Contents

Chapter One

What Is Dispensationalism?

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Nine-year-old Danny came bursting out of Sunday school like a wild stallion. His eyes were darting in every direction as he tried to locate either mom or dad. Finally, after a quick search, he grabbed his daddy by the leg and yelled, "Man, that story of Moses and all those people crossing the Red Sea was great!" His father looked down, smiled, and asked the boy to tell him all about it.

"Well, the Israelites got out of Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army chased after them. So the Jews ran as fast as they could until they got to the Red Sea. The Egyptian Army was getting closer and closer. So Moses got on his walkie-talkie and told the Israeli Air Force to bomb the Egyptians. While that was happening the Israeli Navy built a pontoon bridge so the people could cross over. They made it!"

By now old dad was shocked. "Is *that* the way they taught you the story?"

"Well, no, not exactly," Danny admitted, "but if I told it to you the way they told it to us, you'd *never* believe it, Dad."

That is the way that many believe dispensationalists treat prophetic Scripture. They have to jazz it up to make it believable. But

nothing could be further from the truth. With a few fringe exceptions, dispensationalists want to say no more and no less than what the Bible reports. The design of this chapter is to set the record straight about dispensationalism.

Much has been written about dispensationalism in general and Futuristic Premillennialism in particular. In order to accurately understand dispensationalism, one must have a proper perspective on what this theological approach actually involves. So, this chapter will set forth dispensationalism's essential or foundational characteristics. These beliefs define the heart of dispensational theology—perspectives that differentiate dispensationalism from other systems of theology, especially Covenant theology. In order to accomplish this, we will survey how leading representatives of dispensationalism have defined dispensational theology, followed by a list of unique features that comprise the core beliefs of dispensationalism.

Recent Background to Dispensationalism

In his 1965 book *Dispensationalism Today*, Charles Ryrie offered three points that he considered to be the essentials or *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: (1) a distinction between Israel and the church, (2) an approach to hermeneutics called literal interpretation, and (3) the belief that the underlying purpose of God in the world is God's glory.[1] Ryrie's *sine qua non* was well received by most dispensationalists and was often used as a starting point for explaining dispensationalism. Opponents also grappled with Ryrie's findings and used them as starting points for critiquing dispensational theology.

In his 1988 article "Systems of Discontinuity," John Feinberg presented six "essentials of dispensationalism": (1) belief that the Bible refers to multiple senses of terms like "Jew" and "seed of Abraham"; (2) an approach to hermeneutics that emphasizes that the Old Testament be taken on its own terms and not reinterpreted in light of the New Testament; (3) belief that Old Testament promises will be fulfilled with national Israel; (4) belief in a distinctive future for ethnic Israel; (5) belief that the church is a distinctive organism; and (6) a

philosophy of history that emphasizes not just soteriology and spiritual issues but social, economic, and political issues as well.[2]

Although not giving a list of "essentials," Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock offered a list of "common features" of dispensationalism in their 1993 book *Progressive Dispensationalism*. These features included: (1) the authority of Scripture; (2) dispensations; (3) uniqueness of the church; (4) practical significance of the universal church; (5) significance of biblical prophecy; (6) Futurist Premillennialism; (7) imminent return of Christ; and (8) a national future for Israel.[3]

Not all the characteristics mentioned in the above lists, particularly those of Blaising and Bock, are unique to dispensationalism. Many nondispensationalists, for instance, believe in the authority of Scripture, dispensations, and the significance of biblical prophecy. Some nondispensationalists also believe in Premillennialism—holding that a future millennial kingdom will be established with the second coming of Christ. George Ladd, for instance, held to Historic Premillennialism while also arguing against Futuristic Premillennialism. Thus, being a Premillennialist does not necessarily make one a dispensationalist.

Ryrie's claim that a defining mark of dispensationalism is belief that the underlying purpose of God in the world is God's glory has been controversial. When properly understood, Ryrie correctly pointed out that dispensationalists have a broader understanding of God's purposes in the world than nondispensationalists who often focus mostly on the doctrine of salvation. But the wording Ryrie offered was not helpful. Many nondispensationalists take the glory of God seriously, and to them Ryrie seemed to claim that dispensationalists valued the glory of God more than nondispensationalists. But telling a Covenant theologian that he did not emphasize the glory of God as much as a dispensationalist was not received well. So while there was a sense in which Ryrie was correct, his wording was not as clear as it could have been. John Feinberg was more precise when he pointed out that dispensationalists promote a philosophy of history that emphasizes the *spiritual* and *physical* implications of God's purposes more so than their nondispensational counterparts. Dispensationalists emphasize the fulfillment of both the

spiritual and physical promises of the biblical covenants.[4] In this sense, dispensationalists are more holistic in their understanding of God's kingdom purposes than many nondispensationalists.

When examined closely, however, the lists of Ryrie, Feinberg, and Blaising and Bock reveal three important marks of dispensationalism. First, all mention the uniqueness of the church as a characteristic of dispensationalism. Though disagreement may exist on some details of this distinction, dispensationalists are agreed that the church began at Pentecost (see Acts 2) and is not to be identified as Israel.[5] Thus, all dispensationalists reject "replacement theology" or "supersessionism" in which the church is said to have permanently *replaced* or *superseded* the nation Israel as the people of God.

Second, Ryrie, Feinberg, and Blaising and Bock point out that dispensationalists believe in a future for the nation Israel. Dispensationalists assert that Old Testament promises and covenants made with Israel will be fulfilled in the future. Though dispensationalists may disagree as to how much the church also participates in the Old Testament promises and covenants, they are agreed that Israel will experience a future salvation and restoration.

Both Ryrie and Feinberg mention a third area—a dispensational approach to hermeneutics—as somehow being distinctive to dispensationalism. For Ryrie, dispensationalists interpret the Bible in a consistently literal (i.e., normal) manner while non-dispensationalists do not.[6]

Feinberg claims that Ryrie was "too simplistic" in stating the matter this way.[7] According to Feinberg, the issue of hermeneutics "is not an easy issue," and he points out that many nondispensational theologians claim to interpret the Bible literally. Their literalism, though, differs at points from the literal approach of dispensationalists. Thus, for Feinberg, "The difference is not literalism v. non-literalism, but different understandings of what constitutes literal hermeneutics."[8]

According to Feinberg, the difference between dispensational and non-dispensational hermeneutics is found in three areas: (1) the relation of the progress of revelation to the priority of one testament over the other; (2) the understanding and implications of the New Testa-

ment's use of the Old Testament; and (3) the understanding and implications of typology.[9] In sum, the main difference rests in how dispensationalists and nondispensationalists view the relationship between the testaments.

Feinberg's analysis is accurate. The main difference between dispensationalists and nondispensationalists on the matter of hermeneutics is not simply "literal" versus "spiritual" interpretation, but how each camp views the relationship between the testaments. As Herbert Bateman puts it, the central issue is "testament priority."[10] Testament priority is "a presuppositional preference of one testament over the other that determines a person's literal historical-grammatical hermeneutical starting point."[11]

An interpreter's testament-priority assumptions are especially significant when interpreting how New Testament authors use the Old Testament. Dispensationalists want to maintain a reference point for meaning in the Old Testament. They desire to give justice to the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers as discovered by historical-grammatical hermeneutics. Nondispensationalists, on the other hand, emphasize the New Testament as their reference point for understanding the Old Testament. In other words, they start with the New Testament to understand the Old Testament. Feinberg explains the difference:

> Nondispensationalists begin with NT teaching as having priority and then go back to the OT. Dispensationalists often begin with the OT, but wherever they begin they demand that the OT be taken on its own terms rather than reinterpreted in the light of the NT.[12]

Thus, nondispensationalists start with the New Testament to understand Old Testament prophetic passages. And the New Testament is the lens for viewing the Old Testament. This is what often leads to a "non-literal" understanding of Old Testament texts since nondispensationalists believe the New Testament sanctions less than literal understandings of Old Testament passages, especially prophetic

texts about Israel. In other words, for nondispensationalists, a literal interpretation of the New Testament sanctions a non-literal understanding of some Old Testament passages, especially those regarding Israel.

Six Essential Beliefs of Dispensationalism

This section presents the essential beliefs of dispensationalism. By "essential" I mean foundational beliefs that are central and unique to the system, beliefs upon which the system stands or falls. These are also beliefs that if denied would probably make one a nondispensationalist. This list takes into consideration the contributions of Ryrie, Feinberg, and Blaising and Bock, but also offers my own distinctions that hopefully add clarity.

1. Progressive revelation from the New Testament does not interpret Old Testament passages in a way that cancels the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers as determined by historical-grammatical hermeneutics.

This first point, a hermeneutical issue, is the most foundational of all the points. All dispensationalists affirm that the *starting point* for understanding Old Testament passages are the original Old Testament passages themselves. The meaning of Old Testament texts is not primarily found in New Testament interpretations. The New Testament may, with progressive revelation, shine light on Old Testament passages, offer commentary, or add additional applications or referents, but the New Testament does not override the original intent of the Old Testament writers. In the progress of revelation, the New Testament writers may provide more in the way of application or fulfillment of Old Testament passages, but they do not nullify or transfer the meaning of Old Testament passages in a way that goes against what the Old Testament writers originally intended. Thus, as Paul D. Feinberg states, "The sense of any OT prediction must be determined through the application of historical-grammatical hermeneutics to that text."[13] Bruce A. Ware applies this principle to promises made to Israel:

> There can be no question that the prophets meant to communicate the promise of a national return of Israel to its land. To the extent that our hermeneutics are regulated by the principle of authorial intent, we are given ample reason to accept this literal rendering of what God, through the prophets, originally promised to his people Israel.[14]

Let's look at one key passage as an example. Hebrews 8:8–12, which quotes the original new covenant passage of Jeremiah 31:31–34, certainly includes the church in the spiritual blessings of the new covenant, but since the new covenant was originally promised to Israel, the full fulfillment of the covenant must involve national Israel. The author of Hebrews includes the church in the blessings of the new covenant, but he does not exclude national Israel from the covenant. Thus, the new covenant has a "both/and" element to it—both Israel and the church. The church is related to the new covenant (Heb. 8:8–13), and Israel will be related to the new covenant at the second coming of Christ (see Rom. 11:25–27). Bock is right when he states, "The additional inclusion of some in the promise does not mean the original recipients are thereby excluded. *The expansion of promise need not mean the cancellation of earlier commitments God has made.* The realization of new covenant hope today for Gentiles does not mean that the promise made to Israel in Jeremiah 31 has been jettisoned."[15]

This approach is different from that of nondispensationalists who often view the new covenant as being entirely fulfilled with the church in such a way that does not include national Israel. With this approach, the physical and material blessings of the new covenant are believed to find a more spiritual or less literal fulfillment with the church, which is now viewed as the new or true Israel.[16] Thus, one should not look for a future inclusion of national Israel into the covenant.

The dispensational principle of maintaining the original authorial intent of Old Testament texts has great importance for understanding the eternal and unconditional covenants given to Israel in the Old Testament (Abrahamic, Davidic, New). John Feinberg points out that

God's unconditional covenants with Israel guarantee that the New Testament would never introduce the idea that God would not fulfill His covenants and promises with Israel, the people with whom the original promises were made. To do so, God would have to contradict Himself, and that is not possible. If an Old Testament promise is made unconditionally with a specific group such as Israel, then that promise must be fulfilled with that group. Progress of revelation cannot cancel unconditional promises to Israel. Feinberg states:

> If an OT prophecy or promise is made unconditionally to a given people and is still unfulfilled to them even in the NT era, then the prophecy must still be fulfilled to them. While a prophecy given unconditionally to Israel has a fulfillment for the church if the NT *applies* it to the church, it must also be fulfilled to Israel. Progress of revelation cannot cancel unconditional promises.[17]

David L. Turner points out that "covenant theologians and dispensationalists disagree on the nature of progressive revelation."[18] He writes, "Each group accuses the other of misinterpreting the NT due to alien presuppositions."[19] Turner states that dispensationalists deny that the New Testament reinterprets Old Testament promises to Israel: "It is their contention that the NT supplies no 'reinterpretation' of OT prophecy which would cancel the OT promises to Israel of a future historical kingdom. In their view the NT use of the OT does not radically modify the OT promises to Israel."[20] Turner contends that the nondispensational understanding brings into question God's faithfulness to Israel: "If NT reinterpretation reverses, cancels, or seriously modifies OT promises to Israel, one wonders how to define the word 'progressive' [in progressive revelation]. God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel must also be explained."[21]

Ryrie, too, asserts that the New Testament does not contradict the meaning of Old Testament texts. He states, "New revelation cannot mean contradictory revelation. Later revelation on a subject does not make the earlier revelation mean something different."[22] "If this were

so," says Ryrie, "God would have to be conceived of as deceiving the Old Testament prophets when He revealed to them a nationalistic kingdom, since He would have known all the time that He would completely reverse the concept in later revelation."[23] For Ryrie, the concept of progressive revelation can be likened to a building in progress: "The superstructure does not replace the foundation."[24] Thus, maintaining the original authorial intent of Old Testament passages is an essential of dispensationalism.

2. Types exist, but national Israel is not a type that is superseded by the church.

The issue of typology has significant implications for eschatology. Nondispensationalists hold that national Israel functioned as a type of the New Testament church. Once the greater antitype (the "fulfillment" of the type), the church, was revealed, Israel's place as the people of God was transcended and superseded by the church.[25]

Dispensationalists, too, believe in types. However, they take a different approach to understanding Israel in relation to typology. John Feinberg, for instance, points out that the nature of the unconditional promises to Israel has implications for understanding Israel's relationship to typology. While acknowledging the existence of Old Testament types that prefigure New Testament realities, the people with whom the promises were made are not types:

> The unconditionality of the promises to Israel guarantees that the NT does not even implicitly remove those promises from Israel. OT civil and ceremonial laws and institutions are shadows and are explicitly removed in the NT. But unconditional promises are not shadows, nor are the peoples to whom they are given.[26]

Paul Feinberg, too, while acknowledging the existence of types, does not view Israel as a symbol of the church: "While historical-grammatical interpretation allows for symbols, types, and analogies, I see no evidence that Israel is a symbol for the church, Palestine for the new

Jerusalem, et al."[27] Caution should be used when determining when the New Testament cancels an Old Testament type. As John Feinberg declares, "If the NT antitype cancels the meaning of the OT type, the NT must tell us so."[28]

Are dispensationalists asserting that there is no typological connection whatsoever between Israel and the church? Not necessarily. Saucy, for example, argues that the nation Israel is not a type in the sense that Israel has been transcended by a greater spiritual reality, the church. Yet, he also believes there is a historical and theological correspondence between Israel and the church that may have typological implications. As he explains, "If a type is understood as shadow pointing forward to the reality of an antitype, then it is questionable whether Israel is a type."[29] On the other hand, if a type is viewed in terms of a correspondence between two groups, then a typological connection between Israel and the church may exist:

> If a type is defined as a general historical and theological correspondence, then the many analogies between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament people of God may well be explained by seeing Israel as a type of the church. But the correspondence with God's actions among Old Testament Israel would not in this understanding of typology deny the continued existence of that nation in the future.[30]

Thus, there may be a typological connection between Israel and the church, but this connection is not that of the church superseding national Israel. Instead, the typological connection is that of a historical and theological correspondence that reveals a close relationship between Israel and the church.

This typological connection between the Old and New Testaments, however, does not alter the original sense of the Old Testament promises to Israel. As David L. Turner explains, "Genuine typology and analogy between OT and NT should not be viewed as destructive to the literal fulfillment of the OT promises to Israel, but rather an indication of a greater continuity between Israel and the

church."[31] Thus, whatever typological relationship exists between Israel and the church, this cannot be taken to mean that Israel's significance has been transcended and superseded by the church.

3. Israel and the church are distinct, thus the church cannot be identified as the new or true Israel.

As the lists from Ryrie, Feinberg, and Blaising and Bock indicate, all dispensationalists are united in holding that one cannot equate the New Testament church with a "new" or "true" "Israel." There may be differences of opinion when it comes to the specifics of the relationship between the church and Israel or the exact relationship of the church to the biblical covenants, but all dispensationalists reject a "replacement theology" or "supersessionism" in which the New Testament church is viewed as the replacement or fulfillment of the nation Israel as the people of God.[32]

Traditional and progressive dispensationalists have differences on how they view the church. Traditional dispensationalists tend to view the church as a distinct anthropological group, while progressive dispensationalists are more apt to view the church as a soteriological or new covenant community starting with the events of Acts 2.[33] But both sides agree that there is no biblical evidence to indicate that the church is the new or true Israel that forever supersedes national Israel.

Dispensationalists do acknowledge that believing Gentiles have been brought near to the covenants of Israel (see Eph. 2:11–22), but they also point out that the New Testament distinguishes Israel and the church in such a way that rules out the idea that the church is now identified as Israel or that the church entirely inherits Israel's promises and covenants to the exclusion of the nation Israel.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, for example, points out that the title *Israel* is used a total of seventy-three times in the New Testament, but is always used of ethnic Jews: "Of these seventy-three citations, the vast majority refer to national, ethnic Israel. A few refer specifically to Jewish believers who still are ethnic Jews."[34] Saucy confirms this point when he says, "The NT evidence reveals that outside of a few disputed references . . . the name Israel is related to the 'national'

covenant people of the OT."[35] For dispensationalists, it is significant that the New Testament still consistently refers to the nation Israel as "Israel" even after the establishment of the church. Israel is addressed as a nation in contrast to Gentiles after the church was established at Pentecost (Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28). As Ryrie observes, "In Paul's prayer for national Israel (Romans 10:1) there is a clear reference to Israel as a national people distinct from and outside the church."[36]

Ryrie argues that Paul's linking of national Israel to the covenants and promises of the Old Testament, even while in a state of unbelief, is further proof that the church has not absorbed Israel's blessings:

> Paul, obviously referring to natural Israel as his "kinsmen according to the flesh," ascribes to them the covenants and the promises (Romans 9:3–4). That these words were written after the beginning of the church is proof that the church does not rob Israel of her blessings. The term Israel continues to be used for the natural (not spiritual) descendants of Abraham after the church was instituted, and it is not equated with the church.[37]

Dispensationalists also claim that the book of Acts maintains a distinction between Israel and the church. In the book of Acts, both Israel and the church exist simultaneously, but the term *Israel* is used twenty times and *ekklēsia* (church) nineteen times. Yet the two groups are always kept distinct.[38] Thus, the continued use of the term "Israel" for the physical descendants of Jacob is evidence that the church is not Israel. As Saucy explains, "The church is not . . . identified with 'Israel.' They share a similar identity as the people of God enjoying equally the blessings of the promised eschatological salvation. But this commonality does not eliminate all distinctions between them."[39] In sum, the Israel/church distinction continues to be a defining characteristic of dispensationalism.

4. There is both spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles and a future role for Israel as a nation.

One of the main arguments made against dispensationalism is that it does not do justice to the unity that Jews and Gentiles experience in Christ. The emphasis on "one new man" (Eph. 2:15) and "one body" (Eph. 2:16) in the New Testament is taken to mean there can be no future role for Israel since unity in Christ supposedly rules this out. In reference to Ephesians 2, Anthony Hoekema declares, "All thought of a separate purpose for believing Jews is here excluded."[40] In regard to Ephesians 2:11–15, Raymond Zorn argues, "Through Christ's fulfilling of the law an end has come to the exclusivity of Israel as a holy nation and a holy people."[41] Wayne Grudem says that Ephesians 2 "gives no indication of any distinctive plan for Jewish people ever to be saved apart from inclusion in the one body of Christ, the church."[42] According to nondispensationalists, it appears unlikely that God would bring Jews and Gentiles together only to make a distinction between the two groups in the future. To do so appears to be going backward. Hoekema declares that this is like putting the scaffolding back on a finished building:

> To suggest that God has in mind a separate future for Israel, in distinction from the future he has planned for Gentiles, actually goes contrary to God's purpose. It is like putting the scaffolding back up after the building has been finished. It is like turning the clock of history back to Old Testament times. It is imposing Old Testament separateness upon the New Testament, and ignoring the progress of revelation.[43]

An essential belief of dispensationalism, though, is that spiritual unity between believing Jews and Gentiles does not cancel their God-ordained functional distinctions. To be sure, in the realm of salvation and status before God, believing Gentiles are equal with believing Jews. However, salvific unity between Jews and Gentiles does not

erase all ethnic or functional distinctions between the two groups. As Carl Hoch states:

> Paul's comments in Ephesians . . . exclude any salvific priority for Israel in the ecclesiological structure of the new man. . . . However, while there is no longer *salvific* advantage, there is still an *ethnic* distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Paul continues to speak of Jews and Gentiles as distinct ethnic groups in his letters (Romans 1:16; 9:24; 1 Corinthians 1:24; 12:13; Galatians 2:14, 15).[44]

This dispensational belief that salvific equality does not rule out functional distinctions among groups is seen in other examples in Scripture. For example, according to Galatians 3:28 men and women share equally in salvation blessings but the Bible still teaches that men and women have different roles (see 1 Tim. 2:9–15). Thus, in the case of men and women, salvific unity does not nullify functional distinctions. The same is true for elders and non-elders in a church. Both are equal in essence and share the same spiritual blessings, but elders have a distinct role in the plan of God (see Heb. 13:17). The same distinction could be made between parents and children or even within the Trinity itself in which there is equality of essence among the three members of the Godhead yet functional distinctions within this oneness. Hence, equality in essence and spiritual blessings does not nullify functional distinctions. As Saucy writes:

> The union of Jew and Gentile in the church does not rule out the possibility of *functional* distinctions between Israel and the other nations in the future—in the same way that there are functional distinctions among believers in the church today amid spiritual equality.[45]

Thus, when it comes to the issue of salvific unity between believing Jews and Gentiles *and* a future role for Israel in a millennial kingdom, the dispensationalist says, "Yes, it is a both/and situation."

5. The nation Israel will be saved, restored with a unique identity, and function in a future millennial kingdom upon the earth.

Dispensationalists have often not explained this point well, but it is extremely important.[46] Often dispensationalists state that belief in "a future for Israel" or "the salvation of Israel" is a distinguishing characteristic of dispensationalism. But these statements are not specific enough. Many nondispensationalists also affirm the above two claims. In fact, a fair number of nondispensationalists, including many Postmillennialists and some Amillennialists, believe in a literal salvation of Israel based on Paul's words in Romans 11:26 that "all Israel will be saved." This view was held by many of the theologians of the patristic era. More recently, this understanding of Romans 11:26 has been promoted by Handley C. G. Moule, John Murray, Leon Morris, F. F. Bruce, and Wayne Grudem.[47] So it is not accurate to claim that belief in a future salvation of Israel is a uniquely dispensational view.

What distinguishes all dispensationalists, however, is that they believe not only in a *salvation* of Israel but also in a *restoration* of Israel. The concept of "restoration" certainly includes the idea of salvation, but it goes beyond that. "Restoration" involves the idea of Israel being reinstalled as a nation, in her land, with a specific identity and role of service to the nations. In other words, in a literal, earthly kingdom—a millennium—the nation Israel will perform a functional role of service to the nations. This point is something all dispensationalists affirm while all nondispensationalists deny. Even Historic Premillennialists, who agree with dispensationalists on the issues of a national salvation of Israel and a future millennial kingdom, will disagree with the dispensational idea that Israel will be restored with a unique identity and function that is distinct from the church. Thus, there is a distinction between saying the nation Israel will be saved into the church, and saying that the nation Israel will be saved and restored with a unique identity and role in an earthly millennium. Dispensationalists affirm the latter.

6. There are multiple senses of "seed of Abraham"; thus, the church's identification as "seed of Abraham" does not cancel God's promises to the believing Jewish "seed of Abraham."

Galatians 3:7 states that those who exercise faith are "sons of Abraham." Galatians 3:29 also declares that those who belong to Christ are "Abraham's descendants" and "heirs according to promise." Nondispensationalists have argued that since Gentiles are "sons" and "descendants" (or "seed") of Abraham, they must also be spiritual Jews.[48] Dispensationalists, however, have contested this understanding. They have done so by challenging the idea that being a "son" or "seed" of Abraham automatically makes one a Jew. Saucy, for example, asserts that Abraham's fatherhood goes beyond being the father of ethnic Israel since he trusted God before he was recognized as a Hebrew:

> If Abraham were merely the father of Israel, we would have to conclude that the Gentiles who are now a part of this seed are therefore a part of Israel. But according to the New Testament, Abraham is more than that; he is portrayed as the father of both the people of Israel and of the Gentiles. On the grounds that Abraham was a believer before he was circumcised—that is, before he was recognized as a Hebrew—the Apostle Paul declared him to be "the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised . . . and . . . also the father of the circumcised" (Romans 4:9–12; cf. v. 16).[49]

As a result, "The fact that the true seed of Abraham includes both Jews and Gentiles does not rule out a continuing distinction for Israel in the New Testament. Nor should the calling of the Gentiles as the seed of Abraham be construed as the formation of a 'new spiritual Israel' that supersedes the Old Testament nation of Israel."[50]

Dispensationalists have argued that the concept of "seed of Abraham" is used in several different ways in the New Testament.

Fruchtenbaum, for example, lists four senses of "seed of Abraham." First, he says it can refer to those who are biological descendants of Abraham. Second, it can refer to the Messiah, who is the unique individual seed of Abraham. Third, it can indicate the righteous remnant of Israel (cf. Is. 41:8 with Rom. 9:6). Fourth, it can be used in a spiritual sense for believing Jews and Gentiles (Gal. 3:29).[51] It is in this last sense—the spiritual sense—that believing Gentiles are the seed of Abraham. John Feinberg also distinguishes between a physical sense and a spiritual sense of being a seed of Abraham. According to him, nonsupersessionists hold that "no sense (spiritual especially) is more important than any other, and that no sense cancels out the meaning and implications of the other senses."[52] Consequently, the application of the titles "sons of Abraham" or "seed of Abraham" to believing Gentiles does not mean that believing Gentiles are spiritual Jews or part of Israel.[53]

Together, these six points comprise the foundation of dispensational theology. It is upon these six points that dispensationalism stands or falls.

Notes

1. Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 43–47. Cf. Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 38–41.
2. 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, IL: Crossway, 1988), 67–85.
3. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-To-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1993), 13–21.
4. More recent Amillennialists like Anthony Hoekema have emphasized the fulfillment of physical blessings in the coming eternal state.
5. According to Blaising and Bock, "One of the striking differences between progressive and earlier dispensationalists, is that progressives do not view the church as an anthropological category in the same class as terms like Israel, Gentile Nations, Jews, and Gentile people. . . . The church is precisely redeemed humanity itself (both Jews and Gentiles) as it exists in this dispensation prior to the coming of Christ." *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 49.
6. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 84.
7. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 73.

8. Ibid., 74. Saucy makes the same point: "An analysis of non-dispensational systems, however, reveals that their less-than-literal approach to Israel in the Old Testament prophecies does not really arise from an a priori spiritualistic or metaphorical hermeneutic. Rather, it is the result of their interpretation of the New Testament using the same grammatico-historical hermeneutic as that of dispensationalists." Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Nondispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 20.
9. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 73–74.
10. Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 38.
11. Ibid.
12. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 75. Feinberg's view is supported by the nondispensationalist George Ladd: "Here is the basic watershed between a dispensational and a nondispensational theology. Dispensationalism forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and then fits the New Testament into it. A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament." George Eldon Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1977), 28.
13. Paul Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 123.
14. Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 93.
15. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 103–4. Emphasis in original.
16. Those who believe that Heb. 8:8–13 indicates that the church fully inherits the new covenant include: Bruce K. Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 281; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 862; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 289; Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 116–18; John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 228–29; Willem A. VanGemeren, "A Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 337.
17. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 76. Emphasis in original.
18. David L. Turner, "The Continuity of Scripture and Eschatology: Key Hermeneutical Issues," *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2 (1985): 280.
19. Ibid., 280–81.
20. Ibid., 279.
21. Ibid., 281.
22. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 84.

23. Ibid. George N. H. Peters concurs, "If no restoration was intended; if all was to be understood typically, or spiritually, or conditionally, then surely the language was most eminently calculated to deceive the hearers. . . ." George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus: The Christ as Covenanted in the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (1884; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988), 51.
24. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 84.
25. See LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 45.
26. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 76.
27. Paul Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," 124.
28. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 79.
29. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 32.
30. Ibid., 31–32. See also W. Edward Glenny, "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 180.
31. Turner, "The Continuity of Scripture," 282. See also Howard Taylor, "The Continuity of the People of God in Old and New Testaments," *Scottish Bulletin of Theology* 3 (1985): 14–15.
32. For a case against supersessionism from a dispensational perspective, see Craig A. Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:3 (2001): 435–50.
33. For more on this distinction see Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 49–51.
34. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 120.
35. Robert L. Saucy, "Israel and the Church: A Case for Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 244–45.
36. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 127.
37. Ibid.
38. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," 118.
39. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 210. For Saucy "It is the lack of national characteristics that distinguishes the church from Israel" (210).
40. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 200.
41. Raymond O. Zorn, *Christ Triumphant* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997), 190.
42. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 862.
43. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 201.
44. Carl B. Hoch Jr., "The New Man of Ephesians 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 118. Emphases in original.
45. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 167. Emphasis in original.
46. Arnold Fruchtenbaum would be one notable exception.
47. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985; repr., 1990), 209; Grudem,

Systematic Theology, 861 n. 17; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 421; Handley C. G. Moule, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1899), 311–12; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 2:99.

48. The following authors assert that Gal. 3:7, 29 teaches that believing Gentiles are considered spiritual Jews: Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," 24; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 198–99; William Neil, *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 62; Robert B. Strimple, "Amillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 88–89; LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 108; Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 227; Bruce K. Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 267.
49. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 50.
50. Ibid.
51. See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1996), 702.
52. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 73.
53. Fruchtenbaum states, "What replacement theologians need to prove their case is a statement in Scripture that all believers are of 'the seed of Jacob.' Such teaching would indicate that the church is spiritual Israel or that Gentile Christians are spiritual Jews." Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," 126–27.