jesus.<sup>170</sup> They summarize, “...the context strongly suggests that *nāagíd* [prince] in verses 25 and 26 refers to the same individual... [and] the larger literary structure of Daniel as a whole is against the ‘evil prince’ view.”<sup>171</sup> This interpretation is put forth so that all the events described in Dan 9:24-27 can be fulfilled in Christ without a view of a coming evil prince in an eschatological context with Israel. What is interesting is that they do not address the New Testament passages that are against their view. They state, “A problematic passage is Jesus’ reference to ‘the abomination of desolation’ in Mark 13:14, which cannot be considered in depth at this point.”<sup>172</sup> There is no attempt at all to deal with the passage. Even more problematic is the parallel passage in Matt 24:15-16, which they do not mention, where Jesus says, “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” Vlach rightly notes:

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<sup>168</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 532.

<sup>169</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 541.

<sup>170</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 551-

<sup>171</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 562.

<sup>172</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 561-562.

This event causes terrible consequences for the people of Israel. This is a great persecution that comes upon Israel; it is not caused by Israel. This highly negative event that happens to Israel that Jesus refers to fits well with a negative event described in Dan 9:27. This is a case where a proper canonical approach informs us that Daniel had a negative person in mind in Dan 9:27.<sup>173</sup>

Also, Rev 13:5 refers to the beast that speaks blasphemies and has authority to act for forty-two months. Forty-two months is three and one half years which parallels directly to Dan 9:27 and Matt 24:15. It is in the middle of the seventieth week, or three and one half years, in which the abomination of desolation desecrates the holy place. Paul also references this event in 2 Thess 2:3-4. Gentry and Wellum are guilty of not following their own hermeneutic of *canonical horizon*: letting the New Testament shed light on the Old Testament. Daniel 9 clearly is written to Israel and the eschatological implications of verse 27 make much more sense in a dispensational scheme.

Romans 9 through 11 is a critical New Testament passage dealing with Israel's future.

Commenting on the imagery of the olive tree in Rom 11:25-27, Gentry and Wellum state:

What this means is that the new humanity and restored Israel is based on faith and covenant relationship to the Lord rather than on ethnicity. During the period in which the exiles are brought home, a large number of 'Gentile exiles' (to use Jeremiah's own imagery) will be brought home toward the end. But the Jewish exiles will be *brought back* to the one olive tree. We must interpret 'all Israel' within the context of Paul's teaching in Romans 11. There is no separate future for physical Israel outside of the church – the only humanity to inhabit the new creation.<sup>174</sup>

It is interesting is how little Gentry and Wellum actually deal with the context of Rom 9 through 11. They fail to mention Rom 9:3-5 which speaks of ethnic Israel as the recipient of the covenant promises. Hodges correctly notes:

First of all, those whom he calls 'brothers' and 'fellow-countrymen according to the flesh' (v 3) **are Israelites**. This special designation for his 'fellow-countrymen' originated in the renaming of Jacob by God in Gen 32:28. 'Israel' thus becomes a national designation redolent with the implication of special divine favor. It is striking

<sup>173</sup> Vlach, "Have they found a better way," 22.

<sup>174</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 501.

that Paul employs the term *Israel/Israelite* no less than twelve times in Romans 9-11 and nowhere else in this epistle. The name by which they were known among Gentiles (*Ioudaioi*, 'Jews') is used in all references to them in the other chapters (9:24 also has one reference to 'Jews').<sup>175</sup>

The context of Rom 9 through 11 clearly deals with Israel and their place in the program of God.

Contrary to teaching that God is finished with Israel, Paul repeatedly makes the point that Israel has a future. Hodges elaborates:

...many have claimed in one way or another that Israel's special relationship to God is over. This is often softened into the concept of a new Israel which the largely Gentile Church supposedly fulfills. But Paul knows nothing of this. His concern here is not about a so called spiritual Israel, but about the real physical nation that goes by that name. No suggestion of anything like a spiritual counterpart to Israel can be discovered anywhere in chaps. 9-11.<sup>176</sup>

Contrary to Gentry and Wellum's idea that there is no future for physical Israel, Paul states, "God has not rejected His people has He? May it never be!" (Rom 11:1). Concerning Israel's future restoration Paul writes, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved..." (Rom 11:25-26). Paul puts the certainty of Israel's restoration on the character and promises of God when he states, "...from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Rom 11:28-29). The rejection of Israel's future as a nation and her role in the kingdom by PC is based on its theological assumptions rather than sound exegesis.

In *Kingdom through Covenant*, an eight hundred plus page book that purposes to explain and defend NCT/PC, what is curious is the number of passages that are not addressed. Many of

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<sup>175</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance From Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 258.

<sup>176</sup> Hodges, *Romans*, 318.

these biblical texts seem to clearly contradict NCT/PC, yet the authors do not offer any explanation. The following passages are given as examples.

The angel announces to Mary in Luke 1:30-33 that her son will be given the “throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.” Clearly the coming of Jesus is linked to the Davidic Covenant and a kingdom reign over national Israel.

Acts 1:3-7 shows that the apostles understood the kingdom promises to be for Israel. Verse 3 states, “To these He also presented himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” After hearing Jesus’ command to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, in verse 6 they asked Him the question, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” They clearly understood the coming kingdom to be for Israel. Jesus does not rebuke or correct them for the question, but instead tells them that the time of the implementation of the kingdom is not for them to know. It is hard to imagine that the apostles, taught directly by Jesus for forty days, specifically about the kingdom of God, would have missed the meaning of His teaching.

Revelation 20:1-9 is another significant passage that speaks of the 1000-year millennial reign of Christ that is not addressed by Gentry and Wellum, Wells and Zaspel, or Wellum and Parker, the authors of the three most recent books on NCT/PC. Several questions need to be addressed. If we are now in the spiritual kingdom how can Satan be bound and not deceiving the nations when he presently does that very thing (1 Peter 5:8)? Who are the ones who refused the mark of the beast and are slain and then come to life to rule for 1000 years? This seems to clearly speak of the tribulation period that Revelation has portrayed leading into the millennial kingdom

promised to Israel. Verses 7-9 speak of the events following the 1000 years and refer to a great army that comes against “the beloved city” which refers to Jerusalem. A dispensational, premillennial understanding of this passage, which sees Christ ruling over restored Israel and all the nations during the millennial kingdom, is the only interpretation that makes sense. Vlach nicely summarizes the dispensational view:

The dispensational view is that Jesus is coming again to rule and bless the nations of the earth (see Psalm 2; 110; Rev 2:26-27). The land of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital, will function as the headquarters of Jesus’ international reign (see Zech 14:9). Both the Old Testament (Isa 19:24-25; Zechariah 14) and the New Testament (Rev 2:26-27; 21:21, 24; 22:2) affirm the presence of plural nations in the eschaton. So as God takes back this planet for His purposes, Jesus will use a restored nation Israel, with its geographical boundaries, as a beachhead or platform to bless all the nations of the earth. This will occur in an intermediate kingdom as described in Rev 20:1-6, yet the interaction between God and the nations will continue on into the eternal state as well (see Rev 21:24, 26; 22:2).<sup>177</sup>

In conclusion, PC fails to defend its position exegetically. Its theology is forced on many texts and it fails to adequately address others.

### AN UNCLEAR GOSPEL

Because of its strong ties to CT and Reformed Theology, PC spiritualizes many texts that are written to Israel concerning the tribulation period. Because of this connection PC fails to present a clear gospel of grace. CT and NCT/PC are both amillennial in their eschatology which causes them to misinterpret several key texts. Anderson traces this movement from premillennial to amillennial thinking back to Augustine.<sup>178</sup> He notes, “...when Augustine became amillennial,

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<sup>177</sup> Vlach, “Have they found a better way,” 16.

<sup>178</sup> David R. Anderson, *Free Grace soteriology* (n.c. Xulon Press, 2010), 295-324. In Appendix A, “The Soteriological Impact of Augustine’s Change From Premillennialism to Amillennialism,” Anderson traces Augustine’s movement from premillennial theology to Amillennial theology and the effects it had on his soteriology.

this major change in his eschatology affected other parts of his theology, namely his soteriology.”<sup>179</sup> Anderson points out, “...in the soteriological writings of Augustine, one verse has center stage. This verse is practically the point of departure for Augustine’s understanding of soteriology... It is none other than Matthew 24:13 – ‘But he who endures to the end shall be saved.’”<sup>180</sup> Because Matt 24:13 could not mean salvation in the sense of deliverance from the tribulation period and enduring until the end of that period, “the only interpretive option open to him was a spiritual one, so he understood the verse to mean only those believers who persevere in their Christian lives until the end of their physical lives will be able to go to heaven (saved).<sup>181</sup> This led eventually to the fifth point of Calvinism: perseverance of the saints. For believers to know that they are truly elect they must persevere, or evidence certain fruits in their life until they die. Anderson notes, “John Calvin, who began teaching assurance as the essence of faith, wound up teaching no man could tell if he were elect or reprobate until he died. Matt 24:13 remained a cornerstone of the soteriology of the Reformers.”<sup>182</sup> Gentry and Wellum clearly state their Reformed view when they write:

What is the scope, extent, and design of the new covenant? Is it a general covenant made with everybody, making salvation possible for everyone, if they will take it? Or, is it a limited covenant made only with certain men and assuring their eternal salvation? Whom does our Lord, as the high priest of the new covenant, represent in his death and apply the fruits of that covenant to? Does he represent all people universally, or does he represent a particular people who are effectively brought to salvation and receive the benefits of the new covenant? From our exposition of the new covenant, we affirm the latter. To answer in any other way is to remove the work of Christ from its new covenant context, which is precisely the problem with general atonement views.<sup>183</sup>

Concerning the extent of the atonement they write:

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<sup>179</sup> Anderson, *Free Grace*, 295.

<sup>180</sup> Anderson, *Free Grace*, 303.

<sup>181</sup> Anderson, *Free Grace*, 305.

<sup>182</sup> Anderson, *Free Grace*, 321.

<sup>183</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 679-680.



Was the intent of the atonement specially to render certain the salvation of the elect, in terms not only of putting away the sins of the elect but also of ensuring ‘that they would be brought to faith through regeneration, and kept in faith for glory, and that this is what it was intended to achieve’ (the Calvinist, particular redemption view)? It is our conviction that [this]...view is correct. Christ died for the purpose of saving only those to whom he actually applies the benefits of his work.<sup>184</sup>

The statement “kept in faith for glory” is key to their system. If someone is not continuing in the faith, then his or her eternal salvation comes into question. The practical fallout is none can know for certain that they have eternal life until they die.

Chapter 7 of *Progressive Covenantalism* deals with the warning passages of Hebrews and the New Covenant Community. Cowan proposes what he calls the “means of salvation view.”<sup>185</sup>

He summarizes this view:

This view argues that the warning passages of the NT ‘are addressed to believers, and they are threatened with eternal destruction...if they commit apostasy’. But genuine believers will not apostatize. Truly, believers must heed the warnings to be saved. But the warnings are themselves a means of preserving grace God uses to ensure the perseverance of his saints.<sup>186</sup>

He continues,

According to the broad NT witness, believers in Jesus – both new converts and experienced Christians – are never assured they will inherit the kingdom of God regardless of their actions. Rather apostolic teaching regularly includes exhortations to persevere in order to obtain eternal life. This is not a denial that Christians now possess eternal life; instead, it is an acknowledgment that the NT presents salvation with both present and future dimensions. This ‘already-but-not-yet character of salvation’ is a reality because the cross and resurrection of Christ ‘constitute the invasion of God’s end-time work into the present age.’ While the letter to the Hebrews *primarily* presents salvation as a future reward, the letter also reflects the ‘inaugurated eschatology’ of the rest of the NT... How does one obtain the prize of salvation? The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is the *objective* basis of salvation, but the *subjective* means of salvation is the individual exercise of faith in Christ. Christians must persevere in faith to the end; they must ‘run the race’ to finally receive eternal life.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom*, 671.

<sup>185</sup> Christopher W. Cowan, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews and the New Covenant Community,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 199.

<sup>186</sup> Cowan, “The Warning Passages,” 199.

<sup>187</sup> Cowan, “The Warning Passages,” 199-200.

This is a sad understanding that marries justification and sanctification. How can individuals possess eternal life now but not know they possess it because they have to exercise faith for the rest of their life? No matter how one dresses it up, this line of thinking finally boils down to works salvation. This is in opposition to Paul's statement in Rom 4:4-5, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness."

NCT/PC has followed the path of Reformed Theology by confusing justification and sanctification and making faithfulness to the end of life a test of final salvation. Although these systems use the phrase "faith alone in Christ alone for eternal life," in reality this phrase is stripped of any real meaning in their "already – not yet" confusion about justification.

## CONCLUSION

Progressive Covenantalism as a system attempts to be a *via media* or middle ground between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology emerged as systems soon after the Reformation. Both present a biblical philosophy of history, yet their conclusions are very different due to differences in their hermeneutics. Covenant Theology sees continuity between the Old and New Testaments and therefore one people of God who are the same throughout the Scriptures. Israel and the church are one, and the promises to Israel in the Old Testament are fulfilled and received by the church in the New Testament. Covenant Theologians base their system on two or three theological covenants that, although not found in the Bible, are logical deductions from their system. Their hermeneutic relies on interpreting the Old Testament by the New Testament and spiritualizes the

literal promises given to Israel. This affects their understanding of the Mosaic Law, infant baptism, the Sabbath, and God's future plans for the nation of Israel. There will be no promised kingdom for Israel on the earth with the Messiah reigning on the literal throne of David. Instead they are amillennial in their eschatology and see the reign of Jesus as being currently in the heart of believers. The second coming of Christ will not be to set up His kingdom on earth, but to inaugurate the new heavens and new earth.

Dispensational Theology, on the other hand, sees discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Based on a literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutic Dispensational Theologians believe the Old Testament promises to Israel are not abated by the New Testament. The church is not Israel but a special group consisting of Jews and Gentiles that was not foreseen in the Old Testament. Because of national Israel's rejection of their Messiah, the church age is a parenthesis in God's time table for Israel and one day Israel will be restored and receive the covenant promises of the Old Testament. Christ is not currently ruling on David's throne in a spiritual sense but is seated at the right hand of the Father's throne until the time of His return to set up the millennial kingdom. Dispensational Theology sees the glory of God as the underlying purpose of history.

Progressive Dispensationalism is a recent movement within the Dispensational camp that moves more toward the center of the continuum between Covenant and Dispensational Theology. Several new ideas are introduced. Christ is believed to be actively reigning in heaven on the throne of David, and the overall purpose of history is Christological with redemption being the main focus. They use what is labeled as a "complementary hermeneutic" which allows the New Testament to introduce additions and even changes to Old Testament revelation. While

Progressive Dispensationalists blur the distinction between Israel and the church, they still see a literal future for Israel as a nation in the millennium.

Progressive Covenantalism moves away from Covenant Theology and toward the center of the continuum. One of its major differences is the rejection of the three theological covenants that are foundational to Covenant Theology. PC theologians introduce more discontinuity by rejecting the Mosaic Law as binding on the New Testament believer and also by rejecting the practice of infant baptism. Because their hermeneutic relies on interpreting the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament, Progressive Covenantalists see the Old Testament covenant promises fulfilled, in full, in Christ and by association, the church. They do recognize national Israel, but Israel is now part of the church, and the promised blessings of the Old Testament covenants are fulfilled spiritually for them because they are members of the body of Christ. Like Covenant theologians, Progressive Covenantalists are amillennial and see no future earthly kingdom and land promise for Israel.

Progressive Covenantalism attempts to reach a middle ground between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. However, because of an inconsistent hermeneutic, key biblical texts are misinterpreted, which leads to a faulty eschatology but more tragically, an unclear gospel. Their ties to Covenant Theology and Reformed Theology cause Progressive Covenantalists to blur the distinction between justification and sanctification. Faithfulness to the end of life becomes the ultimate test of salvation. Their attempt to be more biblical in their exegesis and their desire to move toward a middle ground is to be commended, but in the final analysis Progressive Covenantalism is really the same old song of Covenant and Reformed Theology, just in a new key with a few new verses.

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