



Application of the Basic Principle: Dispensational Distinction between Israel & the Church; the Hope Provided by Literal Interpretation of Eschatology

8. Application of the Basic Principle

1. One of the major thrusts of our study of biblical hermeneutics is to document the facts that the system of hermeneutics presented in the Bible and utilized by the Early Church Fathers is the literal-grammatical-historical method and that this system reveals a dispensational framework in which God manages human history.
2. The central and most important conclusion that is derived from this method of hermeneutics and the doctrine of dispensations is that Israel and the church are to be completely distinguished from each other.
3. Dr. Radmacher addresses these subjects in this final paragraph:

Literal interpretation, then, is the "bottom-line" of dispensationalism. Although certainly one would not claim absolute consistency among dispensationalists in the application of the principle, there are areas of unanimity among them which have become theological tenets in their system. Undoubtedly, the most significant of these is the maintaining of a distinction between Israel and the church. The roots of this go in two directions, first, the Old Testament covenant promises to Abraham stated in Genesis 12:2-3 and established unconditionally in Genesis 15:6-21, and second, the New Testament revelation of the mystery of the church as established in Acts 2:41-47 and explained in Ephesians 3:1-6. In the minds of dispensationalists it is the Abrahamic Covenant promises—particularly the land and seed promises—that have suffered most from spiritualization in interpretation.

Presenting the logic of this very simply, Ryrie asks two questions:

(1) Does the Abrahamic covenant promise Israel a permanent existence as a nation? If it does, then the Church is not fulfilling Israel's promises, but rather Israel as a nation has a future yet in prospect; and (2) does the Abrahamic covenant promise Israel permanent possession of the promised land? If it does, then Israel must yet come into possession of that land, for she has never fully possessed it in her history. [Ryrie, *Basis*, pp. 48-9.]

And, may I add, does not possess it today even though it was an everlasting possession.

One of the most probing recent works on this subject was done by one who would not likely be called a dispensationalist, namely, Arnold A. Van Ruler, the late Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Utrecht 'yü' trekt\ . In his work of 1955 translated in 1971 by Geoffrey Bromiley, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament*, Van Ruler states:



To the very depths of Old Testament expectation, the people of Israel as a people, the land, posterity, and theocracy play a role that cannot possibly be eliminated. This role cannot be altered by regarding Christ and his church as the fulfillment, in other words, by spiritualizing. There is a surplus in the Old Testament, a remnant [i.e., Jewish Pivot] that cannot be fitted into the New Testament fulfillment." [A. A. Van Ruler, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) p. 45.]

I believe that the New Testament never says that the people of Israel ... is definitively rejected. It simply says that the people of Israel is blind and hardened and indeed with a view of a new development. This development has an eschatological range: it contains the solution to the riddle of the world:

Romans 11:15 -If Israel's rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

[Van Ruler, *Christian Church*, p. 55.]

May those who posit Replacement Theology take note. And then Van Ruler raises the key question:

How are we, as the Christian church standing in the New Testament in the light of God's act in Jesus Christ, to handle the Old Testament? A renewal of allegorizing may seem to offer a way of assigning an authentic function to the Old Testament... . I believe that we must resist to the last the temptation lurking in this idea. The idea is in fact a temptation, for it seems that allegorizing can solve all the problems of the Christian church in relation to the Old Testament. (It) gives the appearance of making it perfectly plain that the Old Testament is wholly and exclusively the book of the Christian church, which can be exploited fully by it alone. [Van Ruler, *Christian Church*, p. 57.]

It is difficult to resist continuing the quotation from Van Ruler because his remarks are so cogent, but it is that key phrase of his—"surplus in the Old Testament"—which catches one's attention. It is that surplus [Jewish Pivot] which has so often been spiritualized to find its fulfillment in the church. But when interpreted literally it demands an earthly reign of Christ such as this earth has never seen. Thus, it is the nature of the earthly reign of Christ as predicted in the Old Testament and not simply the length of that reign in the millennial prophecy of Revelation 20 that provides the basis for dispensational premillennialism.

Continuing to apply this basic principle of literal interpretation, the dispensationalist not only finds significant eschatological distinctions within God's kingdom program, but he is confronted with a unifying philosophy of history which presents a majestic and climactic victory within history on this earth. In his system, history is not simply an endless series of cycles of testing, apostasy, and judgment moving nowhere. Rather, history has meaning and purpose, and this is seen in its progressive movement toward its grandest demonstration of its doxological purpose.



Thus, with intensity and expectation God's children pray the Disciples' Prayer, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew. 6:9, 10,). The King, the Second Adam, is coming and he is going to reign until he has reversed the curse on this earth and subjected every shred of rebellion precipitated by Satan and his opposing kingdom of darkness "so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians. 15:28).

Too often theological systems, or their applications, have narrowed God's kingdom purpose down to a redemptive purpose. They have become redemptocentric rather than theocentric; consequently, they have minimized or spiritualized activities in the Word that do not have immediate relation to the redemption of man. In this they fall short of an adequate philosophy of history for they fail to account for all of created reality.