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ETERNAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN EVANGELICAL ESCHATOLOGY:
AN ASSESSMENT OF THREE MODELS AND AN
ARGUMENT FOR KINGDOM THEOLOGY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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December 2022

APPROVAL SHEET

ETERNAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN EVANGELICAL ESCHATOLOGY:
AN ASSESSMENT OF THREE MODELS AND AN
ARGUMENT FOR KINGDOM THEOLOGY

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To Ramie.

I could have never completed this dissertation without you. My studies have been in and around parenting, campus ministry, and church responsibilities, and you have always been there with understanding, encouragement, and wise counsel. You even came around to support my approach of weekly “commuting” from L. A. to Louisville to do the PhD program without relocating our family! Ramie you embody 1 Corinthians 13: you are patient and kind, you do not envy or boast or insist on your own way. You rejoice with the truth, bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things.

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PREFACE

Many people deserve thanks for their part in my academic journey. First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Ramie, who has been a model of both perseverance and encouragement. She sometimes reminds me that in our twenty-six years of marriage and ministry, twenty-two of them have involved my participation in some form of theological education!

A special word of thanks is due to my friend John Stone who graciously provided a quiet space to study, access to the theological library at the Master's University, and constant encouragement!

I am grateful to my faculty chair, Dr. Bruce Ware, for the way he models clarity and insight in how he conceptualizes, communicates, teaches, and writes. I have very much appreciated his timely and insightful feedback, and his constant encouragement whenever I would make progress towards completing the marathon which is a PhD program.

I am also thankful to Dr. Gregg Allison and Dr. Fred Zaspel for their willingness to serve on my committee.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Craig Blaising for serving as an external reader. It was Dr. Blaising who pointed me in the direction of my dissertation topic, and I have benefitted from his excellent scholarship, keen intellect, and down to earth sense of humor! I am indebted to Dr. Blaising for his part in formulating Progressive Dispensationalism, and for his continued refinement of the view which we are now calling Kingdom Theology. I believe it to be the most biblically accurate and hope-engendering articulation of the progressively revealed eschatological kingdom

commencing with our Lord's inauguration of the kingdom in his first coming to his consummation of the kingdom in the eternal new creation. It is with the specifics of that hope in mind, that I concur with the apostle John: Come, Lord Jesus!

John Book

Stevenson Ranch, California

December 2022

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What is the nature of the anthropology of the redeemed in the eternal consummation?¹ Does one's ethnicity carry over into the eternal order? In addition, will there be nations involving the concepts of government and territory? Proposed answers to these questions will be inextricably tied to one's understanding of the larger storyline of Scripture. Therefore, assessing answers to questions about consummate anthropology² entails evaluating aspects of larger theological systems—specifically, the arguments given that render different views of the biblical storyline. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on models of consummate anthropology that describe the views of recent and contemporary evangelical theologians who affirm various forms of covenant and dispensational theology. Although identifying these models is synthetic in nature, it is acknowledged that theological viewpoints are rarely monolithic, and important differences among theologians who nevertheless fit under the same model will be discussed along the way. It is also significant to note that the goal of answering questions about the nature of human life in the eternal kingdom is not simply to satisfy one's

¹ Although one of the main foci of this dissertation would be classically described as the nature of *heaven*, that word will be avoided as a generic term. Instead, *heaven* will be used specifically to describe the view of the eternal state of theologians who emphasize a spiritual conception of the afterlife as opposed to a material and spiritual one. Rather than *heaven*, generic terms for the eternal state that will be employed in this dissertation include the following: *eternal consummation*, *eternal state*, *eternal order*, *eternity*, *everlasting consummation*, *everlasting kingdom*, *the eschaton*, etc.

² The phrase “consummate anthropology” is employed throughout this dissertation and by it I intend to convey the general organization of mankind in the everlasting kingdom. In other words, will mankind exist in one large group of diverse individuals, or will there be many nations—corporate socialities characterized by a diversity that we experience now in the midst of redemptive history? Although I will argue for unified national collectives in the eschaton, I will not here focus on other related areas such as the nature of the resurrected body, the “language of heaven,” ongoing cultural distinctives that may or may not exist, ongoing gender differences that pertain when human marriage has ended, etc., although these would be interesting areas for further study.

curiosity, but to gain a clearer understanding of the biblical portrait of what God has planned for the eternal destiny of the redeemed.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The burden of this dissertation is to augment a neglected area of eschatology: the anthropology of the everlasting consummation. I have been unable to find a sustained treatment of different views of this important area. Perhaps because of the eschatological frenzy of rapture debates, date setting, etc., that characterized the 1970s and 1980s in the evangelical world, particularly among dispensationalists, currently evangelical scholars are apt to express themselves as being agnostic about end-time realities. In this vein, some of the proponents that will be explored say little about consummate anthropology such that their perspectives need to be pieced together by closely related affirmations or by entailment.

Another underdeveloped area in the literature is the topic of nations³ in the eschaton. Some of the views that will be examined deny their existence in the eternal state, but it will be maintained that national territoriality is a consistent theme in biblical eschatology.⁴ Some of the views under consideration portray an eternal consummation in which individual ethnic identity is maintained, but I argue that God's plan of redemption culminates in a new creation that includes the redemption of man, not only in his individual identity aspects, but in the corporate structures of human relations as well.⁵

³ An exception to this neglected area is seen in the work of Andrew Kim who explores details regarding nations that are not developed here. For instance drawing on anthropological, sociological, and biblical studies, Kim concludes that there are two indispensable features that constitute a nation: a historic homeland and a dominant ethnic core. See Andrew Kim, "The Eschatological Kingdom as a Multinational Reality in Isaiah" (PhD diss., Southwestern Theological Seminary, 2019). In addition, Kim helpfully traces the theme of nations in the OT. Kim, "Eschatological Kingdom as Multinational Reality," chap. 5.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, by "biblical eschatology," I am referring specifically to the eternal state. Although I understand the millennial order to be closely related to the everlasting kingdom—a kind of silver age prior to the perfect golden age of eternity—I do see the two eras as distinct and not to be conflated.

⁵ Craig A. Blaising, "Typology and the Nature of the Church" (paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, San Diego, November 2014), 5–7. Other views

This is consistent with the God of Scripture who is redeeming this world in a holistic way and intends to unite all things in heaven and earth under the Lordship of Christ (Eph 1:10).⁶

Lastly, this dissertation seeks to bring clarity to views of eternal anthropology that are either explicitly stated by different theologians or are entailments of matters like their understanding of the people of God. Once clarified, all of the views are evaluated in terms of their fidelity to Scripture, and their ability to put together the relevant passages into a coherent whole. It is acknowledged that there is not a plethora of explicit, biblical data describing the everlasting consummation, but God has given readers enough information to have a clear hope and expectation of what is to come. Humility in these matters is appropriate since “we walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). However, fuzziness is not a virtue in areas in which God has spoken clearly and giving vague descriptions of what Scripture has addressed regarding the final state deprives the church of aspects of its future hope.

Thesis

By examining three models of the anthropological organization of the everlasting kingdom and the biblical and theological arguments that underlie them, I argue that the Kingdom Theology⁷ (mainly referred to as progressive dispensationalism

argue that the eschaton does involve corporate humanity, i.e., the church in the eternal state, but this leaves out the most prominent aspect of corporate human life in redemptive history—namely nations.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

⁷ Since the viewpoint argued for in this dissertation was first called “progressive dispensationalism” thirty years ago when the view was introduced to the evangelical world, I mainly refer to it as PD. However, recently PD is also being called “Kingdom Theology” or “Redemptive Kingdom Theology.” Although kingdom theology is out of the dispensational tradition, it is distinct from earlier forms of dispensationalism and makes a unique contribution to evangelical theology—thus, a different name is warranted. See Craig A. Blaising, “A Theology of Israel and the Church,” in *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 88; see also Craig A. Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology” (paper presented at Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, Fort Worth, TX, November 2021), 1.

[PD] in this dissertation) understanding of consummate anthropology is based on stronger interpretive foundations than the other three views. I demonstrate this by assessing all three views according to David Wolfe's criteria for evaluating interpretive systems taken from his work *Epistemology: the Justification of Belief* (see Wolfe's specific criteria and a rationale for their use below).⁸ What emerges as PD is evaluated through Wolfe's criteria and compared and contrasted to the other models, is nothing less than an understanding of the storyline of the Bible and its culmination that is straightforwardly biblical, lucid, compelling, and deeply hope-engendering for the church!

Scope of Research: Three Models of Eternal Anthropology in Evangelical Eschatology

Competing understandings of consummate anthropology in modern evangelicalism can be categorized according to three different models. Two of the models present a unified picture of the everlasting order (i.e., one, unified eternal state) whereas one of the models to be considered affirms bifurcated heavenly and earthly spheres with corresponding heavenly and earthly peoples.

Model 1: Individual Ethnic Identity, but No National Territoriality in the Consummation

Views that fit under model 1 include many forms of classic covenantalism (CC)⁹ as well as Progressive Covenantalism (PC).¹⁰ Towards an understanding of model

⁸ See David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), 52–55.

⁹ For resources on covenant theology see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941); Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980); William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984).

¹⁰ For resources on Progressive Covenantalism see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive*

1 views of ethnicity in the eschaton, it is crucial to understand larger biblical-theological commitments of its adherents. These commitments bear heavily upon the conclusions reached by model 1 regarding the anthropology of the eternal state.

A commitment to understanding Israel as either *replaced* or *fulfilled* in the biblical storyline is common among model 1 views. For CC, the church is understood to be the “new Israel” which functionally results in ethnic, national, territorial Israel dropping out of the storyline. For PC, Israel’s role is fulfilled in Christ which has the effect of national and territorial Israel playing a less prominent role in the storyline—although, a future for ethnic Israel is affirmed.¹¹ Although advocates of CC and PC arrive at their conclusions through different means, both view the church as a redefined Israel. This redefined Israel is a kind of mono-nation that contains individual, ethnic diversity, but not national distinctiveness. For advocates of CC and PC, a conception of human existence on the new earth that involves corporate/national diversity and territoriality contradicts passages like Ephesians 2:11–22, Galatians 3:25–29, and Revelation 21–22, as these passages indicate one, unified people of God and preclude corporate ethnic structures (i.e., “nations”) in the everlasting kingdom.

Model 2: Individual Ethnic Identity and National Territoriality Present in a Dualistic Manner in the Consummation

The key feature that distinguishes model 2 is a dualistic anthropology running through the biblical storyline. The views that fit under model 2 are Classic

Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016). Unless otherwise noted, most references to *Kingdom through Covenant* cite the 2nd ed. (2018). The original edition is cited using the original publication year for clarity: Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

¹¹ See Richard J. Lucas, “The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel’s Future Salvation,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 235–53.

Dispensationalism (CD¹²) and Revised Dispensationalism (RD¹³).

For CD, the purpose of God's earthly redemption is to regain paradise lost and to populate the earth with an immortal humanity (Israel and gentile nations) having both individual ethnic expression as well as corporate/national expression.¹⁴ This earthly people, composed of Israel and gentile nations, would manifest redeemed corporate, social, and political structures. The church, on the other hand, is God's redemption of his heavenly people. For CD, the church is conceived of in individualistic terms since political and national structures are seen as earthly matters. The church is spiritual, individualistic, and destined to occupy the heavenly sphere in the consummation.¹⁵

Although advocates of RD made changes to CD, much of the system was retained. However, the eternal central dualism of CD was dropped such that revised dispensationalists no longer spoke of "heavenly" and "earthly" people, but they did maintain a consistent distinction between Israel and church tied to what they believed was a consistently, "literal" hermeneutic.

In summary, both CD and RD divide mankind into three anthropological categories: Jews, gentiles, and the church. For CD, Israel and gentile nations inhabit the

¹² For writings of classic dispensationalists see J. N. Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* (London: G. Morrish, 1867); Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vols. 1–8 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947); C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917).

¹³ For writings of revised dispensationalists see John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, vols. 1 and 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985); Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986); J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965).

¹⁴ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, specifically chap. 3: "Contrast between Israel and the Church," and chap. 23: "Major Themes of Old Testament Prophecy"; Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, specifically, "Divine Mercy in the Church and towards Israel"; Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993).

¹⁵ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, see "Distinctions between Israel and the Church in the Coming Kingdom, 33–35; chap. 17: "The Eternal State"; J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 5 (London: G. Morrish, 1820), especially "The Revelation," 489–568, <http://archive.org/details/synopsisofbookso05darb>; Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 27.

new earth for eternity, and the church as one unified body of individual Jews and gentiles (although these identity features essentially disappear) occupies the heavenly sphere forever. In RD, a dualism between Israel and church is maintained through the millennial era, and then some RD theologians put both Israel and church in an earthly sphere for eternity and others in a heavenly sphere forever.

Model 3: Individual Ethnic Identity and National Territoriality Present in a Unified Manner in the Consummation

This dissertation argues for the consummate anthropology described by PD¹⁶ (model 3). PD holds to an anti-supersessionist reading of the canon and affirms not only a national future for Israel in the eschaton, but a diversity of other nations which will populate the new earth.

PD advocates deny that the church is a re-defined, multi-ethnic Israel, and instead understand the one people of God to encompass Jews and gentiles in both their ethnic and national identities. Far from contradicting Ephesians 2:11–22, Galatians 3:25–29, and Revelation 21–22, progressive dispensationalists believe these texts are best understood by their view. In addition, it is maintained that a new creation containing Israel and gentile nations is the consistent picture of the eschaton foreseen by the OT prophets.

Method

The argument of this dissertation proceeds by describing the contours of three models of consummate anthropology and the biblical theologies that underlie them.

¹⁶ For other writings of Progressive Dispensationalists see Darrell L. Bock and Craig A. Blaising, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*; Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion House, 2017); Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010).

These models are heuristic in nature, i.e., the broad features of each model fit the views I discuss while allowing room to interact with subgroups within each model. Far from being exhaustive in terms of treatment of views that fit under each model, I choose to interact with the most prominent and representative figures. After elucidating the larger theological commitments of views under each model, I lay out the vision of consummate anthropology that flows from each school of thought. Moreover, I assess each model by utilizing criteria borrowed from Wolfe, who contends that strong systems of interpretation are *comprehensive, congruent, consistent, and coherent*.¹⁷ *Comprehensive* means the system must consider all of the data—with respect to Scripture this means it must explain all of Scripture and not just portions. *Congruent* means that it must “fit” the text, i.e., accord with it. *Consistent* means that the interpretations that the system renders at one point are not in conflict with those it produces at other points. *Coherent* means that it hangs together and makes sense as a whole.¹⁸ As applied in this dissertation, the first two criteria relate directly to the system’s dealing with the biblical text and the last two with the system’s ability to generate a logically consistent and plausible overall reading of the canon of Scripture.¹⁹

Wolfe’s criteria are fitting for this project for several reasons, and my rationale for their use follows. First, his stated goal in producing his criteria exactly overlaps with mine—namely, to evaluate broad systems of interpretation. Second, as an epistemologist, he is uniquely qualified to speak to such matters. Third, rather than using criteria for evaluation proposed by someone directly involved in the debate, his criteria act as a kind

¹⁷ Wolfe, *Epistemology*, 52–55.

¹⁸ Craig A. Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*, ed. Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 158.

¹⁹ Craig A. Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 82.

of objective third party. Finally, his criteria help to break down the analysis of each model into helpful categories. It is important to note that after assessing all of the models, I do *not* argue that models 1 and 2 are wrong, and that model 3 is correct. Rather, I argue that based on the above criteria, model 3 and its understanding of consummate anthropology is the *strongest* of the three.

Conclusion

It is my sincere hope that this dissertation accomplishes several important goals. First, my aim is to present all of the models considered fairly such that adherents of each would detect no distortion of their views. Second, through the presentation and critique of each model, PD would stand out as the most faithful rendering of the biblical storyline that reveals the progressive unfolding of the kingdom of God culminating in the presence and rule of God among his people in a multi-ethnic, multi-national, new earth as part of a larger new creation forever. Finally, I hope that this project results in more dialogue and teaching about the everlasting consummation in the academy and the church, such that Christians move forward in their sojourn filled with hope in light of a clear picture of what awaits them in eternity.

CHAPTER 2

MODEL 1A: INDIVIDUAL ETHNIC IDENTITY, BUT NO NATIONAL TERRITORIALITY IN THE CONSUMMATION DUE TO ISRAEL'S REPLACEMENT BY THE CHURCH (CLASSIC COVENANTALISM)

In chapters 2 and 3, I discuss biblical theologies that understand covenant to be the central schema of Scripture that moves the entire storyline of redemptive history along. As a covenant theologian, Michael Horton reflects this when he writes, “What unites [creation, fall, redemption, and consummation] is not itself a central dogma but an architectonic structure of biblical faith and practice. That particular architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield is the covenant.”¹ Although coming from a Progressive Covenantal perspective, Stephen Wellum and Peter Gentry convey something similar, “We want to show how central the concept of ‘covenant’ is to the narrative plot structure of the Bible. . . . We assert that the covenants form the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture.”²

In addition, model 1 biblical theologies understand there to be a divinely intended shift in the storyline of Scripture such that Israel’s role is either replaced or brought to fulfillment in the plan of God. Hence Israel’s role is less prominent in redemptive history’s culmination for model 1 adherents when compared to those who affirm models 2 and 3. Much more on this follow.

Although there are other variants that would fit under model 1, I will focus my

¹ Michael Scott Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 13.

² Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21.

attention on classic covenantalism (CC) in this chapter and progressive covenantalism (PC) in chapter 3.

Classic Covenantalism

Hermeneutics

Sometimes in the critique of another view, one's own view is most clearly articulated. Of this principle, Oswald Allis's classic work *Prophecy and the Church* is a case in point. In it, Allis fervently argues against a traditional dispensational understanding of the church as a parenthesis in God's kingdom program. In so doing, Allis articulates hermeneutical principles that are central to classic covenantalism. These principles can be synthesized into the following categories: (1) the key to understanding the OT is the NT,³ (2) OT promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church,⁴ and (3) a proper conception of biblical typology will understand national Israel as a type of the church.⁵

The key to understanding the Old Testament is the New Testament. Of course, crucial to understanding how the whole Bible fits together is clarity on how the two testaments interrelate. In interpreting any text of Scripture, one must ask: what is the proper starting point? Covenant theologians affirm that to correctly understand the OT Scripture, one must start with the NT, i.e., one understands the OT through the lens of the NT. Allis states this explicitly: "The doctrine of the Christian Church, as generally

³ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church: An Examination of the Claim of Dispensationalists That the Christian Church Is a Mystery Parenthesis Which Interrupts the Fulfilment to Israel of the Kingdom Prophecies of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: P & R, 1947), 18. Bruce K. Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 264.

⁴ Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 19. Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 172.

⁵ Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 19. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1941), 714; Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," 282; Mark W. Karlberg, "The Significance of Israel in Biblical Typology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 3 (September 1988): 259.

accepted, has always been that the New Testament takes precedence over the Old, that Christ and His apostles are the authoritative interpreters of the Old Testament.”⁶ Berkhof is of the same mind: “Some OT prophecies seem to predict this, but these should be read in light of the New Testament.”⁷ Hoekema, too, concurs: “I agree with [Ladd] that the Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament.”⁸

Michael Vlach points out that the theme of NT priority over the OT in covenantal literature is most clearly seen when OT texts regarding Israel’s future are in view.⁹ In these cases, in the minds of covenantalists, the NT often *reinterprets* the OT. Stephen Sizer writes, “Jesus and the Apostles reinterpreted the Old Testament.”¹⁰ Kim Riddlebarger states, “But eschatological themes are reinterpreted in the New Testament, where we are told these Old Testament images are types and shadows of the glorious realities that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.”¹¹ Covenantalists contrast this approach to some dispensationalists who claim to employ a hermeneutic of “consistent literalism,”¹² by arguing that the dispensational approach seems to involve foisting on the Bible a standard taken from outside the Bible rather than one that is inductively derived from the Bible.¹³

An example of NT reinterpretation of an OT passage is helpful at this point.

⁶ Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 49.

⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 699.

⁸ Hoekema, “An Amillennial Response,” 55.

⁹ Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 81.

¹⁰ Stephen Sizer, *Zion’s Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 36.

¹¹ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 37.

¹² Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 88.

¹³ Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, Andrews University Monographs: Studies in Religion 13 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 13. LaRondelle is a Seventh Day Adventist, but as a supersessionist, shares many of the interpretive principles of classic covenantalism. This way of critiquing dispensationalism is an example.

Hoekema's exegesis of the quotation of Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:14–18 serves this purpose. During the deliberations of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, Peter, Paul and Barnabas describe how the Lord has brought many gentiles to faith through their ministries. James then says the following:

Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old."

Hoekema understands James to be saying that the rebuilding of David's tent is fulfilled now through gentiles being brought into the new, burgeoning community of the church.¹⁴ He identifies this sort of fulfillment as, "a figurative, nonliteral interpretation of an Old Testament passage dealing with the restoration of Israel."¹⁵ In essence, for Hoekema, James is reinterpreting an OT promise to Israel as being fulfilled in the church.

To those who would object that this type of hermeneutic violates a promise of God, Robert Strimple gives an interesting response. He analogizes physical promises to Israel being fulfilled by spiritual blessings to the church to a father giving a gift to his son. The father promises his son some "wheels" for his birthday.¹⁶ The boy thinks his father is going to buy him a motorcycle.¹⁷ However, on the day of his birthday, the son is amazed to find a Ferrari in the driveway!¹⁸ Strimple contends that the son's response would not be to accuse his father of depriving him of his hope, rather, he would be

¹⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 210.

¹⁵ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 210.

¹⁶ Robert B. Strimple, "An Amillennial Response to Craig Blaising," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 99.

¹⁷ Strimple, "Amillennial Response to Blaising," 99–100.

¹⁸ Strimple, "Amillennial Response to Blaising," 100.

overjoyed that the fulfillment of his father's promise is far greater than he had expected.¹⁹

Old Testament promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church. A *prima facie* reading of many OT passages indicate a future restoration for national Israel. Vlach enumerates several: “Amos 9:11–15 for instance, tells of a day in which God will restore Israel to her land. Zechariah 14:16 speaks of a time when Jerusalem will be the place where the kings of the nations come to pay homage to the Lord. Joel 3:17–18 predicts a time when the mountains of Israel ‘will drip with sweet wine’ and the hills ‘will flow with milk.’”²⁰ Another such passage is Hosea 2:23 which is a prophecy about the restoration of Israel from captivity.²¹

In understanding how restoration passages like the above are interpreted by classic covenantalists, Beale's *A New Testament Biblical Theology* is helpful, particularly chapters 19–20, “The Church as the Transformed and Restored Eschatological Israel.”²² Beale takes up Hosea 2:23 in his exegesis of Romans 9:24–26 in which Paul quotes the Hosea passage. Beale understands Paul to be saying that at the end-time restoration, Israel who was formerly referred to as “not my people,” because of the nation's sin and rebellion, will be called “my people” and will be “beloved.”²³ But, Beale notes that it is striking that Paul is not just applying this to Jews, but to gentiles, as part of the restoration prophesied by Hosea which is beginning to be fulfilled now in the church.²⁴ Beale then goes on to summarize broader features of his hermeneutical approach that he

¹⁹ Strimple, “Amillennial Response to Blaising,” 100.

²⁰ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 83.

²¹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 705.

²² Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 614–749.

²³ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 705.

²⁴ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 704–5.

brings to bear on this passage (that tend towards seeing OT promises fulfilled in the church):

The OT prophesies that at the end-time restoration of Israel the messianic Servant will be viewed as the summation of true Israel (Isa. 49:3), and that gentiles will also stream in and be redeemed by becoming identified as Israelites. In addition, the NT (esp. Paul) views Jesus to be true Israel (the “seed of Abraham”) and Jewish and gentile Christians together in Christ also to be true Israel (Gal. 3:16, 26–29). I discussed other evidence in the NT that testifies to the same things (e.g., true circumcision being of the heart and not of the flesh, with which gentiles are identified [Rom. 2:25–29]), so that the church can even be called explicitly “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).²⁵

A proper conception of biblical typology will understand national Israel as a type of the church. Typology, as understood by classic covenantalists, is a feature of the biblical narrative that displays the inherent continuity of the OT and NT. In terms of Israel-church typology, Clowney summarizes the relationship in the following way: “Church in both the N. T. and the Old *is* the people of God, yet O. T. Israel is also a model, a type, in its earthly form, of the spiritual and heavenly reality of the church.”²⁶ Robertson’s view is similar: “The old covenant nation of Israel typologically anticipated the new covenant reality of the chosen people of God assembled as a nation consecrated to God [i.e., the church]”²⁷ Brent Parker further nuances how classic covenantalists formulate Israel-church typology, dividing them into two groups:

Promises and prophecies made to Israel are fulfilled typologically in the church; there is no room for any future restoration of national Israel subsequent or alongside Christ’s return, though some covenantalists like Witsius, Vos, Venema, Mathison, Riddlebarger, Vasholz, and Holwerda do see a future salvation and ingathering of Israel into the church based upon Romans 9–11; certainly others, like Bavinck, Berkhof, Hoekema, Hendriksen, and Robertson, do not.²⁸

²⁵ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 706.

²⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, “Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church: A Hermeneutical Deepening of Ecclesiology,” in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1984), 92.

²⁷ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 289.

²⁸ Brent Evan Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 127. For further research, Parker provides a helpful list of the relevant writings of the theologians he

The Structure of the Canonical Narrative According to Classic Covenantalism

Covenant theology began to be developed doctrinally in the time of the Reformation during which Ulrich Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger drew out the covenantal nature of God's promises to man and man's requisite responsibilities.²⁹ Building on the work of their predecessors, "Olevianus (*Concerning the Nature of the Covenant of Grace between God and the Elect*, 1585), Cocceius (*The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testaments of God*, 1648), and Witsius (*The Oeconomy of the Covenants*, 1685)" systematized covenant theology in ways that persist to today.³⁰ Modern versions of classic covenantalism understand the history of redemption through three theological covenants.

The covenant of redemption. For CC, the foundational covenant is that which is understood to be entered into by the three members of the Trinity. It is variously referred to as the "covenant of redemption," the "*The Pactum Salutis*," the "Counsel of Peace," the "eternal covenant," or the "counsel of redemption."³¹ The covenant of redemption involves "the Father [electing] a people in the Son as their mediator to be brought to saving faith through the Spirit."³² In this way, God's entering into covenants

categorizes regarding their understanding of Israel's future.

²⁹ Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 215.

³⁰ Treier and Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 215.

³¹ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 54.

³² Horton, *God of Promise*, 78. Berkhof understands it this way: "The covenant of redemption may be defined as the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given Him." Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 271. Vos argues that it is the concept of the Covenant of Redemption that allows salvation by grace alone for the glory of God alone, to be truly theologically grounded. Lutheranism had at its heart an anthropological concern, namely, to leave the instability of Rome's salvation by works which is refuted by the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. But Vos notes, the Reformed emphasis went further: "They, too, felt the same necessity to leave the waves of Rome's salvation by works and once again stand on solid ground. But beside and behind this necessity there lay a deeper longing: a thirst for the glory of God. . . . When the Reformed takes the obtaining of salvation completely out of man's hands, he does this so that the glory which God gets from it might be uncurtailed." Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings*

with mankind flow out of the prior covenant among the members of the Godhead. One's salvation, as it were, spills over from the inter-Trinitarian relationships of giving and receiving into the Creator-creature relationship.³³ As Horton articulates, "In the covenant of redemption, the love of the Father and the Spirit for the Son, is demonstrated in the gift of a people who will have him as their living head. At the same time, the Son's love for the Father and the Spirit is demonstrated in his pledge to redeem that family at the greatest personal cost."³⁴

Within CC, there have been differences in the construal of the parties of the covenant. Some understand them to be the triune God and man—variously conceived of as "the sinner," "the elect," or "man in Christ."³⁵ Others have understood the covenant to be between God the Father representing the Trinity and Christ representing the elect.³⁶ A third approach since the time of Cocceius, understands the covenant of redemption to be between the Father and the Son, and the covenant of grace to be between the triune God and the elect.³⁷ Berkhof argues that there is not a doctrinally substantive difference between the second and third view and prefers the third for reasons of perspicuity.³⁸

Berkhof goes on to articulate specific requirements and promises inherent in the covenant of redemption. The Father required of the Son that he re-head his elect

of Geerhardus Vos, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 246–47. Thus, the Covenant of Redemption understands the work of salvation as a divine work for the glory of God that emerges out of the depths of the divine being Himself.

³³ Horton, *God of Promise*, 79.

³⁴ Horton, *God of Promise*, 79.

³⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 265.

³⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 265.

³⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 265.

³⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 265. Berkhof claims the majority of reformed theologians prefer the third model among whom are Mastricht, à Marck, Turretin, Witsius, Heppé, the Hodges, Shedd, Vos, Bavinck, and Honig. He also invokes Hodge who argues that there is not a doctrinal difference between the two, but also prefers the third formulation for clarity. See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2, *Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 358.

people and as such to be their surety.³⁹ As the last Adam, the Son is to make amends for the sin of the elect and to perform the obedience which Adam failed to render thus securing eternal life for his spiritual children.⁴⁰ The promises of the Father fit with what he required of the Son, providing for the Son all that was needful for his great task and eliminating any uncertainty of the realization of the covenant.⁴¹

It is noteworthy, that some reformed theologians, such as O. Palmer Robertson are more hesitant to affirm the covenant of redemption citing a lack of biblical evidence for such a concept. Along these lines, Robertson writes, “Affirming the role of redemption in the eternal counsels of God is not the same as proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son. A sense of artificiality flavors the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God’s eternal counsels. Scripture simply does not say much on the pre-creation shape of the decrees of God.”⁴² But, Horton disagrees, arguing that John’s Gospel, in particular, describes the Son as being given “a people by the Father (John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 4–10; Eph. 1:4-12; Heb. 2:13, citing Isa.

³⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 269.

⁴⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 269. Berkhof elaborates even more specific requirements (and biblical support) that the Father demanded of the Son that fit under the general description above: that he should be born of a woman assuming a human nature—yet without sin, that he should place himself under the law, that after meriting forgiveness and eternal life that he should apply these merits to his elect people by the working of the Holy Spirit.

⁴¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 269–70. Berkhof further specifies the promises of the Father to the Son along with biblical support: that the Father would provide a human body that was a fit tabernacle for the Son, that he would provide for the Son the necessary gifts and graces for his task including the giving of the Spirit without measure, that the Father would deliver him from the power of death, enable him to destroy the dominion of Satan, and establish God’s kingdom, that the Father would enable him to send out the Holy Spirit for the formation and preservation of his body, to give him a people from all nations that would be too numerous to count, that he would give him all power in heaven and earth and eventually reward him with the glory that he enjoyed together with the Father before the foundation of the world.

⁴² Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 54. David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark cite other critics of the traditional doctrine since the middle of the twentieth century including: Herman Hoeksema, Karl Barth, Bert Loonstra, and Robert Letham. They go on to summarize five major criticisms of the doctrine. It is speculative, unbiblical, and rationalist; it confuses the ontological and economic Trinity; it tends towards tritheism; its biblical prooftexts refer to intratrinitarian relations tied to redemptive history, rather than to pretemporal ones. R. Scott Clark and David VanDrunen, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 175–79.

8:18).⁷⁴³ The elect given to the Son are drawn by the Holy Spirit and kept by him (Rom 8:29–30; Eph 1:11–13; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:5).⁴⁴ All of this is according to the Father’s eternal plan conceived before the beginning of time (Eph 1:4; Rev 13:8).⁴⁵

So, the story of redemption for CC, begins with a covenant among the members of the Trinity that pre-dates history.

The covenant of works. Although the word בְּרִית is not found in the first three chapters of Genesis, many covenant theologians propound that a covenant is described in the narrative. It is variously referred to as the covenant of creation, covenant of nature, covenant of law, and covenant of works.⁴⁶ Berkhof argues that all of the constituent parts of a covenant are present such that there is warrant to refer to what is described as a covenant and to give it a name.⁴⁷ In the narrative, two parties are involved, a condition is stipulated, a penalty for transgression is threatened, and a promise of reward for obedience is implied.⁴⁸

Charles Hodge avers that the reward that Adam is implicitly promised is life.⁴⁹ Since death is promised as a consequence of disobedience (“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall

⁴³ Horton, *God of Promise*, 80.

⁴⁴ Horton, *God of Promise*, 80.

⁴⁵ Horton, *God of Promise*, 80. For a more thorough biblical-theological defense of the scriptural nature of the doctrine see Clark and VanDrunen, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” 179–94.

⁴⁶ Horton, *God of Promise*, 83.

⁴⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 213.

⁴⁸ Several objections can be raised at this point, and Berkhof provides rejoinders. Adam does not explicitly agree to a covenant; but, human agreement does not take place in either the Noahic or Abrahamic covenant. In addition, man is not an equal party to God and “all God’s covenants are of the nature of sovereign dispositions imposed on man.” Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 213. Another objection can be raised that there is no explicit promise of eternal life. But, Berkhof avers, “The clear implication of the threatened punishment is that in the case of obedience death would not enter, and this can only mean that life would continue.”

⁴⁹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 118.

surely die,” Gen 2:17), it can be inferred that obedience will result in life.⁵⁰ According to Hodge, the truth that obedience leads to life is a biblical theme and confirmed by many individual passages (e.g., Lev 18:5; Ezek 20:11, 13; Luke 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12).⁵¹ Scripture also presents God as a just judge and moral ruler of his world such that it is inconceivable that God would punish if there is no transgression, so Adam would have necessarily continued to live in fellowship with the one who is life and whose loving-kindness is better than life.⁵² In fact, Berkhof understands the implied promise for obedience to be life at its highest promise of perennial blessing, namely, eternal life (cf. Rom 7:10).⁵³ The image of God is limited in Adam in his state of innocence because he still has the ability to choose to disobey and has not been confirmed in righteousness, unable to sin, and therefore to enjoy complete fullness of life.⁵⁴

The condition of the covenant of works is implicit, perfect obedience.⁵⁵ The analogy of Scripture makes this plain as God’s law throughout Scripture demands perfect obedience flowing from God’s holy nature.⁵⁶ Thus, obedience to the one prohibition is not the only obedience Adam needed to render, since for a holy God any creaturely sin must destroy the fellowship between man and God and arouse divine displeasure.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 118. Vos draws a helpful distinction between the Lutheran view and the Reformed view with respect to Adam’s pre-sin state. The Lutheran view holds that eternal life was already in Adam’s possession. In contrast Vos writes, “But whereas [the Lutheran view] can be satisfied by perpetuating such a state and extending it indefinitely, the Reformed view fixes its gaze on something higher. It sees man not as being placed in eternal bliss from the beginning, but as being placed in such a way that he might attain to eternal bliss. There still hovers above him the possibility of sin and death which is given with his mutable freedom. He is free to do the good out of his good nature, but he has not yet attained the highest freedom which can do good only.” Vos, “Doctrine of Covenant in Reformed Theology,” 242–43.

⁵¹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 118.

⁵² Hodge, *Anthropology*, 118.

⁵³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216.

⁵⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216.

⁵⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216.

⁵⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216.

⁵⁷ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 119. As for the specific test in the garden, Berkhof argues that “the

The penalty that attaches to the breaking of the covenant is death in a holistic sense including physical, spiritual, and eternal death.⁵⁸ Although death in its final form did not take place instantaneously at the time of Adam's sin, the process was set in motion for him and his posterity. The suffering and dissolution that ensues from sin flows, fundamentally, from separation from the one who is the source of life.⁵⁹ Hodge summarizes well this dynamic: "God is the life of the soul. His favour and fellowship with him, are essential to its holiness and happiness. If his favour be forfeited, the inevitable consequences are the death of the soul, i.e., its loss of spiritual life, and unending sinfulness and misery."⁶⁰ The holistic nature of Adam's fall sheds light on the inclusive nature of the redemption Christ accomplished, not only delivering the body from the grave, but the soul from eternal death and separation from God.

Is there a sacrament or sign of the covenant of works? Opinions vary, and Berkhof identifies the range of options as "the tree of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, paradise, and the sabbath."⁶¹

A covenant by its very nature is made between two or more parties.⁶² The

positive command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, relating as it did, to a thing indifferent in itself was clearly a test of pure obedience in the absolute sense of the word." Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 216–17. Berkhof believes there to be an arbitrariness to the command precisely to settle the issue of whether man would obey God implicitly or be guided by his own judgement. Hodge believes that Adam's test was a probationary period similar to what Scripture describes of the angels who were either faithful or unfaithful to God and were accordingly either confirmed in righteousness or unrighteousness. Hodge goes on to infer that, "had Adam continued obedient during the period allotted to his probation, neither he nor any of his posterity would have been ever exposed to the danger of sinning." Hodge, *Anthropology*, 120.

⁵⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 217.

⁵⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 217.

⁶⁰ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 120.

⁶¹ Berkhof opts for the tree of life arguing that it enjoys the most scriptural support (cf. Gen 3:22). It seems unlikely that the tree would have produced immortality in Adam through some mystical means, but rather was an appointed seal or sign of the gift of life. Consequently, when Adam sinned, he was prohibited from the sign. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 217.

⁶² Hodge, *Anthropology*, 121. Berkhof differentiates between the natural relationship between God and man and the covenantal one. The natural relationship is inherent in the Creator-creature relationship such that Adam owes allegiance and obedience to God. But, the distance between infinite God and finite man would seem to make life in communion unattainable. However, God does intend for man to

parties in the covenant of works are straightforwardly God and Adam, but the federal theology of CC places much emphasis on Adam as representative of the whole human race. In this way, the parties of the covenant are God, Adam, and mankind in Adam and represented by him.⁶³ Thus, everything promised to Adam was promised to his posterity, and everything threatened to the whole human race as well.⁶⁴

The covenant of grace (as understood by those who emphasize the unity of the covenant). I draw my description of those who emphasize the unity of the covenant of grace from Hodge and Berkhof, although the works of many other covenant theologians could serve the same purpose.⁶⁵ Just as in the aforementioned covenants, God

live in communion with himself which is made possible by man's creation in the image of God, and God's gracious covenantal initiative towards man. In the covenant of works, Adam is given the promise of eternal life if he would obey in his time of probation. His disobedience sets up future covenantal initiative on the part of God such that the obedience of another would make a way for the reception of eternal life. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 215. The *Westminster Confession* expresses this same truth: "The distance between God and the creatures is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant." *Westminster Confession of Faith* 7.1.

⁶³ See Horton, *God of Promise*, 89–90.

⁶⁴ The reality of this fact is manifest in the natural world, e.g., man earns his living by the sweat of his brow, women endure the pain of childbirth, all are subject to disease and death. In addition, it is a fact of biblical revelation, as Paul makes clear that in Adam all die (1 Cor 15:22a) and by his one sin all were made sinners (Rom 5:12). Hodge argues that these truths are foundational to the whole plan of redemption: "As we fell in Adam, we are saved in Christ. To deny the principle in the one case, is to deny it in the other; for the two are inseparably united in the representations of Scripture." Hodge, *Anthropology*, 121–22. This dynamic of representation is revealed in Scripture as well as in man's nature such that, instinctively, rulers represent their people and parents represent their children.

As to the question of the perpetuity of the covenant of works, Hodge argues that one cannot affirm this proposition and at the same time hold that Adam acted for himself and all of his posterity. If the human race fell in Adam, then it is impossible for anyone to be in the state of probation that Adam found himself—thus, mankind is no longer under the covenant of works and all of Adam's progeny stand condemned when they come into the world (Hodge, 122).

⁶⁵ For other works that emphasize the unity of the covenant of grace see the following: Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd rev. and enlarged ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), esp. chap. 14, "The Unity of the Covenant of Grace"; Joel Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *Man and Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), esp. chaps. 27–33; Donald Macleod, "Covenant Theology," in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993); Horton, *God of Promise*. Additionally, in arguing against pedobaptism, Stephen Wellum provides a list of covenant theologians who emphasize the unity of the covenant of grace as part of their justification for infant baptism; see Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, annotated ed. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), 97–162.

is the first of the contracting parties—taking the initiative and determining the nature of the covenant relationship.⁶⁶ Berkhof adeptly describes the heart of the covenant of grace: “[God] appears in this covenant, however, not merely as a sovereign and benevolent God, but also, and especially, as a gracious and forgiving Father, willing to pardon sin and to restore sinners to His blessed communion.”⁶⁷ Scripture affirms that salvation is offered to all mankind on the condition of faith in Christ, thus, mankind in general is party to the covenant.⁶⁸ But, the plan of redemption features the elect as those who the Father has given to the Son as his own people (John 6:37), thus the covenant has special reference to those the Father draws (John 6:44).⁶⁹

Christ is the mediator of the covenant, not only in the sense that like Moses he is a mediator between God and man, but because it is on the ground of what he accomplished that God entered into this covenant with fallen man.⁷⁰ In addition, he is the surety, who guarantees the fulfillment of the conditions and promises of the covenant.⁷¹ Hodge observes, “[Christ’s] blood was the blood of the covenant. That is, his death had all the effects of a federal sacrifice, it not only bound the parties to the contract, but it also secured the fulfillment of all its provisions.”⁷²

The condition of the covenant is faith in Christ; but, this is not a meritorious condition. Hodge explains,

A blessing may be promised on condition that it is asked for; or that there is a willingness, which is the ground of the gift. It remains a gratuitous favour; but it is,

⁶⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 364.

⁶⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 272–73.

⁶⁸ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 363.

⁶⁹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 363.

⁷⁰ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 364.

⁷¹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 364.

⁷² Hodge, *Anthropology*, 364.

nevertheless, suspended upon the act of asking. It is in this last sense only that faith is the condition of the covenant of grace. There is no merit in believing. It is only the act of receiving a proffered favour. In either case the necessity is equally absolute. Without the work of Christ there would be no salvation; and without faith there is no salvation.⁷³

The promise of the covenant is best summarized in the often repeated biblical formula, “I will be your God and you will be my people.”⁷⁴ This promise is echoed by those who stand in covenant relationship with God throughout redemptive history and exultantly proclaim, “Jehovah is my God.”⁷⁵ This promise encompasses all other promises like the promise of temporal blessings which often symbolize spiritual blessings, the promise of justification and the resultant claim to eternal life, and the promise of the Holy Spirit’s application of redemption and all the blessings of salvation.⁷⁶ Of course, this quintessential promise is only fully realized in the eschaton when the New Jerusalem descends and the dwelling of God is with men (Rev 21:3), unhindered by sin, for the rest of eternity.⁷⁷

Berkhof enumerates many reasons that despite there being different administrations through redemptive history, the covenant of grace is essentially the same.⁷⁸ First, he argues that the summary expression of the covenant, “I will be your God,” is consistent through all the covenants: the Abrahamic (Gen 17:7), the Sinaitic (Exod 19:5; 20:1–2), the Davidic (2 Sam 7:14), and the new covenant (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10).⁷⁹ Second, Scripture affirms there is but one gospel that saves, and since the

⁷³ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 365.

⁷⁴ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 365.

⁷⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 277.

⁷⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 277.

⁷⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 277.

⁷⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

⁷⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

covenant of grace is essentially the revelation of the gospel, there is one covenant.⁸⁰ Third, Paul argues extensively against the Judaizers that the way of salvation for Abraham (and OT believers), (i.e., by faith) is the same for NT believers (Rom 4:9–12; Gal 3:7–9, 17, 18).⁸¹ By arguing this way and by asserting that Abraham is the father of believers, Paul makes clear that the covenant with Abraham is still in force.⁸² Fourth, Jesus has always been the mediator of the covenant (Heb 13.8), the only way to the Father (John 14:6), and the only one by whom men and women can be saved (Acts 4:12).⁸³ Fifth, the realization of the promises the saints have hoped for throughout time are essentially the same (Gen 15:6; Ps 51:12; Matt 13:17; John 8:56).⁸⁴ Sixth, though differing in form, the sacraments have the same significance in both the OT and NT epochs (Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 5:7; Col 2:11,12).⁸⁵ Seventh, the covenant of grace has always been both conditional and unconditional in character.⁸⁶ It is unconditional in the sense that there is no meritorious performance required of man; although man is exhorted to repent and believe, his ability to do so is owing to a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.⁸⁷ The covenant is conditional in the sense that it is based on the suretyship of Jesus Christ, and in introducing the covenant, Jesus had to meet the requirements of the covenant of works which he did through his active and passive obedience.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

⁸¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

⁸² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*.

⁸³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

⁸⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 280.

⁸⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 280.

⁸⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 280.

⁸⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 280.

⁸⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 280.

Like Berkhof, Hodge affirms that “the covenant of grace has always been the same”—it is the dispensations of the covenant that have changed.⁸⁹ Hodge demonstrates this point by identifying and describing four dispensations of redemptive history under which the same covenant of grace is revealed with increasing clarity.

First, he considers the era from Adam to Abraham. Due to a scant amount of biblical data for this period, it is unclear the extent to which the truth was revealed and what measures were adopted for its preservation.⁹⁰ Hodge summarizes what can be learned from this dispensation: “All we know is, that the original promises concerning the seed of the woman, as the Redeemer of our race, had been given; and that the worship of God by sacrifices had been instituted.”⁹¹

The second dispensation identified by Hodge is the period from Abraham to Moses. During this time, God chose Abraham’s descendants as his particular people to retain the knowledge of the true religion in the midst of mankind’s general apostasy.⁹² Increased revelation is given about the nature of the covenant of grace, as God gathers his church out of the world and gives them the covenant sign of circumcision differentiating his people from the gentiles.⁹³ In addition, it is brought to light that the Redeemer would be of the seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, and that the salvation he would bring would be for all nations.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 373.

⁹⁰ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 374.

⁹¹ Hodge substantiates the latter inference regarding the divine sanction of sacrifice in three ways. He observes that performing sacrifices is the common approach man has taken in light of his guilty conscience as a sinner: “It is the dictate of conscience that guilt requires expiation.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 374. Second, Hodge notes that God approves sacrifices and incorporates them into religious observance. Third, the fact that man is saved by the sacrifice of Christ, which the older dispensations pointed forward to, makes clear that animal sacrifice is by divine design.

⁹² Hodge, *Anthropology*, 374.

⁹³ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 374.

⁹⁴ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 374.

The third dispensation described by Hodge is the epoch from Moses to Christ. In this period a plethora of new regulations of polity, worship of God, and religion were enacted.⁹⁵ A priesthood is instituted along with a complicated system of sacrifices. Increased clarity about the nature of the coming Redeemer is given as prophet, priest, and king.⁹⁶ Then Hodge makes a telling remark about how he understands this period in connection with his overall reading of the canon:

We have the direct authority of the New Testament for believing that the covenant of grace, or plan of salvation, thus underlay the whole of the institutions of the Mosaic period, and that their principal design was to teach through types and symbols what is now taught in explicit terms in the gospel. Moses, we are told (Heb. iii. 5), was faithful as a servant to testify concerning the things which were to be spoken after.⁹⁷

In addition, Hodge understands this period to be preparatory of the age to come and to provide further teaching about the nature of the covenant of grace in its contrast with the Christian era. Hodge writes, “And when contrasted with the new or Christian economy, as a different mode of revealing the same covenant, it is spoken of as a state of tutelage and bondage, far different from, the freedom and filial spirit of the dispensation under which we now live.”⁹⁸

Finally, Hodge enumerates six points describing what he calls the Gospel Dispensation of the covenant of grace which reveals the covenant of grace with greater clarity than in the prior dispensations. First, it is universal in focus, i.e., not confined to one people group but to all nations.⁹⁹ Second, it is more deeply spiritual with an emphasis on the internal over the external and what was formerly known objectively is now

⁹⁵ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 374–75.

⁹⁶ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 375.

⁹⁷ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 375.

⁹⁸ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 376.

⁹⁹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 376.

inscribed on the heart (Heb 8:8–11).¹⁰⁰ The former types and shadows are done away with as the reality to which they pointed comes in Christ. Third, Hodge writes, “the New Testament, as we have seen, contains a legal element, it reveals the law still as a covenant of works binding on those who reject the gospel; but in the New Testament the gospel greatly predominates over the law. Whereas, under the Old Testament, the law predominated over the gospel.”¹⁰¹ Fifth, the gospel dispensation is unequivocally the dispensation of the Spirit such that now the Spirit’s presence is available to all nations and classes of people.¹⁰² Lastly, unlike the old dispensation which was preparatory and temporary, the gospel dispensation is permanent and the final era prior to the consummation of all things.¹⁰³ Whereas the Mosaic dispensation hinted of a greater economy to come, there is no such anticipation in the gospel dispensation of an era better suited for the conversion of the nations.¹⁰⁴ Rather, the gospel is fully preached and the end comes.¹⁰⁵

The covenant of grace (as understood by those who emphasize the diversity of the covenants). Robertson affirms that structurally and thematically there is a unity in the covenants of God, “But the various covenants administered throughout history do not appear as monotonous duplications of one another. A luxuriant diversity of covenantal administration emerges as history progresses.”¹⁰⁶ Robertson understands the plan of redemption to flow from the secret counsels of the triune God, but disagrees with

¹⁰⁰ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 376.

¹⁰¹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 376.

¹⁰² Hodge, *Anthropology*, 376.

¹⁰³ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 377.

¹⁰⁴ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 377.

¹⁰⁵ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 377.

¹⁰⁶ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 53.

the notion of a pre-creation covenant among the members of the Trinity finding it contrived.¹⁰⁷ In addition, instead of using the terms “covenant of works” and “covenant of grace,” he proposes “covenant of creation” and “covenant of redemption.”¹⁰⁸ He understands the covenant of creation to refer to the bond God established with man by virtue of the creation.¹⁰⁹ By covenant of redemption he refers to the administrations subsequent to the fall by which God has bound himself to man (i.e., the covenant of grace).¹¹⁰ The advent of Christ sets up the most basic difference in the administrations during the covenant of redemption such that the bond of God with man before Christ is called the “old covenant” era and the period after Christ called the “new covenant.”¹¹¹ The former is characterized by promise, shadow, prophecy and the latter by fulfillment, reality, and realization.¹¹² Robertson sees an important contrast between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic:

Indeed, it should be acknowledged that law in distinction from promise was given to reveal sin (Gal. 3:19). The radicalness of this exposure of human depravity is seen in the fact that the law by its very form, was calculated to uncover sinful man’s inclination to self-trust. In this respect, Sinai represents a covenantal administration in sharpest contrast with Abraham’s promise-covenant. But this contrast must not be understood as rupturing the unity and progress of the revelation.¹¹³

Moreover, Robertson identifies different emphases of the covenants as redemptive history unfolds under the different covenant heads:

Adam: the covenant of commencement
Noah: the covenant of preservation
Abraham: the covenant of promise

¹⁰⁷ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 54.

¹⁰⁸ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 57.

¹⁰⁹ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 57.

¹¹⁰ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 57.

¹¹¹ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 57.

¹¹² Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 57.

¹¹³ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 61.

Moses: the covenant of law
David: the covenant of the kingdom
Christ: the covenant of consummation¹¹⁴

Robertson understands each of the above covenants to relate to one another organically, i.e., they do not replace one another chronologically but build and expand as the covenant of redemption progresses.¹¹⁵ Finally, Robertson argues that all of the pre-Christ, shadowy covenants find their fulfillment in Christ who Robertson calls, “the personal embodiment of the new covenant” and the one in whom all of God’s covenant purposes are fulfilled.¹¹⁶

Like Robertson, William Dumbrell¹¹⁷ emphasizes the diversity of the biblical covenants. He understands the OT as a whole to be, “a record of how Israel’s thinking advanced from creation to covenant at Sinai to a new covenant calculated to lead to a new creation.”¹¹⁸ In his monograph *Covenant and Creation*, Dumbrell engages in an exegetical, biblical-theological study of the OT covenants. He understands the Noahic covenant to be an extension of a pre-existing creation covenant that God entered into with Adam despite *berit* not appearing in the text until Genesis 6:18.¹¹⁹ Dumbrell draws this

¹¹⁴ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 61.

¹¹⁵ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 63.

¹¹⁶ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 63. Robertson’s approach of seeing the person of Christ as the fulfillment of all OT prophecy is similar to the Christification of W. D. Davies. Davies acknowledges that land promises to Israel are explicitly made in the OT, but he argues that the substance of the promises are transferred from land to Christ in the NT: “For the holiness of place, Christianity has fundamentally, though not consistently, substituted the holiness of the Person: it has Christified holy space.” W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 368; for another scholar using Davies’s approach see also Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

¹¹⁷ Dumbrell was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1957, and was reformed and covenantal in his orientation. As an Anglican he would have been a pedobaptist. He does not reference “the covenant of grace,” but does find unity among the diverse covenants stemming from their overall connection to a covenant with creation.

¹¹⁸ William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: Its Expression in the Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 10.

¹¹⁹ William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984), 43.

conclusion from the fact that the typical language of covenant initiation (*karat berit*) is missing, but in Genesis 6:18 and 9:9, God is said to *hequim berit* “establish” his covenant with Noah.¹²⁰ Dumbrell explains that in this context, “the institution of a covenant is not being referred to but rather its perpetuation.”¹²¹ In other words, “the covenant which was confirmed with Noah had been brought into existence by the act of creation itself.”¹²² In fact, Dumbrell understands the rest of the biblical covenants to be a subset of God’s original covenant with all of creation such that when the plan of redemption plays out, “the restoration of all things will put God, man, and the world at harmony again.”¹²³

Dumbrell understands the covenant with Abraham to bring front and center the biblical doctrine of redemption.¹²⁴ This is in response to the degradation caused by the fall of man and the fall of society described in the narrative in Gen 3–11.¹²⁵ Though the Abrahamic covenant is composed of a complex of promises in Genesis, the essence of it is in Genesis 12:1–3. Dumbrell understands these verses to contain two sets of promises: two relating to Abraham’s own posterity and two relating to the relationship between gentiles and the Abrahamic peoples.¹²⁶ For Dumbrell, this passage provides an initial glimpse of what will come to pass in the eschaton: “The ‘great nation’ of 12:2, though having Israel immediately in view, refers finally to the end-time people of God.”¹²⁷

As Dumbrell analyzes the Sinai covenant, he understands Exodus 6:4 to refer

¹²⁰ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 25–26.

¹²¹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 26.

¹²² Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 43.

¹²³ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 41, 43.

¹²⁴ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 47.

¹²⁵ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 78.

¹²⁶ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 78.

¹²⁷ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 78–79.

to Israel's exodus in fulfillment of the patriarchal covenants.¹²⁸ In addition, the setting of Exodus 19:3b–8 in which the covenant is first mentioned in connection with Sinai, indicates that the Sinai covenant is one of confirmation, i.e., is linked back to both the Abrahamic and creation covenants.¹²⁹ Dumbrell goes on to argue regarding Exodus 19:3b–8, “The introduction of the name Yahweh as associated now with the Sinai covenant directed us back to the significance of the call of Moses with whom the divine name Yahweh was particularly to be associated. . . . the function of the divine name [assures] continuity of the older promises.”¹³⁰ Overall, Dumbrell sees parallels between Israel in Canaan and Adam in Eden, both are “created outside the land, placed in the land, placed under obligations by which the land was to be kept, and yet finally to forfeit the land.”¹³¹ The book of Deuteronomy makes much of the theme of “rest” and indicates that Israel in Canaan was intended to be a model of the rest God intended in creation for man in his world.¹³²

Dumbrell understands the Davidic covenant revealed in 2 Samuel 7 to contain a series of promises with David in view, but David functions as Israel's representative such that there is an interweaving of David's fortunes with the history of Israel in verses 6–16.¹³³ In addition, sonship terms formerly applied to Israel (Exod 4:22) are now applied to David (2 Sam 7:14), further indicating that the Davidic covenant is organically connected to the Sinai covenant with Israel.¹³⁴ Dumbrell understands 2 Samuel 7:18–29

¹²⁸ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 81.

¹²⁹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 125.

¹³⁰ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 125.

¹³¹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 126.

¹³² Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 126.

¹³³ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 150.

¹³⁴ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 151.

to contain the idea of “the Davidic covenant as ‘humanity’s charter,’ [providing] for the future of the race under the leadership of the Davidic house and thus [foreshadowing] the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises.”¹³⁵

Dumbrell understands the new covenant presented in Jeremiah 31:31–34 to have aspects of continuity and discontinuity with the old, such that it is a fresh dispensation of the Sinai covenant by the writing of that covenant’s provisions on the individual heart.¹³⁶ He understands the new aspect of the new covenant to be the complete forgiveness of sins such that they are no longer remembered.¹³⁷ Dumbrell explains additional information about the new covenant given by Ezekiel:

Ezekiel carried the New Covenant theology a stage further with his doctrine of the “new heart,” indicating at once what ought to have been the case under the old covenant and what would take place under the new. His concept of the gift of the Spirit to the individual pointed to a democratization of leadership (with which the notion of the gift of the Spirit was bound up in the Old Testament) in the new age a fact which Pentecost takes up later. Ezekiel thus goes a stage further than Jeremiah making God the author of the new obedience.¹³⁸

In summary, for Dumbrell, the covenants of the OT reveal a program for a perfected people of God that was not attained in that period or in the current age, but will come to fruition in the eschaton.¹³⁹ The covenants also express the kingship of God over his people and his world.¹⁴⁰ But, for Dumbrell, the consummation of the kingship of God will require “a return within history to the beginning of history. As we have repeatedly noted, nothing less than a new creation—and thus a new covenant—would achieve this goal.”¹⁴¹ Thus, in Dumbrell’s understanding, all of the later biblical covenants further

¹³⁵ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 163.

¹³⁶ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 199.

¹³⁷ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 200.

¹³⁸ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 200.

¹³⁹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 206.

¹⁴⁰ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 206.

¹⁴¹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 206.

develop the creation covenant and move redemptive history from creation to new creation.

The Consummate Anthropology of Classic Covenantalism

In what follows I first summarize conceptions of the consummation that are generally affirmed by most classic covenantalists. I then move to specific CC theologians whose views go further in certain directions and are more nuanced in their picture of the eternal consummation.

Divine experience and proximity. Hodge understands the blessedness of heaven to derive chiefly from the vision of God in the face of Christ which transforms the soul into the image of God, transfuses it into the divine life, and satiates it with the fullness of God.¹⁴² This communion with God will characterize life forevermore and is its essence (Rev 21:3).¹⁴³ Unlike the bond with God that is veiled and subject to doubt and unbelief in human earthly existence, God will be fully present and knowable.¹⁴⁴ The redeemed will enjoy not only the manifest glory of God, but also the mysterious, unchangeable, and infinite love of God which is redemption's fruit.¹⁴⁵

Creation-oriented blessing. Berkhof affirms that what is called "nature" will share in humanity's eternal existence because it is necessary to human existence.¹⁴⁶ He does not expect a realm of pure spirits, but one that is commensurate to bodily human life

¹⁴² Hodge, *Anthropology*, 860.

¹⁴³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 737.

¹⁴⁴ H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 534.

¹⁴⁵ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 860.

¹⁴⁶ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 535.

and fully redeemed.¹⁴⁷ Further he writes, “The new world will be fully permeated with the light of God. Our old world which is still so far away from its Creator is full of dark shadows, natural catastrophes, sickness, and death. The new world will live so close to its source of light that the shadows will have fled and everything is bathed in light; it is a world unimaginable to us, free from pain, sadness, and mourning.”¹⁴⁸

Individual-oriented blessing. The saints will be entirely exempt from all sorrow and sin.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the capacity of the redeemed to enjoy all that God has for them in the eternal consummation will be made possible by the enlargement of all of their faculties.¹⁵⁰ Man will be able to grow in knowledge unceasingly and will be able to productively exercise all of his powers.¹⁵¹ He will possess securely all possible good.¹⁵² Berkhof avers, “Man will reach his destiny in the absolute unity of freedom and love which God has in mind for man . . . and for which the Spirit now trains us in our sanctification.”¹⁵³

Corporate-oriented blessing. Of course the complete removal of sin will have the effect of harmony in all relationships with love dominating heavenly existence.¹⁵⁴ The redeemed will enjoy fellowship with the saints of all ages including the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs.¹⁵⁵ Berkhof describes eternal, corporate life as “the

¹⁴⁷ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 535.

¹⁴⁸ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 534.

¹⁴⁹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 860.

¹⁵⁰ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 860.

¹⁵¹ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 861.

¹⁵² Hodge, *Anthropology*, 861.

¹⁵³ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 535.

¹⁵⁴ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 534.

¹⁵⁵ Hodge, *Anthropology*, 860.

perfected society in which all relationships will be channels of the interaction of love between God and man and among men themselves, without threat or discrimination, without fear or hatred.”¹⁵⁶ Christ will have the central place in the eternal consummation as he is the prototype of renewed mankind who will have conformed believers to his image such that they are finally, fully sons of God.¹⁵⁷ The unity of mankind in eternity will be so perfected such that love of God and fellowman will be one in the same.¹⁵⁸

William Dumbrell: mono-nation emphasis. Key to Dumbrell’s view is how he understands the Tower of Babel narrative (Gen 11:1–9). The account comes at the end of the primeval history in Genesis 1–11 and ostensibly explains the language families and cultural differences that eventually come to pass in the world.¹⁵⁹ As sin continues to cause humanity to unravel, mankind though once a unity, abuses that unity by seeking to build a name for itself apart from God.¹⁶⁰ Dumbrell points out that in contrast to the city that the people seek to build up to the heavens for their own glory, the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven (Rev 21:2)—in an ironic way, Babel points to this eschatological eventuality.¹⁶¹ Dumbrell describes the judgment of God as a result of Babel and what results from it:

The people were scattered and their language was fractured. Genesis 11:1–9 culminates the spread-of-sin narratives which began in Genesis 3: if the account in chapter 3 deals with the fall of humankind, then the one in chapter 11 reveals the fall of society. After the flood the human race began all over again, but apparently no lessons had been learned. The Babel narratives documents the division that

¹⁵⁶ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 534.

¹⁵⁷ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 535.

¹⁵⁸ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 534.

¹⁵⁹ William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 32.

¹⁶⁰ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 32.

¹⁶¹ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 32.

thereafter characterize the social structure of our world.¹⁶²

However, this gloomy close to the first major section of the Bible does not end without hope, as Abram comes to the forefront as the one whom future hope for mankind revolves around. For Dumbrell, part of the eschatological hope that will come to pass through Abraham is “the harmony of the races, the one new society, which apparently existed prior to the building in a plain in Sinar.”¹⁶³

Central to God’s promise to Abram is that God will make of him “a great nation.” Dumbrell places considerable significance on this aspect of the Abrahamic promise: “Perhaps ‘nation’ is used to represent a political alternative to the world assembled at Babel in chapter 11, the message being that political unity will be divinely given rather than constructed from within the world itself! In the call God perhaps has in mind final governmental structures—those of his kingdom on earth.”¹⁶⁴ God has undone the people’s attempt to establish a world government centered in Babel and has initiated a plan with Abram at its center.¹⁶⁵ Around this nucleus, the great nation of the new people of God—the redeemed, will be gathered. Israel will foreshadow what is eventually eschatologically fulfilled.¹⁶⁶

Dumbrell’s explication of the final chapters of Revelation makes clear how he understands the consummation of the plan of God. He understands the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2) that comes down from heaven to be in contrast to Babylon and its politically disordered society resulting from the fall, as well as to the seven churches (Rev 2–3).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 32.

¹⁶³ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 33.

¹⁶⁴ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 34.

¹⁶⁵ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 34.

¹⁶⁶ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 34.

¹⁶⁷ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 343.

Whereas the people intended to build the tower of Babel up to the heavens, here the city descends from heaven to the Earth. For Dumbrell, the city is identical to the kingdom of God because it perfectly fulfills the following kingdom aspects: a people (the redeemed), a place (the New Creation), and the immediate presence of God who reigns.¹⁶⁸ Dumbrell writes, “It is the renewed world, a paradise, a holy city, a temple, the cosmic mountain joining heaven and earth, the eschatological expectations of the whole Bible now realized.”¹⁶⁹ The New Jerusalem is characteristic of both a city and a temple since it comes down from heaven and is full of the glory of God.¹⁷⁰

In addition, the New Jerusalem fulfills all of the eschatological expectations linked to Zion in the OT: “that of the world united in redemption and of the saved community as the one new people of God undivided by the consequences of Genesis 3–11.”¹⁷¹ Utilizing the familiar old-covenant formula: “They will be his people, and God himself will be their God,” John also indicates fulfillment of the new covenant as the city portrays the unity of Jew and gentile living in community as the one people of God.¹⁷²

Revelation 21:22 explains that John saw no temple in the city from which Dumbrell infers, “the sanctification of the whole world order (cf. Zech. 14:20–21) and the relevance of the city to all social and political institutions.”¹⁷³ Verse 24 indicates that the nations of the world are now converted and the world has received the Abrahamic blessing in full.¹⁷⁴ Verses 24 and 26 indicate that nothing of value from the old order is

¹⁶⁸ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 344.

¹⁶⁹ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 344.

¹⁷⁰ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 344.

¹⁷¹ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 344.

¹⁷² Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 344.

¹⁷³ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 345.

¹⁷⁴ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 345.

prevented from coming into the city for its gates are always open.¹⁷⁵ But, for Dumbrell, the open gates indicate inclusion of what is good from the nations and not the existence of a world outside the gates.¹⁷⁶

Dumbrell's summary of the significance of John's vision and explanation of how all the different threads of the plan of redemption are pulled together is worth quoting at length:

At the end of the canon, we have returned to the beginning with an overplus. The divisions inherent within human society since Babel have been removed. The new people of God, Jews and Gentiles together, have been located in a new sacred space. This is the very end to which the tentative beginning of Genesis 1–2 had pointed. The carriers of the hope had progressed from Adam to Israel and then to Christ. Through the sacrifice of the Lamb believers will rule as kings and priests taking on the role that Adam had forfeited and fulfilling the mandate given to Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19:5–6). The immortality of these new people will not be provisional, as Adam's was, for they have seen the face of the Lamb the image into which they have been transformed, and they will be eternally in his presence. The history of salvation has ended, and the journey has been long. We have moved from creation and Adam to Israel and redemption, to Jesus as suffering Israel to the creation of a new people of God through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. We have moved through the call of the Gentiles to come into the new people of God, through the difficulties of the overlap of the ages, into the reality of the new age itself.¹⁷⁷

So, for Dumbrell, the anthropology of the consummation is one human collective which is the church with the divisions of Babel removed—which presumably means there is one language, there is no geographic particularity within the “new sacred space” (i.e., no nations), and ethnic identity features are minimized.

Gregory Beale: equation of Israel and the church and the New Jerusalem with the new creation. Beale's substantial volume *A New Testament Biblical Theology* contains an important section with the heading “The presuppositional basis for the church

¹⁷⁵ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 345.

¹⁷⁶ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 345.

¹⁷⁷ Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 346.

being true Israel.”¹⁷⁸ Here, he identifies two hermeneutical principles that he adheres to that underlie his conclusion that Israel and the church can be equated: “The first presupposition is the notion of corporate solidarity or representation or identification, sometimes known as the concept of ‘the one and the many.’”¹⁷⁹ “The second presupposition, following from the first, is that Christ is the true Israel, and as true Israel, he represents the church as the continuation of true Israel from the OT.”¹⁸⁰

Steps in Beale’s argument follow below. In the NT, Jesus is called “the Son of God” which is a way of referring to him as Israel since Israel was called this in the OT.¹⁸¹ In addition, the moniker “Son of Man” identifies Jesus with Israel (cf. Dan 7:13; Ps 80:17).¹⁸² According to Beale, both of these titles allude to Adam and Israel because, “Adam and Israel are two sides of one coin. Israel and its patriarchs were given the same commission as was Adam in Gen. 1:26–28. Consequently, it is not unwarranted to understand Israel as a corporate Adam who had failed in its ‘garden of Eden,’ in much the same way as its primal father had failed in the first garden.”¹⁸³ Since Jesus is the last Adam and true Israel, and the church is associated with Jesus, it follows that the church is identified with Adam and Israel as well.¹⁸⁴ Therefore for Beale, “it is important to maintain that the church is not merely like Israel but actually is Israel.”¹⁸⁵

Next, Beale applies this kind of argumentation to OT prophecy and gives his

¹⁷⁸ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 651.

¹⁷⁹ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 651–52.

¹⁸⁰ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 652.

¹⁸¹ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 652. Beale references Exod 4:22–23; Deut 14:1; Isa 1:2, 4; 63:8; Hos 1:10; 11:1.

¹⁸² Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 652.

¹⁸³ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 652–53.

¹⁸⁴ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 653.

¹⁸⁵ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 653.

understanding of the church as eschatological Israel. He understands the OT to prophesy that gentiles will become part of Israel, “and not merely be redeemed people who retain the name ‘gentiles’ and coexist alongside but as a separate people from redeemed ethnic Israel. . . . Their gentile identity was not eradicated, but they came to have a greater identity as true Israelites.”¹⁸⁶ What is the difference between converted gentiles of the OT era and those in the future eschaton? Beale believes the NT reveals the difference between the two:

[The former had to] move to geographical Israel, be circumcised and worship at the temple, obey the food laws and observe the holy days, and follow other laws distinguishing national Israel from the nations, [but], in the end-time period gentiles identify with Jesus, true Israel, and become part of the temple in him and are circumcised by his death and are made clean in him. *In the new age Jesus, as true Adam/Israel, is the only ultimate identification tag that transcends gentile identification marks or the old nationalistic Israelite identifying marks of the law* [emphasis added].¹⁸⁷

Beale sums up by arguing that what is described above is the essence of the mystery that was concealed in the OT, but revealed by Paul in Ephesians 3:3–6 regarding the gentiles being members of the one body of Christ:

It was not as clear in the OT that when the Messiah came, the theocracy of Israel would be so completely *reconstituted* [emphasis added] that it would continue only as the new organism of the Messiah (Jesus), the true Israel. In him Jews and gentiles would be fused together on a footing of complete equality through corporate identification. Some commentators have seen the mystery consisting of complete equality, but as far as I can determine, none have apparently underscored the basis for such equality lying in the one person “Christ Jesus” as the true Israel, since there can be no distinguishing marks in him but only unity.¹⁸⁸

So, for Beale, Israel and the church are equated, and the “reconstituted” eschatological Israel is composed of Jews and gentiles whose identity in Christ “transcends” old identity features such as ethnicity and nationality.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 653.

¹⁸⁷ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 653–54.

¹⁸⁸ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 654.

¹⁸⁹ Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 653–54.

Central to Beale’s understanding of John’s vision of the eternal consummation in Revelation 21, is his understanding that in this passage, John equates the new creation with the new Jerusalem which is equivalent to the temple.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, what is described in Revelation 21 is the culmination of the theme of temple/the presence of God that is developed throughout the canon. Thus, to understand the conclusions that Beale draws, as well as his view of territoriality in the eternal state, one must examine his biblical theology of temple starting with what he considers to be the original temple—the garden of Eden.¹⁹¹

In defense of the idea that the first sanctuary in sacred history was Eden, Beale articulates nine observations.¹⁹² Some of the more salient ones are offered here. First, just as Israel experienced God’s presence in the temple, Adam experienced it in Eden.¹⁹³ Second, Beale cites the following to show an analogy between Adam’s role and the Israelite priests:

Gen 2:15 says God placed Adam in the Garden “to cultivate it and to keep it.” The two Hebrew words for “cultivate and keep” (respectively, *cābad* and *shāmar*) can easily be, and usually are, translated “serve and guard.” When these two words occur together later in the OT, without exception they have this meaning and refer either to Israelites “serving and guarding/obeying” God’s word (about 10 times) or, more often to priests who “serve” God in the temple and “guard” the temple from unclean things entering it (Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14). Therefore, Adam was to be the first priest to serve in and guard God’s temple. When Adam fails to guard the temple by sinning and letting in an unclean serpent to defile the temple, Adam loses his priestly role.¹⁹⁴

Third, the tree of life was probably the model for the lampstand that was stationed directly outside the Holy of Holies in Israel’s temple which looked like a tree with three

¹⁹⁰ G. K. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 7.

¹⁹¹ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 7.

¹⁹² Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 7–12.

¹⁹³ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 7.

¹⁹⁴ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 7–8.

branches protruding from either side and one branch pointing upward.¹⁹⁵ Fourth, the ark in the Holy of Holies contained the law which led to wisdom, which echoes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which also led to wisdom.¹⁹⁶ Touching either the ark or the tree led to death.¹⁹⁷ Fifth, just as Eden had a river flowing out from it, so too does the eschatological temple as described in Revelation 22.¹⁹⁸

Based on the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28, Beale believes Adam's role was to expand the presence of God throughout the earth.¹⁹⁹ When Adam fails in this, God starts again with Noah, who also fails, and then Abraham. In fact, Beale observes that this role to spread the presence of God is continually handed down: "God then gave the essence of the commission of Gen 1:28 to Abraham (Gen 12:2-3; 17:2, 6, 8, 16; 22:18); Isaac (26:3-4, 24); Jacob (28:3-4, 14; 35:11-12; 48:3, 15-16); and to Israel (see Deut 7:13 and Gen 47:27; Exod 1:7; Ps 107:38; and Isa 51:2."²⁰⁰

As Beale continues to trace the temple theme through the canon, he argues that the tabernacle, and ultimately Israel's temple, was another new temple of a new creation.²⁰¹ In fact, he writes, "Israel's temple was a miniature model of God's huge cosmic temple that was to dominate the heavens and earth at the end of time. That is, the temple was a symbolic model pointing to, not merely the present cosmos, but also the new heavens and earth that would be perfectly filled with God's presence."²⁰²

¹⁹⁵ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 8.

¹⁹⁶ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 8.

¹⁹⁷ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 8.

¹⁹⁸ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 8.

¹⁹⁹ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 11.

²⁰⁰ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 13.

²⁰¹ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 15.

²⁰² Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 16.

For Beale, when Christ comes on the scene, he is the temple to which all earlier temples pointed (cf. 2 Sam 7:12–14; Zech 6:12–13) because he is the epitome of the presence of God as God incarnate.²⁰³ In light of this, Israel’s temple was a shadow pointing forward to Christ and his church as the end-time reality.²⁰⁴ Beale is critical of those who anticipate the building of a future temple as being overly focused on the shadow when the reality has arrived: “Is it too dogmatic to say that such an approach would be to confuse the shadow with the end-time substance? Would this not be to want to possess the cultic picture *alongside* of the true Christological reality to which the picture points (on which see Heb 8:2, 5; 9:8–11, 23–25)? And would this not be to posit a retrogression in the progress of redemptive history?”²⁰⁵

Finally, Beale explicates John’s vision in Revelation asking and answering the question: “[How can John] see a new heavens and earth in Rev 21:1, and then in the rest of the vision from 21:9–22:5 sees only a city in the form of a garden-like temple is now clarified by having looked at the purpose of the temple throughout scripture.”²⁰⁶ Key to Beale’s interpretation is his view that the visions John describes are interpreting one another: “It is likely that the second vision in verse 2 interprets the first vision of the new cosmos and that what is heard about the tabernacle in verse 3 interprets both verses 1–2. If so, the new creation of verse 1 is identical to the ‘new Jerusalem’ of verse 2 and both represent the same reality as the ‘tabernacle’ of verse 3.”²⁰⁷ So, for Beale, the new Jerusalem is the new creation which is the dwelling place of God. This represents the ultimate fulfillment of the creation mandate, as God’s presence which was once limited to

²⁰³ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 19–20.

²⁰⁴ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 20.

²⁰⁵ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 20–21.

²⁰⁶ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 25.

²⁰⁷ Beale, “Eden, Temple, and Church’s Mission,” 25.

the garden then Israel's temple then the church, now fills the entire new cosmos.²⁰⁸ Beale bolsters this claim further by explaining the city's composition of gold (cf. 21:18): "Why does Rev 21:18 say the city-temple will be pure gold? Because the entire 'Holy of Holies' and 'Holy Place' of Israel's temple, which were paved with gold on the walls, floor, and ceiling (so 1 Kgs 6:20–22; 2 Chr 3:4–8), have been expanded to cover the whole earth."²⁰⁹ Of the three sections of the Israelite temple—the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the outer court—Beale sees the latter two as symbolic of the visible earth and cosmos.²¹⁰ Now, in the eschatological-new creation-temple the Holy Place and outer court have dropped out like a cocoon from which the full glory and presence of God has emerged making the entire new creation the Holy of Holies.²¹¹

Herman Bavinck: renewal of creation. Although Bavinck points out that the kingdom of God is first implanted spiritually in the hearts of believers, he argues strongly against a spiritualization of the eternal state. Rather Bavinck maintains, "According to Scripture the present world will neither continue forever nor will it be destroyed and replaced by a totally new one. Instead it will be cleansed of sin and re-created, reborn, renewed, made whole."²¹² The biblical view is in between two extreme positions like that of thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, etc., who affirmed that this world would continue forever in its present form, and the views of Origen, Vorstius, Beza, etc., who thought the current world would be destroyed and replaced by an utterly different one.²¹³ Scripture's view is

²⁰⁸ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 25.

²⁰⁹ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 25.

²¹⁰ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission."

²¹¹ Beale, "Eden, Temple, and Church's Mission," 25–26.

²¹² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 715.

²¹³ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 716.

different, describing an eternal state that is holistic, integrating the physical and the spiritual: “the world according to [Scripture], consists of heaven and earth; humans consist of soul and body and the kingdom of God accordingly, has a hidden spiritual dimension and an external, visible side. Whereas Jesus came the first time to establish that kingdom in a spiritual sense. He returns at the end of history to give visible shape to it.”²¹⁴ Bavinck argues that the new Jerusalem whose architect and builder is God will be more glorious than this beautiful earth and even paradise:

The state of glory (*status gloriae*) will be no mere restoration (*restauratie*) of the state of nature (*status naturae*), but a re-formation that, thanks to the power of Christ, transforms all matter (*ύλη, hyle*) into form (*ειδος, eidos*), all potency into actuality (*potentia, actus*), and presents the entire creation before the face of God, brilliant in unfading splendor and blossoming in a springtime of eternal youth. *Substantially* nothing is lost.²¹⁵

What is the nature of human anthropology in the consummated state for Bavinck? He thinks that new life for the believer is to be understood as a transformation of life here; just as the new heaven and earth are formed out of the elements of this world, so God’s people are a re-creation of the human race that fell in Adam.²¹⁶ This life does not consist in contemplation of God in the catholic sense of *visio Dei*, nor is it a gradual development of Christian living in its current form.²¹⁷ Rather Bavinck conceives of it thus:

It is a genuinely natural life but unfolded by grace to its highest splendor and its most bountiful beauty. The matter (*materia*) remains, but the form (*forma*) differs. In that life, religion—fellowship with God—is primary and central. But that fellowship will be richer, deeper, and more blessed than it ever was or could be on earth since it will not be disturbed by any sin, or interrupted by any distance, or mediated by either Scripture or nature.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 718.

²¹⁵ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 720.

²¹⁶ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 722.

²¹⁷ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 722.

²¹⁸ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 722.

What about mankind’s corporate structures, specifically, nations and government in the eternal consummation? Although he does not elaborate on their role or function in the new creation, he does affirm their presence and that they contribute:

But in the new heaven and new earth the world as such is restored; in the believing community the human race is saved. In that community, which Christ has purchased and gathered from all nations languages, and tongues (Rev. 5:9; etc.), all the nations, Israel included, maintain their distinct places and calling (Matt. 8:11; Rom. 11:25, 22:2). All those nations—each in accordance with its own distinct national character—bring into the new Jerusalem all they have received from God in the way of glory and honor (Rev. 21:24, 26).²¹⁹

As for man’s ongoing life in eternity, Bavinck argues against a static existence. Rather, he reasons that the communion believers enjoy with God and all the redeemed in the eternal state no more entails inaction than it does now in the present dispensation.²²⁰ The rest that characterizes life in blessedness is to be understood as rest from their earthly labors (cf. Heb 4:9; Rev 14:13), not as inaction on the part of God or the redeemed.²²¹ For Bavinck, Scripture is clear that “eternal life consists in knowing and serving God, in glorifying and praising him (John 17:3; Rev. 4–11; 5:8–10, etc.). His children remain his servants who serve him night and day (Rev. 22:3). They are prophets, priests, and kings who reign on earth forever (1:6; 5:10; 22:5).”²²²

Anthony Hoekema: passages some understand as millennial are pictures of the new earth. As a classic covenantalist, Hoekema responds directly to some of the typical dispensational critiques of CC’s handling of certain OT prophecies. Many OT prophecies paint a picture of an amazing time in the future characterized by the earth being more productive than currently, the desert blossoming like a rose, the mountains

²¹⁹ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 720.

²²⁰ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 727.

²²¹ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 727.

²²² Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 727.

dripping with wine, the plowman overtaking the reaper, the cessation of weeping, the days of God's people being like that of a tree, the wolf and lamb feeding together, no one hurting or destroying in all God's holy mountain, and the earth being full of the knowledge of God like the sea is full of water.²²³ Covenantal amillennialists have been charged by dispensationalists of mishandling prophecies like the aforementioned in two ways: spiritualizing them such that promises to Israel are transferred to the church or understanding these passages in terms of heavenly fulfillment rather than earthly fulfillment in the millennium.²²⁴ Walvoord is forceful in his critique of these approaches: "By no theological alchemy should these and countless other references to earth as the sphere of Christ's millennial reign be spiritualized to become the equivalent of heaven, the eternal state, or the church as amillenarians have done."²²⁵

Though the new earth will be perfected, Hoekema affirms continuity between the renovated earth of eternity and that which exists now. Thus, he brings this emphasis in his response to Walvoord:

Prophecies of this sort should not be interpreted as referring either to the church of the present time or to heaven, if by heaven is meant a realm somewhere off in space, far away from earth. Prophecies of this nature should be understood as descriptions—in figurative language, to be sure—of the new earth which God will bring into existence after Christ comes again—a new earth which will last, not just for a thousand years, but forever.²²⁶

Hoekema also believes passages that predict the restoration of Israel to its land can be understood in terms of his new creation eschatology. Taking a typological approach, he affirms that the land of Canaan (the type) promised to Israel points forward to the entire new earth (the antitype) which will eventually be inherited by all of God's

²²³ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 275.

²²⁴ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 275.

²²⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Zondervan, 1983), 298.

²²⁶ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 275–76.

people.²²⁷ Appealing to Hebrews 4, Hoekema explains his approach:

From Hebrews 11 we learn that Abraham, who had been promised the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (v. 10). This future city, then will have to be the final fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that he would everlastingly possess the land of Canaan. What can this future city be but the “holy city” which will be found on the new earth?²²⁸

Thus, Hoekema claims that he agrees in part with dispensationalists that OT prophecies about the restoration of Israel to its land look forward to a glorious future, but this future is not just for Israel but for all of the redeemed in eternity.²²⁹

Hoekema goes on to explain his understanding of Revelation 21–22. The new Jerusalem which seems to be located in the center of the new earth, is described by John using metaphorical language of jeweled foundations and pearly gates to attempt to describe its almost inexpressible beauty.²³⁰ In addition, Hoekema maintains that the nations of the world will live together in peace (cf. Rev 22:2) and bring the best of their culture into the city: “Is it too much to say that, according to [Rev 21:24, 26], the unique contributions of each nation to the life of the present earth will enrich the life of the new earth? Shall we then perhaps inherit the best products of culture and art which this earth has produced?”²³¹

Assessment of Classic Covenantalism Using Wolfe’s Criteria for Strong Interpretive Systems

From the hermeneutical presuppositions, the rendering of the canonical narrative, and the understanding of the consummation presented above, CC can be characterized as a supersessionist reading of the biblical storyline. As such, CC and the

²²⁷ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 211.

²²⁸ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 211.

²²⁹ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 212.

²³⁰ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 285.

²³¹ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 286.

different variants covered above employ a canonical reading in which the meaning of “Israel” shifts as one moves from promise in the OT to fulfillment in the NT.²³² Towards further understanding this phenomenon, Blaising writes,

In the Old Testament the story of the Bible unfolds with promises regarding Israel, the land, the people, and the nation. But as the story moves to the New Testament, fulfillment takes place in an alternate reality—a different kind of Israel, one that transcends the land, the people, and the nation. This reality shift is from the material, the earthly, the ethnic, to a heavenly, a spiritual, a non-ethnic reality. It moves from a political, national reality to a non-political, universal reality. It changes from a focus on the particular to a universal focus [like Dumbrell]. When supersessionists say that the promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ [like Beale], the church [like Hodge and Berkhof], or the new creation [like Hoekema], this kind of reality shift informs their view.²³³

The effect one’s commitment to supersessionism has on one’s understanding of the whole Bible can hardly be understated. The difference between a supersessionist view (some model 1 views in this work) and a non-supersessionist view (models 2 and 3) are not simply about different interpretations of a range of verses which could be adjudicated by the historical, lexical, grammatical approach to interpretation found in most evangelical hermeneutics textbooks.²³⁴ Rather, they are different ways of construing the plotline that runs through all the diverse genres of Scripture uniting them in one story of redemption which is itself a hermeneutical act.²³⁵ As Charles Wood points out, this is “a basic decision” that the interpreter makes which is necessary for the “canonical use of the bible.”²³⁶

²³² Craig A. Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*, ed. Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 155.

²³³ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 155–56.

²³⁴ Craig A. Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 81.

²³⁵ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 81.

²³⁶ Charles M. Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding: Theological Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 109.

With CC's commitment to supersessionism as a backdrop, I will now move to evaluating it using Wolfe's criteria for a strong interpretive system.

Is It Comprehensive?

An interpretive system is comprehensive to the extent that it is able to account for all of the relevant data—with respect to Scripture this means it must explain all of the crucial biblical data and not just portions.²³⁷

CC's commitment to supersessionism creates problems for its ability to interpret whole sections of biblical data. Passages that describe an eschatological future for ethnic, national, territorial (ENT) Israel highlight this deficiency.

Old Testament prophecies foreseeing a Davidic king who will rule Israel and the gentile nations in righteousness and peace forever.²³⁸ Isaiah 9:6–7 describes one who will sit on David's throne and head a government characterized by peace forever. Isaiah 11:1–12 depicts a time in which the root of Jesse will oversee a kingdom order in which knowledge of the Lord extends over the earth, there is peace among humans and the animal kingdom, and conditions are such that the nations inquire of this king. Amos 9:11–15 speaks of a reunited northern and southern kingdom of Israel under the Davidic son and Israel back in her land never to be uprooted again. Finally, Zechariah 9:9–10 describes a king coming to Zion who holds the keys to salvation as well as proclaims peace to the nations, and who will rule from sea to sea. A supersessionist

²³⁷ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 158. Blaising points out that being comprehensive certainly does not mean covering every verse in the Bible, but by covering the crucial data, "the system may plausibly be said to cover all data, since there would be nothing left out that could actually change or alter the interpretative system."

²³⁸ The passages that I gloss below are drawn from Craig A. Blaising, "A Theology of Israel and the Church," in *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 92.

interpretive model simply cannot plausibly account for passages like these and so lacks comprehensiveness.

Old Testament prophecies predicting that ethnic, national, territorial Israel will be central to this eschatological kingdom, and that the gentiles will join themselves to the Lord forming one, diverse people of God (differentiated both individually and corporately as nations).²³⁹ Prophetic texts like those that follow are also problematic for CC and supersessionist models. Isaiah 11:10–12 speaks of a re-gathering of Israel to her land and also refers to a plethora of diverse people from gentile nations as God’s people:

In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Similar themes are also observable in Isaiah 49:14–52:10. Isaiah 54:1–17 indicates that the Holy One of Israel is the God of the whole earth who will possess both Israel and the gentile nations. Isaiah 60:1–62:12 describes “the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (60:14), and depicts the nations bringing their wealth into the city that seems to be the center of the kingdom with its gates always open—indicating constant access to the Lord. Jeremiah 30:1–31:37 describes the return of the Jews to their land and guarantees that the nation of Israel will be a nation before him forever (Jer 31:36). Zechariah 2:11 indicates that the Lord will dwell in the midst of the Jews and that many nations will be his people: “And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.” Zechariah 8:20–23 explains that many nations will come to Jerusalem to entreat the Lord who is located there. Zechariah 14:9, 16–19

²³⁹ The passages that I gloss below are drawn from Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92.

describes a future time period in which nations annually go to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Booths and to worship the Lord who is king. Zechariah's writings cited above (c. 520–518 BC) are particularly important because they are post-exilic. This precludes the idea that the 539 BC return from exile represents the fulfillment of God's promises through Zechariah to ENT Israel.²⁴⁰

New Testament evidence of an eschatological future for ethnic, national, territorial Israel. If supersessionists are correct, then the NT should not speak of a future for national Israel after Jesus comes on the scene; but it does, which is problematic for the comprehensiveness of CC.²⁴¹ For example, when Peter inquires about future rewards in Matthew 19:28, Jesus predicts a coming time when he will sit on the Davidic throne and the twelve apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” But, under supersessionist views in which promises to Israel are fulfilled by Christification, or by being absorbed into the person of Jesus, Jesus's words would make little sense as he would be affirming that the twelve apostles would have authority over, and sit in judgement of, Jesus.²⁴² Another important example is seen in Acts 1:3–8. Acts 1:3 states explicitly that Jesus appeared to the disciples for forty days during which he instructed them in the kingdom. When the disciples ask Jesus if he will now restore the kingdom to Israel (1:6), which indicates how they understood his teaching on the kingdom, he does not correct them and let them know that they have completely missed the point.²⁴³ He

²⁴⁰ Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever* (Silverton, OR: Lampion House, 2017), 238.

²⁴¹ 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): 5–24.

²⁴² Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 13.

²⁴³ Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 14.

does not say, “Why are you so confused and still talking about Israel. I am the true Israel.”²⁴⁴ Rather, he tells them that the timing of this event is not for them to know, which does not satisfy their curiosity, but it does indicate that there is future prophetic significance for Israel. Romans 9–11 also affirms the future importance of Israel. As Vlach notes, “Even in a state of unbelief after the era of the church has begun, Paul explicitly affirms that the ‘covenants,’ ‘temple service,’ and ‘promises’ still ‘belong(s)’ (present tense) to Israel (Rom 9:4–5). Romans 11 affirms a future for Israel by declaring that after the time of the fullness of the Gentiles, ‘All Israel will be saved’ (see Rom 11:25–26).”²⁴⁵

Is It Congruent?

A strong system of interpretation, according to Wolfe, must also be congruent. Applied to biblical theologies, a reliable system’s interpretations must “fit” the text, i.e., accord with it and account for it in a clear, natural way.

The theological covenants of classic covenantalism. Covenant theologians who emphasize the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace in their rendering of the canonical narrative are at odds with the criterion of congruence.

As a classic covenantalist himself, O. Palmer Robertson’s critique of the covenant of redemption is substantive. As was referenced above, Robertson avers that there is a difference between affirming that the counsels of the triune God include the intent to redeem and “proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son. A sense of artificiality flavors the effort to structure in covenantal terms the

²⁴⁴ Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 14.

²⁴⁵ Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 14.

mysteries of God’s eternal counsels. Scripture simply does not say much on the pre-creation shape of the decrees of God.”²⁴⁶ Robertson’s concern about the artificiality of this kind of affirmation is warranted, as the concept seems to emerge from a theological system and then is brought to bear on the text rather than drawing theology from the text. Stephen Wellum’s hermeneutical distinction between “intratextual” and “extratextual” is helpful here.²⁴⁷ Wellum argues that being intratextual as an interpreter means allowing the self-description of Scripture to direct and shape one’s theology:

Contra an extratextual reading of Scripture (the idea that people approach Scripture with a prior worldview that then squeezes the Scripture into that grid and interprets it accordingly), intratextual seeks to let Scripture speak on its own terms, that is, according to its own presentation, worldview framework, and structures (e.g., “covenant”). As we read biblical texts leading to a canonical reading, we let Scripture unfold its own plan along its own storyline, which is the only way to “think God’s thoughts after him.”²⁴⁸

Of course, CC theologians are not bringing a different worldview to bear on the text, but they do appear to bring their own framework and structure to the text, as opposed to allowing Scripture’s own internal categories and structures to unfold the storyline, and in this sense, they are extratextual.

There are other aspects of the CC construal of the covenants that lack congruence and are extratextual. In fact, renowned reformed theologian John Murray is critical of the covenant of works in this regard. Murray straightforwardly observes that Scripture nowhere designates the events of Genesis 1–2 as a covenant.²⁴⁹ Murray goes on

²⁴⁶ Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 54.

²⁴⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (2012), 89.

²⁴⁸ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 115n17.

²⁴⁹ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 49. Murray acknowledges Hos 6:7, but avers that it can be interpreted in ways other than to somehow affirm the basis for a covenant of works in the Adamic economy.

to argue that covenants are redemptive in nature²⁵⁰—thus, they appear after the fall in the biblical story. He also notes that the covenant concept in Scripture, “denotes the oath-bound confirmation of promise and involves a security which the Adamic economy did not bestow.”²⁵¹ Finally, Murray questions the congruence of the covenant of works as a valid concept when describing a relationship between God and man:

The *promise* was that of the greatest felicity in heaven. The obligation which God assumed in this promise was wholly gratuitous; God had no debt, strictly speaking, from which a right could belong to man. The only debt was that of his own faithfulness to the promise. And as for man, he could not, strictly and properly, obtain merit from his obedience and could not seek the reward as a right. The worthiness of works could bear no proportion to the reward of life eternal.

A further critique of CC’s congruence is put forward by Wellum when he notes that Scripture speaks of *covenants* (cf. Gal 4:24; Eph 2:12; Heb 8:7–13) not the one *covenant* of grace.²⁵² As to why many CC theologians emphasize the covenant of grace, Wellum argues it is because it has the effect of unifying the testaments such that the doctrine of infant baptism can be upheld. Any kind of detailed analysis of pedobaptism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but how the covenant of grace functions in justifying the doctrine is germane. Wellum elucidates this:

At the heart of the advocacy and defense of the doctrine of infant baptism is the argument that it is an implication drawn from the comprehensive theological category of the “covenant of grace,” a category which, it is claimed, unites the Scriptures and without which the Bible cannot be understood correctly. In many ways, all other arguments for infant baptism are secondary to this overall line of reasoning. If one can establish the basic continuity of the “covenant of grace” across the canon, then it is the belief of most pedobaptists that their doctrine is biblically and theologically demonstrated. It does not seem to bother them that in the NT there is no express command to baptize infants and no record of any clear case of infant baptism. Rather, as John Murray admits, “the evidence for infant baptism falls into the category of good and necessary inference” and ultimately this inference is rooted and grounded in a specific covenantal argument. Covenant theology, then, according

²⁵⁰ Murray, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 2:49.

²⁵¹ Murray, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 2:49.

²⁵² Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, annotated ed. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), 126.

to the pedobaptist, requires infant baptism. In fact, specific details in their argument such as the “mixed” nature and various NT passages utilized to support their view such as the household texts, are all dependent on their understanding of the continuity of the covenant of grace across redemptive history. Ultimately, if Baptists want to argue cogently against the pedobaptist viewpoint and for a believer’s baptism, we must, in the end, respond to this covenantal argument.²⁵³

Universalizing the particular. Another problem of congruence for CC’s construal of the storyline and the consummation of redemptive history is reading the biblical narrative as a progression from the particular in the OT to the universal in the NT.²⁵⁴ Blaising effectively summarizes this approach:

Supersessionist interpretation typically construes the progression of the canonical narrative from particularism to universalism. In this view, the Old Testament tells a story about God’s plan for and blessings to one particular people, whereas the New Testament expands the plan and blessing to include all peoples. There is a progression from the particular to the universal, from an ethnic political Israel among the nations to a multi-ethnic, universal Israel inclusive of all nations!²⁵⁵

Of course in the OT there is much focus on the nation of Israel and the NT clearly emphasizes the mission of taking the gospel to the nations, but these programs are not mutually exclusive, rather they are complementary throughout the Bible.²⁵⁶ The biblical data that follows will demonstrate this point.²⁵⁷ In the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:2–3, readers see both the particular and the universal present from the beginning, as God promises “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Moreover, God’s promise to the Davidic house does not just pertain to one nation, but has in view all the other nations as well, as is made clear in Psalm 2:8, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your

²⁵³ Wellum, “Baptism and Relationship between Covenants,” 97–98. For a full treatment of how the covenantal argument is laid out relying on the covenant of grace and critique, see entire chapter (97–161).

²⁵⁴ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

²⁵⁵ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

²⁵⁶ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

²⁵⁷ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”²⁵⁸ Many psalms and prophets speak of blessings coming upon the nations, and Daniel 2:35 describes a coming kingdom that is worldwide (Dan 2:35) and features all the nations at peace and in their places including Israel (2 Sam 7:10–11; Ezek 37:26–28; Isa 2:1–4).²⁵⁹ Blaising observes, “Isaiah foresaw the extension of the favored term ‘my people’ to gentile nations *in addition to not in substitution of or through redefinition of* Israel (Isa. 19:24–25).”²⁶⁰ This pattern is repeated in John’s vision in Revelation of the New Jerusalem where the city is described in terms of breathtaking beauty, and as illuminated by the glory of God which the nations are said to “walk by” (NASB) as they bring their glory into the city. Blaising incisively notes the incongruence of supersessionists who misconstrue the particular and universal in the Bible: “It is not necessary to eliminate the particular in order to institute the universal nor is it necessary to expand the particular to become the universal, rather, the particular is both the means to the blessing of the universal as well as a central constitutive part of it.”²⁶¹

Holistic redemption and consummation. The redemption that is described in the Bible is holistic and multi-faceted—describing God’s renewal of all things culminating in an eschatological kingdom that is reflective of such. The views of CC theologians like Dumbrell, are incongruent with this rich, biblical picture of redemption. Blaising summarizes how the Bible’s holistic eschatology is in conflict with a view like Dumbrell’s:

A holistic eschatology [is one] in which ‘all the promises of God find their Yes in Christ’ (2 Cor 1:20). This includes promises regarding Israel. And, it extends to

²⁵⁸ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

²⁵⁹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

²⁶⁰ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

²⁶¹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 162.

promises regarding the nations. It includes God's plans and purpose for the earth as well as the heavens. It envisions human beings not only as individuals but in their various corporate connections from their ethnic identities to their political and social organizations. In a holistic eschatology, the kingdom of God is a robust rather than a thin concept.²⁶²

Dumbrell's eschatological errors stem from his belief that the diversity resulting from Babel is a direct implication of mankind's sin and constitutes the fall of society.²⁶³ But, diversity is a constituent feature of God's creative work seen in the vastness of the creation itself, in the differences between men and women, the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ, and the diversity observable in human collectives of cultures and nations. Certainly, there was much that was egregious in the Babel incident, but it is wrong to conclude that God will eventually homogenize the diversity that came from it. The placement of the so called "Table of Nations" in chapter 10 of Genesis prior to the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11 mitigates against this conclusion. In addition, Acts 17:26 straightforwardly states that God made the nations and determined their duration and territories: "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place."

Dumbrell's mono-nation view of the consummation that he believes to be first predicted in Genesis 12 represents a truncated understanding of redemption that has the effect of stripping out of the eschaton the corporate dimensions of human anthropology that Scripture indicates will be present there (this will be argued for in chap. 5). Rather than a *mono-nation*, the eschatological kingdom predicted and described in the Bible is *multi-national*. The kingdom will fill the earth, but its inhabitants will not simply be individuals who are part of one collective, rather, they will be part of different nations.

²⁶² Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 165.

²⁶³ For a refutation of the Babel as pure judgement view see Andrew H. Kim, "God's Plan for the Nations" (ThM thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2011).

Blaising notes, “Jews of Israel and Gentiles of the various nations—are equally redeemed by Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In this way, God dwells with and in his peoples (Is 25:6–8; Rev 21:3,22–22:5). This is essential to grasp both the universality of the kingdom and the particularity of the divine promise to Israel.”²⁶⁴

Is It Consistent?

Another aspect of a reliable interpretive system is that it is consistent. That is, the interpretations that the system renders at one point are not in conflict with those it produces at another point.

Israel is replaced, but then reappears. As supersessionists, CC theologians affirm that Israel is replaced by the church in the biblical narrative. However, then some CC theologians understand Israel to reappear along with gentile nations in the eternal consummation, and others affirm gentile nations will be present in the eschaton but not Israel. Both of these interpretations suffer from problems of consistency.

Bavinck’s supersessionism is evident from his interpretation of 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Bavinck writes in one section (“The Church as the ‘People of God’”), “Under the Old Testament dispensation Israel was the people that had been called together and convened for God’s service. In the New Testament the people of Israel have been replaced by the church of Christ, which is now ‘the holy nation, the chosen race, the royal priesthood’ of God.”²⁶⁵

However, Bavinck goes on to affirm the presence of national Israel in the eschaton:

²⁶⁴ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 89.

²⁶⁵ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 296.

But in the new heaven and new earth the world as such is restored; in the believing community the human race is saved. In that community, which Christ has purchased and gathered from all nations languages, and tongues (Rev. 5:9; etc.), all the nations, Israel included, maintain their distinct places and calling (Matt. 8:11; Rom. 11:25, 22:2). All those nations—each in accordance with its own distinct national character—bring into the new Jerusalem all they have received from God in the way of glory and honor (Rev. 21:24, 26).²⁶⁶

It is inconsistent to say that Israel has been replaced and then affirm that Israel reappears in the eternal consummation. Hoekema's critique of dispensationalists regarding 1 Peter 2:9 is equally applicable to Bavinck, as can be seen by Hoekema's comments from his chapter, "A Critique of Dispensational Premillennialism":

When we now look carefully at I Peter 2:9 we notice that Peter is here applying to the New Testament church expressions which are used in the Old Testament to describe Israel. The words "a chosen race" are applied in Isaiah 43:20 to the people of Israel. The expressions "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" are used to describe the people of Israel in Exodus 19:6. The words "God's own people" or "a people for his possession" are applied to the people of Israel in Exodus 19:5. Peter is therefore saying here in the plainest of words that what the Old Testament said about Israel can now be said about the church. No longer are the people of Israel to be thought of exclusively as constituting the chosen race—the Jewish-Gentile church is now God's chosen race. No longer are the Old Testament Jews God's holy nation—the entire church must now be so called. No longer is Israel by itself "a people for God's possession"—these words must now be applied to the entire New Testament church. Is it not abundantly clear from the passages just dealt with that the New Testament church is now the true Israel, in whom and through whom the promises made to Old Testament Israel are being fulfilled?²⁶⁷

Hoekema's attached note is also instructive: "If the New Testament church is now God's holy nation, what room is left for the future emergence (in the millennium, so it is claimed) of another 'holy nation' which will be distinct from the church?"²⁶⁸ Hoekema's argument that in light of the church's replacement of Israel, there is no room for the nation of Israel to appear in the millennium (as dispensationalists hold) applies to Bavinck's view of Israel's reappearance in the eternal state.

²⁶⁶ Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 720.

²⁶⁷ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 198.

²⁶⁸ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 198n11.

However, Hoekema's view suffers from a conceptual inconsistency of its own. If Israel points forward to the one *nation* that is the church, why are there *nations* present in the eschaton? And does it make sense that if there are nations present, that the one nation that is absent is Israel? The nation that was privileged to be given the covenants of promise and through whom the Messiah came?

Death present in the new earth? Many CC theologians are demonstrably inconsistent in their understandings of Isaiah 65:20, "No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed"; and Revelation 21:4, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Hoekema and Beale both falter at this point.

Hoekema describes Revelation 21:1–4 as "the most breathtaking description of the new earth in the entire Bible."²⁶⁹ He goes on to affirm that death will be non-existent in the eternal consummation according to Revelation 21:4: "The bold strokes of verse 4 suggest far more than they actually say. There will be no tears on the new earth. Crying and pain will belong to the former things which have passed away. And there will be no more death—no more incurable diseases, no more funeral services, no more final farewells."²⁷⁰

In observing Hoekema's comments on Isaiah 65:20, the inconsistency with his understanding of Revelation 21:4 becomes plain. Just prior to making clear that he understands the entire section of Isaiah 65:17–25 to describe the eternal state on the new earth he writes, "We know that the Bible predicts that at the end of time there will be a

²⁶⁹ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 284.

²⁷⁰ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 285.

new earth (see for example. Is. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21:1). Why may we not therefore understand the details found in these verses as descriptions of life on the new earth?”²⁷¹ The emphatic answer to Hoekema’s question given by nonsupersessionists is that this section of Isaiah 65 cannot be understood as life on the new earth because the text indicates that death is still present! Arguing against those who understand Isaiah 65:17–25 to be describing both a millennial era and the eternal state, Hoekema leaves no doubt that he understands Isaiah 65:20 to be descriptive of the eschaton: “There is no indication whatever that at this point, or at either verse 18 or 20, Isaiah is suddenly shifting to a description of a millennial age preceding the creation of the new heavens and new earth!”²⁷²

Beale’s interpretations of these passages reflect the same inconsistency. In his commentary on the book of Revelation he begins his remarks on 21:4 in the following way, “The final coming of God’s presence in fullness results in absolute peace and security from any form of the suffering that characterized the old creation. Not surprisingly, the forms of affliction to be done away with are those mentioned in Isaiah’s prophecy.”²⁷³ In treating Isaiah 65:20 in his section on Revelation 21:4, Beale glosses the text in the same way in his *Revelation* commentary and in his *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (both of which are volumes of over 1000 pages). He writes, “Isa. 65:20a says that ‘no longer will there be’ *unnecessary death*, as in the old age [emphasis added].”²⁷⁴ Beale’s interpretation here appears to be a clear case of attempting to maintain consistency between two of his interpretations in a way that the

²⁷¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Centrality of the Covenant of Grace,” *Reformed Journal* 5, no. 11 (December 1955): 174.

²⁷² Hoekema, “Amillennialism,” 176.

²⁷³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1050.

²⁷⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1050; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1151.

text itself will not allow. In neither of his massive works cited above, does he comment on the crucial second part of Isaiah 65:20 which makes clear that, though perhaps rare, death does still occur in the period under consideration.

Is It Coherent?

Finally, a reliable interpretive system must be coherent. That is, it must be logically tight, and hang together, as an entire system.

Speech-act theory as applied to divine promise. Speech-act theory was developed in the 1960s by formative thinkers John Austin and John Searle.²⁷⁵ The central insight of Austin and Searle was that when a person speaks, he is not just saying something, he is doing something. In fact, Austin cited the convention of a promise as the paradigmatic speech-act.²⁷⁶ When one person makes a promise to another person, a relationship is set into motion with expectations and inherent moral obligation.²⁷⁷ To violate a promise, is to violate one's word and constitutes a breach of personal integrity.²⁷⁸ The wedding ceremony provides a clear illustration of the potency of a promissory speech-act. When individuals exchange wedding vows a relationship is formed with expectations and moral obligations for both parties, and as Richard Briggs has pointed out, an hour after saying "I do," there is no convention by which someone can turn around and say, "Actually, I don't."²⁷⁹

Speech-act theory can be invoked as a helpful hermeneutical tool because

²⁷⁵ John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

²⁷⁶ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 160.

²⁷⁷ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 160.

²⁷⁸ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 160.

²⁷⁹ Richard G. Briggs, "Speech-Act Theory," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (London: SPCK, 2005), 763.

Scripture contains numerous speech-acts that come in the form of divine promise. This is clearly seen in promises God makes to Abraham and his descendants. In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham land, people, a nation, and that he will be the source of divine blessing to all nations. Genesis 15 is noteworthy because Abraham questions God about his initial promise and asks God how he can know that this will truly come to pass (Gen 15:8). God responds by participating in an ancient covenant ceremony involving passing through the remains of the covenant sacrifice and taking obligation on himself alone.²⁸⁰ In Genesis 22:15–18, God again reaffirms his promise with a solemn oath—God’s sworn allegiance to bring these things to pass is not peripheral to the story of the Bible, rather it is central to the plotline.²⁸¹ Thus, the manner in which a biblical theology understands the fulfillment of these promises will reflect the overall coherence and stability of that canonical theology.

The insights of speech-act theory shed light on a significant coherency problem for supersessionist biblical theologies. Blaising bluntly states, “To argue that the Lord ‘Christifies,’ spiritualizes or revises so as to essentially discard the national and territorial promises to Israel in the fulfillment of the plot line of Scripture is to call into question the integrity of God.”²⁸² This is particularly problematic for evangelical theologians who affirm the inerrancy of Scripture because that doctrine is tied to the integrity of God which extends to his word.²⁸³ If in the most paradigmatic form of performative language, a promise, God’s word is unreliable or can be changed significantly, how can his word in general be trusted? However, the objection extends to the very nature of God because passages like Ezekiel 37:26–28 and 39:25–29 reveal that fulfillment of God’s promises to

²⁸⁰ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 160.

²⁸¹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 161.

²⁸² Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164–65.

²⁸³ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 165.

restore Israel to her land are tied to God's very name and his nature as God.²⁸⁴ In short, CC's affirmation that the recipients of divine promise shift, in a way that cannot have been understood or anticipated by the original audience to whom those promises were given, undermines the divine word. Thus, what should be the most trust-engendering form of communication, divine promise, is rendered unreliable, and instability and incoherence are introduced into the entire system of interpretation.

Blaising brings an additional critique of CC tied to performative speech, observing that beyond the initial promises of God, the prophets reaffirm the promises:

The second problem for supersessionist interpretation also has reference to performative language, namely the performative force of prophetic reaffirmation of these covenanted promises to Israel. Not only are the promises made early in the canonical narrative, but in the later narrative they are reinforced by prophetic speech acts of swearing, reaffirming, and emphatically restating God's resolve to fulfill them as promised. The resolve is further underscored in several texts by sweeping rhetorical features like posing impossible odds, unsurmountable obstacles only to dismiss them as trifles to the powerful Creator of all things, and by dramatic scenes, such as the anguish and sorrow of adultery or the pain of parental rejection which in spite of punishment, hurt, and suffering is nevertheless overcome by an unquenchable, triumphant love. The supersessionist reading of the canonical narrative in which Israel is replaced and God's promises are "Christified," spiritualized, or otherwise substantively changed is not congruent with this line of prophetic reaffirmation and restated divine resolve.²⁸⁵

Part/whole logical fallacy. There is also an incoherence problem for CC theologians who dichotomize the particular (Israel) and the universal (the church) in the plan of God.²⁸⁶ As has been shown above, many CC theologians understand the part (Israel) to be replaced by the whole (the church) in the consummation.²⁸⁷ But, does a whole replace a part or include a part?²⁸⁸ It is incoherent to affirm that a part is taken

²⁸⁴ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 165.

²⁸⁵ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 161.

²⁸⁶ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 164.

²⁸⁷ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 164.

²⁸⁸ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 164.

away and a whole replaces it because a whole is a collection of all the parts!²⁸⁹ To speak in terms of the consummation of redemptive history, a wholly redeemed new earth would include a redeemed Israel and redeemed gentile nations all forming the one people of God, not the nation Israel being replaced by a spiritual Israel—the church.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to describe CC in its many varieties. As a model 1 view, the classic covenantal rendering of the biblical storyline features Israel being superseded. The typology of classic covenantalism is Israel-church, and it is by this mechanism that Israel is replaced by the church in the canonical narrative. Classic covenantal views of the eschaton were described and were categorized by their different emphases: a mono-nation of the redeemed inclusive of ethnic diversity (Dumbrell), an eschatological temple as the dwelling place of God extending to the whole new creation (Beale), an emphasis on the renewal of creation (Bavinck), and understanding certain passages, as biblical pictures of the eschatological new earth, rather than the millennium (Hoekema). A strength of CC is that it renders a unified biblical storyline, however as seen above, Wolfe’s criteria for strong interpretive systems reveal significant weaknesses in CC.

²⁸⁹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164.

CHAPTER 3

MODEL 1B: INDIVIDUAL ETHNIC IDENTITY, BUT NO NATIONAL TERRITORIALITY IN THE CONSUMMATION DUE TO ISRAEL'S FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST (PROGRESSIVE COVENANTALISM)

Another major biblical theology that fits under model 2 is Progressive Covenantalism (PC). PC theologians understand their view to be a variant of new covenant theology, but they want to differentiate themselves in some important ways.¹ Due to space constraints, and given PC's prominence in recent debates, this section of the dissertation will feature PC as the primary representative of new covenant theology. Also, given the heuristic nature of the biblical theology models articulated in this dissertation, the views categorized under each, bear a family resemblance, but have distinctives as well. Thus, in what follows I will acknowledge CC and PC areas of agreement but focus my attention on areas where they are distinct.

Progressive Covenantalism

Hermeneutics

Like CC, PC can be characterized as a broadly supersessionist view. However, PC theologians are uncomfortable with this designation believing it to convey that Israel

¹ Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 3. Wellum and Parker list the following as helpful examples of new covenant theology: Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002); John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998); A. Blake White, *The Newness of the New Covenant* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2007). Areas in which PC theologians distinguish themselves from some new covenant theology perspectives include the following: PC affirms a creation covenant, Christ's active obedience and the imputation of his righteousness, and PC wants to be careful not to dismiss the instructive function of the mosaic law for the life of the church. In addition, PC advocates believe that it is inadequate to differentiate the old and new covenants in terms of categories like these: conditional/unconditional and external/internal.

is *replaced* in the biblical storyline by something that is not Israel. Rather, PC theologians understand Israel's role to be *fulfilled* in Christ. Drawing on N. T. Wright, Graeme Goldsworthy, and Patrick Fairbairn, Brent Parker describes the relation of Israel to Christ in the following way:

The New Testament (NT) presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel and all the OT covenant mediators, for he ushers in the promises to Israel (restoration and return from exile, the land, etc.), embodies their identity, and completes Israel's role, calling, and vocation. All the institutions (the sacrificial system, tabernacle, temple, Sabbath, feasts, the law), identity markers (e.g., circumcision), offices (prophet, priest, king), and key events (e.g., the exodus) of Israel find their culmination in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. As Patrick Fairbairn correctly surmises, the Israelite nation "with their land and their religious institutions, were, in what distinctively belonged to them under the old covenant, of a typical nature; the whole together, in that particular aspect, has passed away—it has become merged in Christ and the Gospel dispensation." Jesus is the "true Israel" in that he typologically fulfills all that the nation of Israel anticipated and hoped for; Jesus is the one who brings to completion the covenants, inaugurates the kingdom, and establishes the prophesied new covenant with his blood.²

Thus, PC theologians understand Christ to be fulfilling in his person the role of corporate Israel in the history of redemption. As a result, Israel continues in the biblical story line in a fulfilled but altered state.

The key to understanding the Old Testament is the New Testament. Like CC, PC gives priority to the NT in interpreting the OT. In this vein, PC understands *sensus plenior* to be a biblical phenomenon in which OT authors did not exhaustively understand the meaning and implications of all that they wrote.³ Wellum helpfully describes his view:

² Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 44–45. Tied to his understanding of Israel's fulfillment in Christ, Parker cites the following: N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 237; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 253–56; Patrick Fairbairn, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, Students' Reformed Theological Library (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 255.

³ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 111. Wellum cites G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts," *Themelios* 14, no. 3

As authors who wrote under divine inspiration, what they wrote was God given, true, and authoritative. However, they might not, and probably did not, understand where the entire revelation was going, given the fact that God had not yet disclosed all the details of his eternal plan. Thus, as more revelation is given 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, since later texts bring with them greater clarity and understanding.⁴

It is in this sense that Wellum believes that NT authors can “expand” the meaning of OT authors—accordingly he writes, “we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is brought to fulfillment in Christ.”⁵

Scripture is a progressive revelation. Of course, the progressive nature of Scripture is widely held. However, there are some important emphases in PC’s understanding of such. God’s plan of redemption, mighty acts, and word interpretation of those acts in Scripture do not happen all at once, but over time in what Wellum describes as, “a *progressive* manner by unique twists and turns in separate but related epochs, largely demarcated by God’s acts and redemptive covenants, which reach their fulfillment, telos (end/goal), and terminus in the person and work of Messiah Jesus.”⁶ As Wellum describes, PC’s understanding of progressive revelation is emphatically Christological in the sense that when Jesus comes on the scene, all of the prior revelation of the OT finds its fulfillment in him.⁷ Referring to Hebrews 1:1–3, Wellum writes,

(April 1989): 89–96.

⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 111–12.

⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 112. See also Oren R. Martin, “The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 269; Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 159.

⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 116. See Stephen J. Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), 78.

⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 116; see also Jason S. DeRouchie, “How Does Biblical Theology Help Us See Christ in the Old Testament?,” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 41–47.

But now, with the coming of the Son, the last days have dawned; the last days that the Old Testament revelation anticipated have now come to fulfillment “in Son” (*en hui ō*; 1:2), underscoring that in Christ the final, definitive, complete revelation has now come. In this way, the author of Hebrews, along with the entire New Testament, places the Son in a qualitatively different category than the prophets who preceded him. The effect of this is not to downplay the authority of the Old Testament prophetic revelation; rather, the point is that the previous revelation was incomplete and, by its very nature, was intended by God to point beyond itself to God’s full self-disclosure in his Son. This is why the Son is more than a mere prophet (though he is the fulfillment of the entire prophetic institution): he is the one about whom the prophets spoke; he is the one who fulfills the previous, incomplete revelation. Even more, in the Son, all God’s revelation and redemptive purposes culminate.⁸

So, for PC, the concept of progressive revelation is understood to be additional information that God reveals over time, but also an advance culminating in the coming of Christ such that major changes happen in redemptive history as humanity enters the new covenant era, i.e., there is significant discontinuity in the move from the period of promise to fulfillment. This is in contrast to classic covenantalism which affirms that progressive revelation is God giving further disclosure over time, but this information gives progressive clarity regarding the plan of salvation.⁹ While CC emphasizes continuity in the move from promise to fulfillment, PC understands there to be major redemptive-historical differences that are ushered in with the coming of Christ.

The three horizons of biblical interpretation. Stephen Wellum argues that the interpreter only does justice to the notion of progressive revelation by correctly understanding the relationships among the biblical covenants. Toward this end, Wellum invokes the interpretive method of Richard Lints which involves interpreting texts according to three horizons: *textual*, *epochal*, and *canonical*.¹⁰ The textual horizon refers

⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 116–17.

⁹ The essence of this idea was communicated to me in a private conversation with Dr. Craig Blaising.

¹⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 119. See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 259–311. Brent Parker also invokes Lints’s horizons of interpretation towards proper biblical interpretation in general, and biblical typology in particular. Parker, “Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” 48.

to the immediate context of the text that one is studying and emphasizes that the meaning of the passage is ascertained through the grammatical-historical-literary method endorsed by most evangelicals.¹¹ Next, an exegete must consider the epochal horizon, i.e., he must ask and answer the question: where is this passage located in redemptive history? An interpreter must consider the fact that Bible passages do not come to readers in a vacuum, rather they are organically connected to what has come before in God's revelation.¹² Later authors refer to and build on what earlier inspired authors have communicated, and the astute Bible interpreter will notice *interbiblical* or *intertextual* developments.¹³ Wellum underlines the importance of what biblical authors do when they make intertextual connections:

They build on what is given, and not only with a greater understanding of where God's plan is going; they also begin to identify God-given patterns between earlier and later events, persons, and institutions within the unfolding of God's plan—what is rightly labelled *typology*. As more revelation is given, including the development of God-given patterns (types), God's plan moves forward and ultimately reaches its telos in Christ. Later authors do not arbitrarily make connections by referring to earlier revelation; rather, they develop these patterns in ways that God intends and that do not contravene earlier texts.¹⁴

Wellum acknowledges that there are differences among scholars as to where to draw epochal lines in Scripture, but he notes that almost all of the approaches to these divisions are tied to covenants, and remarks, “[this] is why we contend that *the Bible's own way of making epochal divisions is by the progression of the covenants.*”¹⁵ However, what is

¹¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 119–20.

¹² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 120.

¹³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 120.

¹⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 120–21. Wellum cites D. A. Carson who warns against anachronistic approaches to “intertextuality.” Carson commends a more cautious approach which he says when “carefully exploited . . . proves to be one of the lashings that hold biblical theology together.” The question is whether *Kingdom through Covenant* is cautious enough, i.e., accurate in some of the intertextuality the authors identify. D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity Diversity of Scripture*, ed. Brian S. Rosner and T. Desmond Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 98.

¹⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 121–22. Wellum conveys that the understanding of how the Bible itself divides redemptive history contained in *Kingdom through Covenant* is a modification of Graeme Goldsworthy's proposal; see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical*

more important than precise identification of epochal shifts in the plan of God, is that texts are read in light of what has preceded them.¹⁶ Finally, the interpreter needs to think about the canonical context of the passage under consideration. Interpreting Scripture canonically, presupposes several doctrinal truths. As Wellum puts it, “Because Scripture is *God’s Word*, from the triune, sovereign, and omniscient Creator of the universe, we expect *an overall unity and coherence* between the Testaments, which, despite their diversity, together declare God’s unfailing plan and purposes in this fallen world.”¹⁷ Thus, to be properly understood, texts must be interpreted in relation to the rest of Scripture.¹⁸ Drawing on Vanhoozer, Wellum argues that reading the Bible canonically is in fact the only way to truly be biblical, i.e., to read it “according to its truest, fullest, *divine* intention.”¹⁹ Thus, utilizing the three horizons results in a grammatical-historical–literary–canonical method of interpretation.²⁰ Finally, Scripture is to be understood Christologically. To underscore this point, Wellum quotes Vanhoozer who describes the canon as:

A great hall of witnesses in which different voices all testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. Over and above the laws and promises, the warnings and commands, the stories and the songs, is an all embracing act, that of witnessing to what God was and is doing in Christ. . . . Thanks to their overarching canonical context, the smaller communicative acts are caught up and reoriented to the larger purpose of “making wise unto salvation.”²¹

Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 19–110.

¹⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 121.

¹⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 110. See Oren R. Martin, “What Must We Presuppose to Do Biblical Theology?,” in DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 111–19.

¹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 126.

¹⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 126. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in Rosner and Alexander, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 61.

²⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 127.

²¹ Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” 62, quoted in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 126–27. It is noteworthy that prior to the formulation of PC as expressed in *Kingdom through Covenant* in 2012, Blaising and Bock devoted a chapter in their 1993 publication *Progressive Dispensationalism*, which described how the biblical covenants converge on Christ and are fulfilled in him.

Critical to PC theologians' views of the Christological nature of Scripture, how the covenants relate to one another, and their overall understanding of the biblical storyline, is the notion of typology to which I now turn.

Typology. First PC theologians are careful to differentiate their understanding of typology from allegory. Progressive covenantalists argue that typology is grounded in history, the text, and interbiblical development such that persons, events, and institutions correspond by divine intention and according to the divine plan.²² By contrast, Wellum argues that “allegory assumes none of these things.”²³ In essence, according to Vanhoozer, allegory is an approach to interpretation in which “*this* (word) means *that* (concept),” and *that* is a kind of interpretive key provided by an extratextual framework.²⁴

Typology is not allegory, but what is it exactly?²⁵ Wellum formulates a definition based on the work of Richard Davidson²⁶: “Typology is the study of the Old Testament redemptive historical realities or ‘types’ (persons, events, institutions) that God has specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their

However, the major difference between these two Christocentric understandings of the covenants is that the PD approach is non-supersessionist. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), esp. chap. 6, “The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants through Jesus Christ.”

²² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 129.

²³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 129. See Parker, “Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern,” 22–53.

²⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 129–30. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, anniv. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 119.

²⁵ For a thorough treatment of typology from a progressive covenantal perspective see Brent Evan Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies” (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); see also W. Edward Glenny, “Typology: A Summary of the Present Evangelical Discussion,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 4 (December 1997): 627–38.

²⁶ Davidson is a Seventh Day Adventist scholar who did his doctoral dissertation on the NT uses of τύπος. Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated, appropriated, and consummated) in New Testament redemptive history.”²⁷ Wellum elaborates on this definition by first noting that “typology is a feature of divine revelation rooted in history and the text” involving “an organic relationship or analogical correspondences between ‘persons, events, and institutions’ in one epoch (‘type’) and what they anticipate, or their fulfillment, in a later epoch (‘antitype’).”²⁸ Drawing on Lints, he also argues that the use of typology in Scripture links earlier epochal horizons to later ones and in this way connects the present with the future and retroactively connects the future to the past according to the broader divine pattern of promise and fulfillment.²⁹ Another aspect of typology, as understood by progressive covenantalists, is that it should be thought of as a subset of predictive prophecy.³⁰ Unlike standard biblical prophecy which is communicated in a direct and propositional manner, typology is conveyed in an exemplified manner. Because of typology’s indirect nature it is only discerned by the interpreter’s sensitivity to God-ordained patterns that are repeated and developed by OT authors in such a way that they ultimately point forward to and are fulfilled in Christ. This harmonizes well with the Pauline sense of the mystery and hiddenness of the gospel in ages past, but now made known with the advent of Christ.³¹

Finally, Wellum underscores how typology normally functions in Scripture according to a threefold pattern: first the pattern is characterized by *repetition* of a person, event, or institution developing a trajectory that ultimately finds antitypical

²⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 130. For a more concise articulation of Wellum’s view of typology see Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 82–87.

²⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 130.

²⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 130–31. See also Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 304.

³⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 131; see also Parker, “Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern,” 60–69.

³¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 131–32.

fulfillment first in Christ and then in his people.³² Nuancing typology's Christocentric nature Wellum writes,

While not all typological patterns are directly Christocentric (e.g., the antitype of Peter's flood typology is not Christ but water baptism and final judgment, 1 Pet. 3:18–22), yet Brent Parker rightly insists that "all OT types have a Christotelic emphasis as they are qualified by their relationship to Jesus, his redemptive work, and the consummation of the new heavens and the new earth." All typological patterns, then, either converge in or are mediated through Christ and his work.³³

A second way that typology functions in Scripture is its *a fortiori* (lesser to greater) quality—in other words, as the type is fulfilled in the antitype, there is always an escalation.³⁴ Wellum illustrates,

For example, through covenantal progression, as one moves from Adam or David to the prophets, priests, and kings, and through the covenants to the last Adam, the true Davidic king, the Great High Priest, and so on, the antitype is always greater than the previous types. Yet escalation across time does not occur incrementally from the original type to each installment and then to Christ, as if there is a straight line of increase. Rather, escalation fully occurs with Christ's coming. The previous typological patterns point forward to the greater one to come (Rom. 5:14), but the greater aspect is realized only in Christ and then extended to his people. For example, Adam is a type of Christ, and "other Adams" arise, yet these "Adams" (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Israel, David) fail in their obedience and faith; there is really no increase in them. Yet all of them anticipate the last/second Adam, who obeys perfectly. What is true of Adam is also true of other typological patterns, whether they are various persons (Moses, Israel, David, prophets, priests, kings), events (the exodus), or institutions (sacrificial system, tabernacle temple).³⁵

There are two important implications to be drawn from the above according to Wellum. First the *a fortiori* nature of typology elucidates the unique identity of God the Son incarnate who is the second Adam, but it also highlights the uniqueness of the new covenant era and justifies seeing legitimate discontinuity in the move from the period of promise to fulfillment.³⁶ The third characteristic of typology as it functions in Scripture is

³² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 133.

³³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 133. See Parker, "Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 72.

³⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 134–35. See Parker, "Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 69–79.

³⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 134–35.

³⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 135. It is along these lines that progressive

that it is developed *through covenantal progression*.³⁷ It is helpful here to quote Wellum at length:

In fact, to think through the development of typological patterns is to walk through the covenants. For example, Adam and “other Adams” are associated with the covenants of creation, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David. In these covenant heads, Adam’s role continues, and each one anticipates Christ, who by his obedience secures our redemption. Or think of the promise to Abraham regarding his “seed.” As the seed promise unfolds, it does so in Isaac, Israel, the Davidic king, and ultimately Christ—and then it extends to the church as Abraham’s spiritual offspring. Or think of how Moses, who is foundational for the institution of the prophets and who inaugurates the priestly role under the old covenant, is developed in terms of an entire institution of prophets and priests that ultimately culminates in Christ. . . . All these types are tied to the covenants; one cannot think of them apart from wrestling with how the covenants relate to each other and how the covenants are fulfilled in Christ and the new covenant. In this way, all biblical history is eschatological and prophetic, not merely in verbal predictions but also in types/patterns associated with the covenants, which anticipate and predict the dawning of the end of the ages in the coming of the Lord of glory. This is why the entire New Testament is Christological in focus, since Jesus is the one whom the covenants and prophets anticipate (e.g., Matt. 5:17–18; 11:11–15; Rom. 3:21, 31). This is another reason why “putting together” the biblical covenants is the means by which we grasp the plan of God and thus understand the Scriptures. Apart from doing so, we fail to discern how the “parts” fit with the “whole,” and we are less than “biblical” in our reading of Scripture.³⁸

In summary, typology, as defined above, is crucial for PC’s understanding of how the covenants relate to one another, in the move from promise to fulfillment, how one understands the very identity of Christ, and how the entire biblical storyline fits together.³⁹

The Structure of the Canonical Narrative as Understood by Progressive Covenantalism

Like CC, PC largely understands redemptive history as the re-heading of the

covenantalists justify a Baptist ecclesiology.

³⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 135.

³⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 135–36.

³⁹ For a brief summary of how typology is understood by progressive covenantalists see Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 114–17.

human race from Adam to Christ, ultimately, bringing about the new creation. But, whereas CC understands the canonical narrative through the theological covenants, PC dispenses with the theological covenants, and focuses only on the biblical covenants to describe their understanding of the unfolding of the plan of God.⁴⁰

Adam and the covenant with creation. Within covenant theology and its varieties, there is much debate over the presence of a covenant in the opening chapters of the Bible. However, progressive covenantalists strongly affirm the presence of a covenant with creation with Adam as its head, as they see the creation covenant as foundational to all the other covenants which further develop the representative role that God intended Adam to play in the world.⁴¹ In seeking to both justify his affirmation of the presence of a covenant with creation and further explain Adam's role, Wellum offers rationales for his view.

First, the absence of the word "covenant" in Genesis 1–2, is insufficient to deny the presence of one. Drawing on the work of William Dumbrell, Wellum appeals to the distinction between the initiation ("cutting") of a covenant and the maintenance ("establishing") of a covenant arguing that the repeated use of the term "establish" in reference to the Noahic covenant (Gen 6:18, 9:9, 11, 17) implies a pre-existing covenant which must be the covenant of creation.⁴²

Second, Wellum argues that there is a covenantal context in Genesis 2, observing that there all the typical elements of an ancient Near Eastern lord-vassal

⁴⁰ For an overview of Wellum's view of how the covenants unfold in Scripture see Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 87–98; see also Merkle's work which provides a very brief, but helpful summary of how the covenants function in progressive covenantalism: Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 119–21.

⁴¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 672. See Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 89–21.

⁴² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 667; see William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984), 11–26, 31–39.

agreement “including conditions of obedience with sanctions for disobedience.”⁴³ Also, tied to the ancient Near East context of the passage, Wellum makes the following comments regarding the image of God in Adam and Eve:

In the ancient world, the concept of the “image of the god” conveys the idea of a physical representation of the “god,” which underscores how Adam and the entire human race are viewed as vice regents who are to rule and function in the place of God, as God’s representatives, as God’s servant-priest kings. However, unlike the ancient Near East, where this concept is applied only to the king, Scripture teaches that the entire human race, under the headship of Adam, was created to be “king” over all creation, thus emphasizing the dual relationship of Adam and the human race to God and to the created order.⁴⁴

Noting that in Luke 3:38, Adam is called the “son” of God, Wellum argues that the image of God and the concept of “sonship” are linked in Scripture because both terms strongly convey both function and representation.⁴⁵ “Sonship” is picked up in subsequent covenants and applied to Israel, David, and to Christ.⁴⁶

Third, given that the overall structure of the Bible moves from humanity being headed by Adam to being headed by Christ (Rom 5:12–21), it is difficult to understand Christ as the head of the new covenant without seeing Adam as head of a creation covenant.⁴⁷ Wellum describes Adam and Eve’s role in the original creation setting, “As God’s image bearers and children, Adam and Eve are given the mandate to rule over God’s creation, to put all things under their feet (cf. Ps. 8:5–8) for God’s glory, and to establish the pattern of God’s kingdom in this world whereby everything that God has made stands in right relationship to him as God intended.”⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Adam and

⁴³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 667.

⁴⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 668.

⁴⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 667–68.

⁴⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 668.

⁴⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 670.

⁴⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 670; see also Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 99.

Eve fail in their role and bring the whole human race down introducing sin and death into God’s good world and leaving all things in a state of judgement unless God would intervene.⁴⁹ The text reveals that God does plan to intervene through the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15)—in the context, this enigmatic figure will apparently reverse the disastrous effects of the fall.⁵⁰ As one walks through the covenants, ultimately, Christ emerges as the head of the new creation—inaugurating it at his first coming and consummating it at his second coming—bringing God’s eschatological plan to fulfillment.⁵¹

The Noahic covenant. Despite Adam’s failure under the creation covenant, God continues his commitment to the covenant beginning again with a new Adam—Noah. Of course, the situation is very different now as the world is under sin, but God is resolute as Wellum describes:

It would seem that God’s commitment to humans and creation is threatened in light of human sin and depravity, but given God’s promise in Genesis 3:15 and the description of the Noahic covenant—lasting as long as “the earth remains” (8:22)—this covenant reinforces God’s intention that creation will not be lost and that our role in it will continue as God’s image bearers and priest kings.⁵²

However, Noah disobeys (Gen 9:18–28) and Wellum remarks, “by the time we reach Genesis 11, we have Genesis 3 all over again.”⁵³ Noah demonstrates that the problem with the human heart remains (Gen 6:5–7; 8:21–22) and a radical transformation (which will be wrought by the Spirit) is needed which comes into greater focus as the covenants

⁴⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 671.

⁵⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 671.

⁵¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 672.

⁵² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 685. See Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 91–92; see also Jason S. DeRouchie, “What Is a Biblical Theology of the Covenants?,” in DeRouchie, Martin, and Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 217–18.

⁵³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 686.

progress.⁵⁴ In addition, since God commits to not continually wipe away sinful humanity, the Noahic covenant explains why two kingdoms exist alongside one another until the end: the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God.⁵⁵

The Abrahamic covenant. In light of Noah’s failure, God starts yet again with Abraham—who is another Adam-like figure. Through his covenant with Abraham (and the nation that comes from him), God will extend his rule. As Gentry writes, “God intends to establish his rule over all his creation through his relationship with Abram and his family: kingdom through covenant. Through blessing Abram and his descendants, the broken relationship between God and all the nations of the world will be reconciled and healed.”⁵⁶

Wellum summarizes his view of the covenant in four points. First, PC affirms that the Abrahamic covenant is one covenant that is further clarified in multiple passages in Genesis—not two covenants.⁵⁷ Second, it comes on the heels of the judgement of God in Genesis 11 and conveys again God’s universal plan for creation.⁵⁸ Wellum writes, “However, unlike the situation with Noah, where God destroyed everyone except Noah and his family, God does not destroy the human race. Instead, God allows the nations to exist and then calls Abraham out of the nations to become a great nation (gôy), that is, a world community, a political entity, a kingdom in the proper sense of the word.”⁵⁹ Third,

⁵⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 686.

⁵⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 686.

⁵⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 281. See Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 92–93.

⁵⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 688. For the view Gentry and Wellum are differentiating their own from in chap. 7, see Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 77–93.

⁵⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 688.

⁵⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*. PC’s understanding of national Israel’s relation to the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant will be delineated in the assessment portion of this chapter.

the covenant is multi-faceted and complex encompassing spiritual and internal aspects eventually tied to the new covenant, and national/typological elements the significance of which is understood as the storyline progresses through the biblical covenants.⁶⁰ Finally, Wellum and Gentry believe that the covenant contains both unconditional/unilateral elements (Gen 12, 15) and conditional/bilateral aspects (Gen 17, 18, 22).⁶¹ This creates tension in the narrative that is ultimately only resolved in Christ:

God, as the covenant maker and keeper will always keep his promises, despite human disobedience, because that is the kind of glorious God he is. And yet, God will always demand perfect obedience from a faithful human covenant partner that, as the covenantal story makes clear, sinful humanity cannot produce. This growing tension between God unilaterally keeping his promises and demanding an obedient covenant partner is resolved neither here nor in later covenants, as evidenced by Israel's and the Davidic kings' disobedience. Yet even within the Abrahamic covenant is a hint at how it will be resolved: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8). However, as the covenants unfold, God's provision will not merely be a lamb in our place (nor the entire priestly sacrificial system under the law covenant); God's provision is his own dear Son, the true seed of Abraham, who, because he is God, can satisfy God's own righteous demand and who, because he is human, can fully obey for us as the faithful human covenant partner.⁶²

The covenant with Israel. In God's plan, although the old covenant takes up much space in the canon of Scripture, ultimately, it is temporary and the means to a larger end, the arrival of the new and better new covenant (Jer 31:29–34; Heb 8).⁶³ Thus, when put in its proper redemptive-historical perspective, Christians should understand that as a covenant unit it has come to an end and Christians are not under it (Gal 3:15–4:7).⁶⁴ Put in its proper epochal-covenantal context, the covenant with Israel is tied back to the

⁶⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 690–91.

⁶¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 693–94.

⁶² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 694. See DeRouchie, "What Is Biblical Theology of Covenants?," 220–21.

⁶³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 694. See Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 93–95; see also DeRouchie, "What Is Biblical Theology of Covenants?," 220–21.

⁶⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 694.

covenant with Abraham which cannot be separated from the covenant with creation.⁶⁵

Wellum elaborates on Israel's role beyond fulfillment of making Abraham into a great nation:

In addition, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, Israel is called to be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (*gôy*, Ex. 19:5–6), which speaks of the nation not only in kingdom terms but also in Adamic terms. Israel, as a nation, is called to be "another Adam," a corporate representative of Yahweh and to exercise kingly rule as priest kings. In so doing, as a nation, Israel was to demonstrate to the other nations what God intended for humanity, to enjoy access to God's presence through the tabernacle temple structures in the land. In this way, the Promised Land is to Israel what Eden was for Adam. In that land, the people were to know their covenant Lord and to learn from his Torah what it means to be true image bearers and thus fully obedient sons who are wholly devoted to Yahweh in worship and service. By their covenant relationship with Yahweh, God's rule was to be extended through them, and Israel was to make known the ways of God to the nations and to bring the nations into a right relationship to God.⁶⁶

Another important element of the covenant with Israel for Wellum and Gentry is the typological patterns that are revealed in it. Among them are the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle-temple-sacrificial system, the office of prophet, and role of king.⁶⁷ All of these will find antitypical fulfillment first in Christ and then will have application to the church.⁶⁸ In addition, like the other covenants that come before it, Wellum understands the covenant with Israel to be both bilateral and unilateral.⁶⁹ He again describes both aspects in Adamic terms:

As with all the covenants, God unilaterally keeps his promises to bring about our redemption. In fact, this is what grounds our hope and confidence that God's plan of salvation will actually come about, regardless of our sin and rebellious hearts. Yet as in the other covenants, God demands that Israel be an obedient son. Israel is called to be a loyal, fully devoted, obedient son, as was Adam and the entire human race. Yet, like Adam, Israel failed. Through Israel, as another Adam, the lost dominion of humanity is to be reclaimed, but the people are unfaithful sons. While the law

⁶⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 695.

⁶⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 695–96.

⁶⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 697–98.

⁶⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 698.

⁶⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 698.

covenant held out the promise of life (Lev. 18:5), Israel broke the law and came under its curse of death and exile, as they served as a microcosm of the entire human race.⁷⁰

So, Israel is yet another unfaithful covenant partner like Adam, but through Israel will come the last Adam who by his obedience will accomplish redemption.

The Davidic covenant. Wellum stresses that the Davidic covenant is the “epitome” of the OT covenants in that “it brings the previous covenants to a climax in the king, who is the representative of Israel, the seed of Abraham, and an Adamic like figure.”⁷¹ There are two main components to it: God’s promise that the Davidic house will endure forever (2 Sam 7:12–16; 1 Chr 17:11–14), and promises connected to the Father-son relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; cf. Pss 2; 89:26–27).⁷² In many ways, the nation of Israel is now embodied in the Davidic king who is the administrator and mediator of the Mosaic covenant; thus, the Davidic sons are effectively God’s representative to Israel and function as a servant-priest-king.⁷³

Like the preceding covenants, the Davidic covenant is organically connected to the covenants that come before. For example, the great name (2 Sam 7:9; 1 Chr 17:8) of the Abrahamic promise is passed to the Davidic king as well as the great nation promise (Gen 12:2).⁷⁴ Wellum argues that this, “serves to identify the promised line of ‘seed’ that will mediate blessings to all nations.”⁷⁵ In addition, the Davidic king takes on the role of Adam and Israel to all of humanity as “son of God.”⁷⁶ In support of this understanding,

⁷⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 698.

⁷¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 700. See Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 95–96; see also DeRouchie, “What Is Biblical Theology of Covenants?,” 221–23.

⁷² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 700.

⁷³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 700.

⁷⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 701.

⁷⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 701.

⁷⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 701.

Wellum affirms Walter Kaiser's translation of 2 Samuel 7:19b: "This is the charter by which humanity will be directed," indicating that David himself understood this covenant to be universal in its application.⁷⁷ The role of the Davidic king once again repeats the pattern of God's intention to restore man's role as vice-regent of creation through the "seed" of the woman.⁷⁸ But, the tension in the biblical storyline continues to build as the Davidic kings are all disobedient. The prophets will reveal more clearly the need for David's greater son to come on the scene fulfilling all the roles of the previous covenant mediators, reversing the effects of the fall, and ushering in the new creation.⁷⁹

The new covenant. The new covenant is revealed through the prophets who are post-Davidic and build on the covenants that have come before.⁸⁰ The prophets pronounce judgement on the people because of their covenant unfaithfulness, but they hold out hope by recapitulating salvation history and projecting it into the future.⁸¹ Wellum nicely summarizes the good news the prophets proclaim as they anticipate the coming new covenant:

The prophets announce that God will unilaterally keep his promises to save, but he will do so through a faithful Davidic king (Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 52:13-53:12; 55:3; 61:1-3; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-26; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-28). In this king, identified as the "servant of Yahweh," a new or everlasting covenant will come, and with it the pouring of the Spirit (Ezek. 36:24-38; 37:11-28; Joel 2:28-32), God's saving reign among the nations, the forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34), and a new creation (Isa. 65:17). The hope of the prophets is found in the new covenant. Thus, as God's plan is unveiled through covenantal progression, it is in the new covenant that all the previous covenants find their fulfillment, terminus, and telos.⁸²

⁷⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 701.

⁷⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 702.

⁷⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 702.

⁸⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 704.

⁸¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 704. See Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 96-98.

⁸² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 704-5. See Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 117-18.

In the OT, the new covenant is revealed to be both national and international thus fulfilling all aspects of the Abrahamic covenant including its universal scope.⁸³

Wellum argues that Isaiah presents the following:

Isaiah projects the ultimate fulfillment of the divine promises in the new covenant onto an “ideal Israel”—a community intimately tied to the servant of Yahweh, the Davidic king (who is true Israel in himself), and located in a rejuvenated new creation (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). This “ideal Israel” picks up the promises to Abraham and is the ultimate fulfillment of the covenants that God established with the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and David’s son (Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–10; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–26; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–28).⁸⁴

The new covenant also fulfills the covenant with creation because, ultimately, it will reverse the effects of the fall and bring in the new creation.

There are several aspects of the new covenant that are indeed new in the progression of redemption history. First, there is a new structure in which God moves from relating to his covenant people primarily through mediatorial leaders such as prophets, priests, and kings to an emphasis on relating to individual members of the covenant community.⁸⁵ This point is most clearly seen in the new covenant promise of the universal giving of the Spirit to the people of God as opposed to the OT reality of the Spirit’s ministry being limited in scope and duration (Ezek 36:27). The prophets also anticipate that the new covenant community will be international, “This new covenant people will consist of believing people from every nation, not merely the nation of Israel.”⁸⁶ Second, the nature of new covenant people is different in that they will all be regenerate having the law “[written] on their hearts” (Jer 31:33).⁸⁷ Third, there will be a

⁸³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 705.

⁸⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 705.

⁸⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 706.

⁸⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 707. They include the following: e.g., Isa 14:1–2; 19:23–25; 42:6, 20; 49:6; 55:3–5; 56:4–8; 66:18–24; Jer 16:19; 33:9; Ezek 36:36; 37:28; Amos 9:11–12; cf. Pss 47:9; 67:2–3; 87:3–6; 117:1.

⁸⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 709.

new sacrifice which will accomplish complete forgiveness of sin (Jer 31:34).⁸⁸ All of these qualitative changes are tied to the uniqueness of the new covenant head: the Lord Jesus Christ.⁸⁹

Fulfillment of the biblical covenants in Christ and the new covenant.

Coming to the NT, the era of prediction is left behind and the period of fulfillment begins. Progressive covenantalists understand this phase of the biblical storyline to involve Christ, in himself, fulfilling all of the previous biblical covenants and passing on the covenant promises to the church.⁹⁰

The NT commences with the declaration that Jesus is the “son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1)—phrases that are full of covenantal significance.⁹¹ In addition, he is the eternal Son who “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:1–2, 14).⁹² Matthew describes Jesus’s supernatural, virginal conception which is evidence that in him the new creation has dawned—in fact, he is the first man of the new creation.⁹³ Wellum describes the clear connection between the coming of Christ and OT expectation:

Significantly, the angel tells Joseph, “You shall call his name Jesus, for [*gar*] he will save his people from their sins” (1:21). Anyone steeped in the Old Testament would immediately recognize two crucial points: first, the stress on the agency of the Spirit tied to the expectation of the coming Messiah and the messianic age (see Isaiah 11; 42; 61; Ezek. 36:25–27; Joel 2:28–32); second, the fact that this child will save his people from their sins according to the new covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:34.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 710.

⁸⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 711.

⁹⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 713–65. For a more concise explication of this point see Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 98–110; see also DeRouchie, “What Is Biblical Theology of Covenants?,” 223–25.

⁹¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 715.

⁹² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 715.

⁹³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 716.

⁹⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 716.

Jesus's baptism in which the Spirit descended upon him, and the Father speaks from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:16) is additional evidence that he is the Spirit-anointed messiah that the OT prophets foretold. Wellum elucidates further the significance of this scene:

Jesus joined others in John's "baptism of repentance" (Acts 12:24) to identify with us in covenant solidarity in his ministry of reconciliation between God and humans. Yet at the same time, God spoke to this man to declare, "'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'" (Mark 1:11). As a blend of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, 13 these words confirm that Jesus knows himself to be the son king who will bring justice to all the nations through the sovereign and saving reign of the Lord himself, thus fulfilling the previous covenant promises. 14 This event certainly signals that Jesus is the promised Messiah, but he is also more than this. Given Jesus's virginal conception (Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38), the typological significance of his status as the "beloved" (*agapē tos*) Son, and his ability to inaugurate God's kingdom, Jesus is more than a mere human son; he is also the divine Son. Jesus's baptism, then, reminds us that he is the promised Davidic son king; in him all God's promises are now coming to fulfillment.⁹⁵

The gospels make clear that Jesus's life, ministry, death, and resurrection are all tied to the inauguration of the new covenant and the kingdom of God.⁹⁶ Through his teaching and miracles, Jesus demonstrates that he is greater than anyone who has come before, and as Wellum conveys, "in Jesus's self understanding of his work, he sees himself as the antitypical fulfillment of David, Israel, Abraham, and Adam—indeed, as the eternal Son who has become son by his incarnation—in order to usher in God's saving reign and fulfill all God's covenant promises."⁹⁷ Finally, a faithful covenant head has arrived bringing with him the inaugurated kingdom of God and resolving the tension that has built in the biblical storyline.

The author of Hebrews explains the significance of Jesus's death (Heb 9:16–22) as consistent with covenant patterns of the OT in which animals were cut in two and

⁹⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 718.

⁹⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 719. See Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 100–103.

⁹⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 719.

the parties of the covenant walked through the remains to initiate the covenant.⁹⁸ In this way, Jesus's death inaugurates the new covenant even as Jesus himself makes clear (Luke 22:19–20).⁹⁹ In addition, the NT makes clear that the cross work of Jesus makes it possible for the covenantal theme of God dwelling with his people to be fully realized as it enables sinners to be justified by his righteousness (Rom 3:21–26) and acceptable in his presence.¹⁰⁰ The bodily resurrection of Christ makes clear that the new creation is visible and physical and leads to his session where he currently reigns as the Davidic king who will return to lead history to its consummation.¹⁰¹

The church is central to Jesus's messianic mission as evidenced by his simple words, "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18).¹⁰² Wellum, argues that by the time Jesus makes this statement, he has already begun to gather his messianic community through the calling of the twelve and reconstituting them "as the new Israel (Matt. 4:18–22; 10:1–4) in relation to him, the true Israel (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15)."¹⁰³ Wellum then explains Jesus's building of the church post-resurrection, as described in Acts:

Also, the future tense of "I will build" (*oikodomēsō*) looks ahead to the time after Jesus's cross and resurrection when the promised Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, thus signaling the arrival of the new covenant age. In fact, as Christ's redemptive mission unfolds in the book of Acts, Jesus's messianic people (*ekklēsia*) begins with the Twelve and other believing Jews (Acts 1–2), reunites Israel with the conversion of the Samaritans (Acts 8), and then incorporates into it believing Gentiles, which together constitute the church (Acts 10; cf. Eph. 2:11–21). In Christ, the church as his people has entered God's kingdom through the new covenant, and she now faithfully lives, worships, and proclaims the gospel to the ends of the earth as she awaits Christ's return.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 731.

⁹⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 726.

¹⁰⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 728.

¹⁰¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 733–34.

¹⁰² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 746.

¹⁰³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 747.

¹⁰⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 747.

Given Christ's triumphant work and faithfulness as the new covenant head of the church, there is an inseparable link between Christ and his people—in fact, he is united with his people who are his body.¹⁰⁵ Given this union, Christ's people are inheritors of all of the covenant blessings in him. Wellum describes it this way:

All that Christ has achieved is for the benefit of the church, and as an entire church without distinction, she has received all God's promises in him. Since the new covenant is the fulfillment of the previous covenants, the church, as God's new covenant kingdom people, is the community that continues forever, while all the kingdoms of this world fade away and ultimately come under divine judgment (Revelation 18–22).¹⁰⁶

The Consummate Anthropology of Progressive Covenantalism

Eschatology is a less developed area in the progressive covenantal literature. For instance, there is no extended treatment of millennial issues. However, in the introduction to the edited volume *Progressive Covenantalism*, the authors mention that, “PC advocates can accept historic premillennialism or amillennialism, yet all the authors are united in their rejection of a dispensational understanding of the land promise to national Israel ‘apart’ from Gentile Christians.”¹⁰⁷ Regarding the everlasting consummation, in a recent four views publication, Wellum conveys that he does not believe there will be a national Israel in either the millennium or eschaton receiving “outstanding promises . . . *distinct or different* from believing Gentiles.”¹⁰⁸ Wellum, like Parker, seems to envision a singular, multi-ethnic mono-nation of the redeemed inhabiting the new creation in the eternal state.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 747.

¹⁰⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 747–48. See Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 105–10.

¹⁰⁷ Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 110.

¹⁰⁹ Parker, “Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” 66.

The nature of the eschatological land. In arriving at his conclusions regarding the land in the eschaton, Wellum provides a biblical theology of land.¹¹⁰ His process in doing so, follows his hermeneutical method described above.

First, Wellum considers the land promise in the Abrahamic covenant in its textual context. He acknowledges that the relevant texts in the immediate context (Gen 12:1–3; 13:14–16; 15:18–21; 17:8; 26:3, 4, 24; 28:3–4, 13–15; 35:9–12) point to the specific land of Canaan, but argues that it does not merely refer to an area with specific geographical boundaries but points to something greater.¹¹¹ Wellum adduces two pieces of evidence towards his view that the land goes beyond the limited territory of Canaan. First he cites the international aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, i.e., it is not just national in focus, but international bringing blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. 17:5–8; 22:15–19).¹¹² Ultimately, this international blessing comes through the work of Christ which makes it possible for Abraham’s *spiritual* seed to be united to him by faith union and thereby receive all the covenantal promises (including the land promise) and spiritual blessings whether Jew or gentile (Eph 2:11–22).¹¹³ This is the climax of God’s plan, not simply the establishment of the nation of Israel.¹¹⁴ In light of this, Wellum quotes Paul Williamson regarding implications of the universal focus of God’s plan:

The promise of land must be understood within this broader context of God’s programmatic agenda, an agenda that culminates in the blessing of all the nations of the world through Abraham’s seed (cf. Gal. 3:6ff.; Rev. 7:9). Since the latter aspect

¹¹⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 824–38. This is part of a new chapter that appears in the second edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*, “Some Theological Implications: Ecclesiology and Eschatology.” For a full treatment of a biblical theology of land from a progressive covenantal perspective see Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*.

¹¹¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 828–29.

¹¹² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 829.

¹¹³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 829.

¹¹⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 829.

of the divine plan is patently non-territorial (in the sense that it is not restricted to any one geographical location), the national dimension of the territorial promise should probably be understood as a transitional stage in the outworking of God's ultimate plan.¹¹⁵

However, it should be noted that Williamson's interpretation of the national, territorial inheritance of Israel in Genesis is contradicted by one of the key sections of Genesis that he attempts to explicate. Williamson understands Genesis 15 and 17 to elaborate God's programmatic agenda which he understands to be overviewed in Genesis 12:1–3. But in denying that there is an enduring, national inheritance for Israel, Williamson contradicts the straightforward reading of Genesis 17:8, "And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."¹¹⁶

Wellum continues his argument by drawing on Jason DeRouchie, who claims that within the Abrahamic narrative there appear to be hints that the Abrahamic promise will be fulfilled in two stages, "first, in the nation of Israel, which will live in the Promised Land and serve as a kingdom of priests under the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19:4–6; Deut. 4:5–8); second, in Christ, Abraham's royal, singular seed who will bless *all* nations (Gen. 17:4–6; cf. 22:17b–18; 49:8, 10; Isa. 9:6)."¹¹⁷ Next, Wellum argues that in the immediate context of the Abrahamic promise, the boundaries of the land are inconsistent and imprecise (Gen 15:18–21; Exod 23:31; Deut 1:7; 11:24; Josh 1:2–4).¹¹⁸ Wellum infers from this that the boundaries of the land are not fixed and quotes Williamson who

¹¹⁵ Paul R. Williamson, "Promise and Fulfillment: The Territorial Inheritance," *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Philip Johnston and Peter Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 18, quoted in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 830.

¹¹⁶ This problem of consistency in Williamson's view was pointed out to me by Dr. Craig Blaising.

¹¹⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 830. See Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 3 (September 2015): 460.

¹¹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 831.

crystallizes the point, “The fact that no steps were taken to impose uniformity suggests an element of flexibility difficult to harmonize with rigidly defined territorial borders.”¹¹⁹

For Wellum, the textual ambiguity here hints at greater fulfillment beyond a piece of land to something that encompasses the whole world occupied by Abraham’s offspring.¹²⁰

Wellum argues that this is consistent with Romans 4:13, “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world,” and avers that Paul appears to be saying that Abraham understood the land promise in this expanded way.¹²¹

Second, Wellum analyzes the epochal context of the land promise by considering it in light of the covenant of creation and concluding that this shows that the land is a type of the whole creation.¹²² The theological significance of land did not begin with Abraham, rather its significance is tied to Eden and God’s ultimate goal to bring the restoration of the original state.¹²³ The typological nature of land is further seen when one considers how the Promised Land is connected to the biblical theme of rest (Deut 3:20; 12:9–10; 25:19; cf. Josh 1:13–15; 21:43–44; 22:4; cf. Ps 95; Heb 3:7–4:13)—possessing the land is a type of entering God’s eternal rest.¹²⁴ Moreover, Wellum appeals to the work of Beale, who understands Eden to be an archetypal temple (which the land of Israel and the tabernacle-temple are patterned after) in which Adam and Eve served as priest-kings who were given the task of extending Eden to the rest of creation.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Williamson, “Promise and Fulfillment,” 20–21.

¹²⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 831.

¹²¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 831.

¹²² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 832.

¹²³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 832; see also Martin, “Land Promise Understood,” 271–74.

¹²⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 833.

¹²⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 833. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 66–80.

Lastly, Wellum reflects on the land in its canonical context. When considered in light of creation and the themes of rest and temple, Wellum concludes that one can:

View the land as a type and pattern of creation. In this reading, the archetype is the land of Eden, whose borders are to be extended to the entire creation. With the fall of Adam and the removal from the land (Eden), God's promise is to restore what was lost and to reverse the disastrous effects of sin and death. Through the "seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15), as worked out through the biblical covenants (Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David and his sons), God's rest and covenantal presence in the tabernacle temple—all associated with the land—are restored in type and shadow but not in ultimate reality. Israel as God's son is to function like another Adam and experience God's presence in the land, but the people of Israel fail. They were to act as God's priest kings, as a holy nation, in order to bring God's blessing to the nations. Their land, then, becomes a pattern or a microcosm of the entire world. Through them the nations are to see what God intends for the entire world as they live as God's holy people. Just as "Adam and Eve had known God's blessing in Eden, so God would bless his people in a new land." But, sadly, they fail to do what God intended for them to do. In order for God's purposes to be finally realized, God will have to provide his Son, who is not only the true Israel but also the last Adam, who in himself replaces the temple, inaugurates a new covenant by his blood, and begins to usher in the new creation.¹²⁶

In addition to Jesus being the antitype of both Adam and Israel, "who brings God's rest to this world through his work (Matt. 11:28–30)," Wellum goes on to say that Christ, "receives the land promise and fulfills it by his inauguration of a new creation."¹²⁷ The consummation of the new creation is described in Revelation 21–22 in terms reminiscent of Eden but far greater, and boundaries that extend to the whole new creation.¹²⁸ This "land" is described in the dimensions of a cube (reflecting the Holy of Holies in the temple), and the people of God have inherited the antitype of the land/Israel—a perfect new creation-temple with their covenant Lord at its center.¹²⁹

The nature of the eschatological people. The church is covenantally new in redemptive history but is part of the one people of God—the elect—throughout salvation

¹²⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 834.

¹²⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 836.

¹²⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 838.

¹²⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 838.

history.¹³⁰ Against dispensational views, Wellum denies that the church is, “a parenthesis in God’s plan or merely a *present* illustration of the spiritual unity that Israel as a nation and the Gentile nations will exhibit in the millennium and consummation as recipients of ‘distinct’ blessings or privileges.”¹³¹

Instead, Wellum argues that the continuity of the one people of God is seen in biblical language referring to OT and NT saints in texts like: Rom 1:1–2, 11; Phil 3:3, 7, 9.¹³² In addition, Wellum understands certain passages to be descriptions of Israel as God’s covenant people used to refer to the church through Christ.¹³³ Also, words for “assembly” (אֲסֵפָא [qāhāl] and ἐκκλησία [ekklēsia]) are applied to Israel and the church, and the church is called the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16.¹³⁴

In addition, the church is an eschatological community that exists now, but is part of the “age to come” which was inaugurated in Christ’s first coming and will be consummated in his second coming.¹³⁵ It is not associated with “this present age,” but with the saving reign of Christ which is here now.¹³⁶ Wellum goes on to argue,

Those in faith union with Christ are now citizens of the new, heavenly Jerusalem (our final destination tied to the new creation). In one sense this new Jerusalem is still future, but in a profound sense, it is already here.

¹³⁰ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 105.

¹³¹ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 105.

¹³² Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 106.

¹³³ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 106. He gives the following examples: Exod 19:6; Deut 32:15; 33:12; Isa 43:20–21; 44:2; Jer 31:31–34; Hos 1:6, 9–11; 2:1, 23; see Rom 9:24–26; Gal 3:26–29; Eph 2:12, 19; 3:4–6; 1 Thess 1:4; Heb 8:6–13; 1 Pet 2:9–10.

¹³⁴ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 106.

¹³⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 753.

¹³⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 753.

This is the point of Hebrews 12:18–29. In contrast to the Israelites who assembled at Sinai (12:18–21), new covenant believers have already gathered to meet God at the “heavenly” Jerusalem (12:22–24) tied to the new creation.¹³⁷

Third, the church is God’s new humanity fit for the new creation and will remain forever; it is made up of believing Jews and gentiles, who in Christ, receive equally and fully all of God’s promises.¹³⁸ Jews and gentiles are not only reconciled to God, but to each other because the “dividing wall of hostility” has been torn down due to Christ’s work and now the two groups are forged together into one new humanity (Eph 2:11–22). How is the anthropology of this new humanity to be understood? Wellum explains it in the following way:

The church is not merely the extension of Israel, or an amalgam of Jews and Gentiles. The church is new—a third entity that is Christian (see Paul’s view of himself in 1 Cor 9:19–23). The church transcends the old entities, although unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist. The church is not simply a replacement of Israel or a “renewed” instantiation of it, or one phase in God’s plan to end in the future when God returns to his previous plan for Israel and the nations. God’s eternal plan always anticipated the creation of the church (Eph 3:8–13).¹³⁹

This is all made possible only through Jesus, who fulfills the promises of God, and then applies them to the church.¹⁴⁰

In light of the above, what are the implications of the PC view regarding a future for ethnic Israel? Advocates of PC believe that Romans 9–11 indicates that despite widespread Jewish unbelief in the current age, there continues to be a remnant who believe in Christ and come into the church.¹⁴¹ In God’s sovereignty, in this time of Israelite unbelief, the elect among the gentiles will come to faith and ultimately arouse

¹³⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 753.

¹³⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 758; see also Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 107–10.

¹³⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 760.

¹⁴⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 761.

¹⁴¹ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 110.

the jealousy of the Jews who will experience mass conversion towards the end of the age (“all Israel will be saved”; cf. Rom 11:26).¹⁴² However, contra dispensationalism, Wellum asserts, “Nothing in Romans 9–11 speaks of the ‘restoration’ of Israel as a nation, in its land, with a specific identity and role of service to the nations. This text can only serve as ‘evidence’ for this view if the entire dispensational view is assumed, which is precisely what is at debate.”¹⁴³

According to PC, how will the people of God be organized in the consummation? Will national structures persist? After discussing how the church is the antitype of Israel, first through fulfillment in Christ, Parker answers this question.¹⁴⁴ He writes,

It is important to observe that Peter identifies the church as a holy (singular) nation (1 Pet 2:9). The old covenant nation of Israel pointed forward to a singular, multiethnic nation of the redeemed—the church. Moreover, although the language of “nations” is employed in Revelation 21–22, such does not establish that separate national identities or entities will continue throughout the consummated eternal state. The people of God are depicted as coming from all nations and people groups who persevere and overcome through Christ (Rev 21:7; cf. 5:9; 7:9) in contrast to the faithless who are designated for eternal destruction (Rev 21:8; 20:15). “[T]he ‘nations’ and their kings who enter the gates of the New Jerusalem in 21:24–26 are identified by John in 22:14 with those ‘who wash their robes’ and thus obtain ‘the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.’ . . . In other words, they are those who continue to be faithful to their original commitment to Jesus Christ and his saving work.” The consummated state of Revelation 21–22 is a vision where the city of God is the people of God, where God dwells among all his saints.¹⁴⁵

In summary, for progressive covenantalists, the church is the one people of God, that as the eschatological new humanity, will persist for eternity. The new creation is not multi-

¹⁴² Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 110. Of course, the meaning of “all Israel will be saved” is debated. A minority understand it to mean all the elect (Jews and gentiles) that come to faith in this age, while the majority hold that “all Israel” refers to ethnic Jews. In the latter view, some argue that it refers to elect Jews that come to faith throughout church history and others believe it refers to a mass conversion of Jews at the end of the church age. All of the above positions are consistent with PC, but Wellum subscribes to the latter position.

¹⁴³ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 110.

¹⁴⁴ Parker, “Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” 63–68.

¹⁴⁵ Parker, “Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” 66–67.

national or multi-territorial; instead, it is made up of one corporate grouping, or holy nation—the multi-ethnic company of the redeemed.

Assessment of Progressive Covenantalism Using Wolfe's Criteria for Strong Interpretive Systems

As I have categorized both CC and PC as model 2 biblical theologies, it follows that some of the critique that I have brought to bear on CC also applies to PC. Areas of overlap will be noted below.

Is It Comprehensive?

All of the areas of comprehensiveness that I raised as problematic for CC also apply to PC. Although for advocates of PC, a certain approach to typology is heavily relied upon to arrive at exegetical conclusions (an approach I will come back to below), there still remain significant problems in understanding the following kinds of passages. In the OT, prophetic passages that predict a Davidic king who will rule Israel and gentile nations in righteousness and peace forever (see chap. 2, “Is It Comprehensive,” for this point and others in this paragraph), and prophecies that foresee ethnic, national, territorial (ENT) Israel as central to the eschatological kingdom alongside gentiles who join themselves to the Lord and form one, diverse people of God (differentiated both individually and corporately as nations). In addition, NT passages that affirm an eschatological future for ENT Israel are in tension with the PC view.

In addition to the difficulties for the comprehensiveness of PC raised above, Darrell Bock points to what he refers to as “*until*” passages in Luke-Acts that are problematic for PC and do not receive adequate explanation. These passages refer to a time of discipline/judgement upon national Israel followed by a time of great hope. How one understands these passages, and their connection to the broader storyline, will affect one’s understanding of the anthropology of the consummation and whether national Israel will be present there. Details of these key passages follow.

Luke 13:34–35. In response to Israel’s rejection of her Messiah, Jesus issues a warning in Luke 13:6–9 that the vine that is not fruitful will be excised raising the question of whether there is to be a permanent judgement against Israel.¹⁴⁶ In Luke 13:34, Jesus uses the analogy of a hen gathering her brood to convey his desire (along with the long line of prophets he had sent) to care for and protect Israel.¹⁴⁷ God’s desire to extend parental care to the nation is frustrated by one reason alone: the people have been unwilling.¹⁴⁸ In light of Jesus’s current offer, the nation is in the same position of risk which Luke 13:35 underscores as Bock explains:

The language of the empty, desolate house recalls Jer 12:7 and 22:5 (cf. Ps 69:25 [69:26 MT]; Ezek 8:6; 11:23). The parallel in Matt 23:39 mentions that the house is desolate (*ermos*), but Luke lacks this term. The Old Testament declared the possibility of exile for the nation if it did not respond to God’s call about exercising justice (Jer 22:5–6). As such, Jesus’ use of “house” (*oikos*) does not allude just to the Temple. Jesus is more emphatic than Jeremiah’s statement of the nation’s potential rejection; a time of abandoning exile has come. Rather than being gathered under God’s wings, their house is empty and exposed (Luke 13:6–9).¹⁴⁹

How long will Israel be in this state of judgement? In Luke 13:35b, Jesus indicates that this situation will obtain “*until*” Israel recognizes Jesus as “the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (a quotation of Ps 118:26)—so Israel will be there in the future.¹⁵⁰

Luke 21:24. Another “until” passage noted by Bock is Luke 21:24 which conveys a turnaround in Israel’s future.¹⁵¹ In this verse, Luke depicts a period in which

¹⁴⁶ Darrell L. Bock, “A Critique of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant: A New Testament Perspective*,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (2015): 139–40; see also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 9:51–24:53, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1208–11.

¹⁴⁷ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140.

¹⁴⁸ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140.

¹⁴⁹ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140.

¹⁵⁰ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140. See also Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1250–52.

¹⁵¹ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140. See also Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1680–82.

Jerusalem is underfoot that Bock describes as, “a period of Gentile domination (Dan 8:13–14; 12:5–13), while alluding to a subsequent hope for Israel (Ezek 39:24–29; Zech 12:4–9).”¹⁵² Bock offers three reasons grounding this reading of the text. First, the fall of the city is for a limited period of time—otherwise, why mention the duration?¹⁵³ Second, there is an epoch in which the gentiles exercise power, i.e., “the time of the Gentiles,” which implies that after this there is a time in which Israel’s role will be significant.¹⁵⁴ Third, what is described here as Israel’s judgment followed by vindication, Bock argues is consistent with “what Paul also contends in Rom 11:25–26: Israel has a future, grafted back in when the fullness of the gentiles leads her to respond (see also Rom 11:11–12, 15, 30–32).¹⁵⁵ These passages have ethnic Israel in view—not any concept of a spiritual Israel. Romans 9–11 provides more information about the temporary period of judgment referred to in Luke 13:34–35.¹⁵⁶

Is It Congruent?

Congruence is concerned with the “fit” of the data with the explanation given for it. As one moves into Acts tracing the theme of Israel’s connection to the kingdom, one finds advocates of PC that address crucial texts (thus, they are comprehensive in that sense), but their explanations are incongruent.

Acts 1:4–7. In the progression of Luke-Acts, Acts 1:4–7 is very important.

Wellum understands Jesus to be teaching in this passage that “Israel’s end time

¹⁵² Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140.

¹⁵³ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140.

¹⁵⁴ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140.

¹⁵⁵ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140–41. Bock cites James Scott’s chapter on Rom 11:26; see James M. Scott, *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 489–526. Scott includes a helpful summary of his exegetical conclusions regarding the crucial passage of Rom 11:26 (Scott, 524–26).

¹⁵⁶ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 140–41.

restoration is about to occur at Pentecost (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:14–21), starting in Jerusalem with Jewish believers and extending to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8, *thus a reconstituted Israel*) [emphasis added] and to the Gentile nations (Acts 10–11), thus creating a new humanity in Christ.”¹⁵⁷ For Wellum, this is a prime example of “how Old Testament restoration promises for Israel are applied to the church *in Christ*.”¹⁵⁸ The Spirit’s coming is tied to the Messiah’s arrival and the whole messianic age rooted in the new covenant—the head of which is Christ himself who is “the true Israel and last Adam,” the one who fulfills all the prior covenants, and applies the promises of God to the church.¹⁵⁹

Bock puts forward a different understanding and finds fault with the PC view.¹⁶⁰ The text features the disciples inquiring of Jesus if the current time is when he intends to restore the kingdom to Israel, and Jesus responds by telling the disciples the timing of this is not for them to know—only the Father. Bock argues that the disciples’ question and Jesus’s response is significant because nothing that Jesus says corrects the hope they had for promises to the nation presupposed in the question.¹⁶¹ Bock writes,

Many Jewish texts expected that Israel would be restored to a place of great blessing (Jer 16:15; 23:8; 31:27–34 [where the New Covenant is mentioned]; Ezekiel 34–37; Isa 2:2–4; 49:6; Amos 9:11–15; Sir 48:10; *Pss Sol.* 17–18; *1 En* 24–25; Tob 13–14; Eighteen Benedictions 14).⁴ The question is a natural one for Jews. Luke 1–2 expressed this hope vividly (Luke 1:69–74; 2:25, 38).¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 762.

¹⁵⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 761.

¹⁵⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 761–62.

¹⁶⁰ For Bock’s extended exegesis of the passage see Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 56–63.

¹⁶¹ Darrell L. Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” in Parker and Lucas, *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 142–43.

¹⁶² Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 141.

In the Luke-Acts storyline neither the definition of Israel nor the expectations for Israel are changed, rather, the focus shifts to God's eschatological work now centered in Christ.¹⁶³ Bock avers, "Throughout Acts, Jesus is the blessing's mediator. Throughout Acts, Israel's role remains central to the hope of salvation, including the expectation of national restoration. Acts 10–15 works out this story as it extends into all the world."¹⁶⁴

Other problems exist with the PC, restoration-of-reconstituted-Israel understanding of this text. Many interpreters who disagree with a view like Bock's, affirm that the disciples are operating with an errant expectation of a restored kingdom to Israel. Thomas Schreiner (a contributor to the edited volume *Progressive Covenantalism*), believes the disciples' expectation is skewed because they still fail to comprehend the already-not-yet character of the kingdom that infused Jesus's ministry, as well as not fully understanding Israel's reconstitution and their resultant mission.¹⁶⁵ Schreiner references Polhill's commentary on Acts which is worth quoting at length:

It is not surprising from Jesus' prior remarks about the coming of the Spirit and the fulfillment of God's promises (v. 5) that the disciples concluded the final coming of God's kingdom might have been imminent. In Jewish thought God's promises often referred to the coming of Israel's final salvation, and this concept is reflected elsewhere in Acts (cf. 2:39; 13:23, 32; 26:6). Likewise, the outpouring of the Spirit had strong eschatological associations. Such passages as Joel 2:28–32 were interpreted in nationalistic terms that saw a general outpouring of the Spirit on Israel as a mark of the final great messianic Day of the Lord when Israel would be "restored" to the former glory of the days of David and Solomon.

Jesus corrected the disciples by directing them away from the question about "times or dates" (v. 7). . . . In denying such knowledge to the disciples, the hope in the Parousia is not abandoned.²⁶ If anything, it is intensified by the vivid picture of Jesus returning on the clouds of heaven in the same mode as his ascension (Acts 1:11). Neither did Jesus reject the concept of the "restoration of Israel." Instead, he "depoliticized it" with the call to a worldwide mission. The disciples were to be the true, "restored" Israel, fulfilling its mission to be a "light for the Gentiles" so that God's salvation might reach "to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Bock, "Critique of Gentry and Wellum," 141–42.

¹⁶⁴ Bock, "Critique of Gentry and Wellum," 142.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 104.

¹⁶⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992),

In short, advocates of PC believe the disciples were mistaken in their expectation that there would be a national restoration of Israel's kingdom—rather, “Israel's” restoration would involve the church expanding to all nations through the proclamation of the gospel.

Michael Vlach raises important objections that apply to the PC view. Acts 1:3 indicates that central to Jesus's forty days of post-resurrection instruction of the disciples is the topic of the kingdom of God. Is it reasonable to think that after Jesus's tutelage, the disciples still misunderstood the nature of the kingdom and the nature of Israel's role in it?¹⁶⁷ Was Jesus ineffective as a teacher? He had already been able to enlighten the disciples to how the Scriptures pointed to him (cf. Luke 24:27).¹⁶⁸ Understanding the disciples to be misguided in thinking that Israel would have a political and national role within the larger kingdom program of God involves either doubting their intelligence, or Jesus's ability as a teacher, or both.¹⁶⁹ In addition, why would Jesus not correct the disciples errant thinking? Vlach remarks, “Jesus often corrected erroneous thinking. Would this not be the perfect time, just before His ascension, to calibrate an erroneous view? If He does not, He will ascend to heaven with His trusted disciples being misguided on a topic of great importance. But no correction occurs.”¹⁷⁰

In addition, Vlach points out that it is incorrect to conclude that Jesus's statement in verse 1:8 regarding the disciples being his Spirit-filled gospel witnesses to the ends of the earth, entails a redefinition of the disciples' kingdom expectations.¹⁷¹ To

84–86.

¹⁶⁷ Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever* (Silverton, OR: Lampion House, 2017), 404.

¹⁶⁸ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 404.

¹⁶⁹ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 404.

¹⁷⁰ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 404–5.

¹⁷¹ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 406.

illustrate, Vlach describes a father promising his sons that he has planned a camping trip for them, but when it happens will be a surprise:

One day the sons say, “dad are we going camping now?” The Father’s response is “I’m not telling you when we are going. It’s a surprise. But what I want you to focus on now is doing your chores and schoolwork well.” The father’s statement is not a dodging of the question. Nor does it mean the camping trip is redefined to be chores and schoolwork. The father’s response is a statement that chores and schoolwork are to be their focus until the camping trip arrives. The same is true for the kingdom. The apostles were to focus on the task at hand and the Father would determine the kingdom’s timing.¹⁷²

The most natural reading of this passage is that Jesus does not wish to correct the disciples’ expectation of a future restoration of the nation of Israel in the kingdom (because that will occur, just at a future, undisclosed time), but he does desire to redirect their focus to the mission he has already charged them with to take the gospel of the kingdom to all nations (Matt 28:18–20).

Acts 3:18–21. The idea that there is a restored national Israel in the millennium as well as in the eschaton (along with gentile nations) is denied by PC but is further substantiated by Acts 3:18–21. In his speech, Peter exhorts the nation to repent, and speaks of times of refreshing as well as Jesus’s return. Peter proclaims that Jesus will remain in heaven “*until* the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke [emphasis added]”—a time attested to by God through the “mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (v. 21). It is notable that “mouth” (*stomatos*) is singular which points to the prophets unified message of hope.¹⁷³ Peter, now inspired by the Holy Spirit, is putting together what he heard Jesus say in Acts 1, even as he refers to the restoration of all things.¹⁷⁴ Bock captures well the significance of Peter’s exhortation:

¹⁷² Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 406.

¹⁷³ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 143.

¹⁷⁴ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 143.

Peter urges his audience to read what God has already said through the prophets. He refers specifically in v. 21 to the restoration of all things mentioned often in the prophets. The noun for restore (*apokatastasis*) is related to the verb used for Israel's restoration in Acts 1:6.¹⁷⁵ As we noted above, texts such as Isaiah 65–66 are in view, where Israel is restored to fullness (also Isa 34:4; 51:6; Jer 15:18–19; 16:15; 23:8; 24:6; chaps. 30–33; Ezek 17:23; Amos 9:11–12).¹⁷⁶

Far from the restoration of a redefined Israel, as PC construes the biblical storyline, Peter is referring to the restoration of ENT Israel in complete consistency with the teaching of the OT (cf. Jer 29:14; 30:3, 17–18; 31:23; 32:37–44; 33:7–9, 11, 26; Ezek 39:25–29; Hos 6:11; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:13–15; Zeph 3:20).¹⁷⁷

In addition, Peter goes on to tie this restoration to the Abrahamic covenant promise in Acts 3:25.¹⁷⁸ Luke-Acts extends the storyline of the OT by documenting the life, death, resurrection, ascension of the Christ who accomplishes the salvation by which

¹⁷⁵ Craig Keener comes to this same conclusion. Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, vol. 2, 3:1–14:28 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1112.

¹⁷⁶ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 142. In a direct response to Bock’s understanding of Acts 3:21, Wellum argues that Bock’s view that the preposition until (*achri*) indicates that the “restoration” will occur after Jesus’s return does not preclude it already occurring in the church. Drawing on Alan Thompson’s work *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, Wellum prefers the following sense of *achri*: “whom heaven must receive until after the times of restoration of all that God spoke by the prophets” (Acts 3:21)—to stress that the restoration is not complete until the end. Based on Thompson, Wellum further argues that “these days” in Acts 3:24 fits better with the above translation, and that fulfillment is happening now. But, Bock argues that what is being highlighted is not the period of time being addressed by the promise (“these days”), but the content, i.e., that all things will be restored in “these days.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 177. In addition, Wellum asserts that Bock’s view is only arrived at by first assuming the dispensational storyline (see *Kingdom through Covenant*, 762n107). But, this will not do, as the charge can simply be reversed, i.e., Wellum only arrives at his interpretation by assuming the progressive covenantal storyline. Wellum better assesses how the debate should proceed in his 2014 response to Bock’s critique: “Bock knows we cannot determine the meaning of Romans 9–11 and Luke-Acts from exegesis based on cultural setting, linguistic data, and literary structure alone. The metanarrative we bring to these texts determines our exegetical outcomes.” Stephen J. Wellum and Peter J. Gentry, “‘Kingdom through Covenant’ Authors Respond to Bock, Moo, Horton,” *The Gospel Coalition*, September 20, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gentry-and-wellum-respond-to-kingdom-through-covenant-reviews/>. Neither side of the debate simply assumes their metanarrative, but argues for it on a cumulative-case basis. Thus, it is important to argue exegetical points on that level and broader hermeneutical suppositions and their grounding at that level. It is unfruitful for either side to charge the other of simply assuming their canonical storyline.

¹⁷⁷ Blaising notes that in all of the references he cites here, the restoration is national and territorial. Craig A. Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 92. Contra the PC view that in the OT “Israel” is already being expanded to include gentiles, Grisanti argues this is not the case. See Michael Grisanti, “A Critique of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant*: An Old Testament Perspective,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (2015), 129–37.

¹⁷⁸ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 92. See Bock, *Acts*, 180–81.

Israel's sins (Peter's immediate audience in Acts 3) "may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19) and by which they can be "turned from their wickedness" (Acts 3:26) along with gentiles to bring to completion the previously revealed kingdom consummation (Israel's restoration is part and parcel of the larger multi-national kingdom consummation prophesied in the OT).¹⁷⁹ In the book of Acts, the scope of the gospel mission is from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)—consistent with this, in Acts, the gospel is first preached in Jerusalem (the center of the Jewish world) and ends with Paul preaching the gospel in Rome (the center of the gentile world).¹⁸⁰

Continuity with the OT is evident in the other speeches in Acts, but Paul's words in Acts 13:19 after recounting the Exodus are particularly noteworthy: "And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, *he gave them their land as an inheritance* [emphasis added]."¹⁸¹ Blaising helpfully connects the covenantal significance of this important phrase:

[Paul's] mention of the gift of the land is significant in light of many denials that the New Testament has any interest in the land. The statement "he gave them their land as an inheritance" is taken from covenant language. It is repeatedly found in Deuteronomy (Deut 4:21, 37–40; 12:10; 15:4; 19:10, 14; 21:23; 24:4; 25:19) and is declared to be everlasting (Deut 4:40), as is the Abrahamic covenant (Ps 105:7–11; cf. Gen 13:14–18; 17:8). This reference to the gift of the land fits thematically with the restoration theme of Acts 1 and 3, especially Peter's proclamation that the future restoration would be in accord with the words of the prophets and the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 3:17–26). The fact that the land was given to Israel as an inheritance is taken as a given by Paul, as it was by Peter, and as it would have been by first-century Jews in general, believers in Yeshua and those who were not.¹⁸²

Acts 24:14–15; 26:6–7, 22–23; 28:20. A further problem of congruence in PC can be seen by a series of texts at the end of Acts that give evidence that Israel's relation

¹⁷⁹ Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 92.

¹⁸⁰ Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 92. See Keener, *Acts 3:1–14:28*, 697–708.

¹⁸¹ Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 92.

¹⁸² Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 92.

to the storyline has not changed but is consistent OT to NT.¹⁸³ The closing chapters of Acts feature Paul defending his ministry to gentiles before the Romans and others. In Acts 26:6–7, he declares, “And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain.” Paul is on trial for the hope of the twelve tribes, and in his speech, he consistently alludes to being on trial for proclaiming the hope of Israel.¹⁸⁴ Vlach makes an astute observation that the hope of the twelve tribes is anchored in “the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers” (v. 6):

Paul’s message has roots back to the patriarchs of Israel and what God revealed to them. The promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same promise Paul is proclaiming. There is no indication this “promise” has been transcended or spiritualized or redefined into something different. This is the literal hope to Israel as found in the Abrahamic Covenant given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁸⁵

As a good Jew, Paul is preaching the message of Israel’s Messiah which is the story of Moses and the prophets (26:22–23).¹⁸⁶ In Acts 24:14–15, in the presence of Jews, Paul affirms that he worships, “the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.”¹⁸⁷ Finally, in Acts 28:20, Paul says that he is in chains because of the hope of Israel.¹⁸⁸ All of these passages are consistent with a holistic consummation plan which features the presence of Israel and gentile nations that is predicted in both the OT and NT. They do not seem to reflect a

¹⁸³ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 144.

¹⁸⁴ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 144.

¹⁸⁵ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 428.

¹⁸⁶ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 144.

¹⁸⁷ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 144.

¹⁸⁸ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 144.

role for Israel that has progressively changed or been redefined in the OT and carried into the NT.

Given the belief of PC theologians that “Israel” is fulfilled in Christ and then is restored/reconstituted in the church, puts the view in tension with passages that affirm a role for national Israel in the eschatological age. Thus, the biblical data and arguments above bring to light a deficiency in the congruence of progressive covenantalism.

Romans 9–11. The progressive covenantal literature has little to say about this crucial passage. In fact, the first edition of *Kingdom Through Covenant* was criticized for giving such little attention to the NT in general in what purported to be a whole Bible theology, and to Romans 9–11 in particular.¹⁸⁹ The second edition has no extended treatment of this passage either. The most lengthy treatment of this part of the Bible is taken up by Richard Lucas in *Progressive Covenantalism* in his chapter entitled, “The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11.”¹⁹⁰ However, Lucas’s chapter is structured as a critique of a dispensational view of the passage, so his understanding of the passage is ancillary to his larger concern of arguing that dispensationalists should look elsewhere for support for their system and “cease appealing to Romans 11 as a major proof text.”¹⁹¹ What is needed is an extended exegesis of Romans 9–11 from a progressive covenantal perspective. An assessment of Lucas’s handling of Romans 11 follows.

¹⁸⁹ Bock, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum”; Craig A. Blaising, “A Critique of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant*: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 111–27; 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): 5–24; Douglas Moo, review of *Kingdom through Covenant*, by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *The Gospel Coalition*, September 12, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/kingdom-covenant-douglas-moo/>.

¹⁹⁰ The title of Lucas’s chapter in *Progressive Covenantalism* gives the impression that there is one dispensational understanding of this passage. Insensitivity to differences between PD and other dispensational views may lead to a mischaracterization of PD in relation to this text.

¹⁹¹ Richard J. Lucas, “The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel’s Future Salvation,” in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 252.

Although he does not provide a verse-by-verse explication of Romans 11, in the midst of his critique of a dispensational interpretation, Lucas weaves in the thrust of what he believes the passage to be teaching. Consistent with the PC understanding of the biblical storyline, Lucas affirms that in the age of the church, both the spiritual and material blessings of the new covenant are inaugurated with final consummation of these blessings yet to come.¹⁹² For Lucas, what is in view in Romans 11 is occurring now during the church age, rather than how he characterizes dispensational thought as “spiritual blessings” now in the church, and “physical blessings” for Israel in a millennial period later.¹⁹³ In addition, Lucas asserts the PC understanding of land promises which bear on his understanding of the passage. Drawing on Beale he writes,

Greg Beale explains, “The physical way that these land promises have begun fulfillment is that Christ himself introduced the new creation by his physical resurrection.” Jesus is the first man of the new creation and as such has inaugurated the fulfillment of the land promises that will be expanded to include the whole new creation when the promises are consummated at his return. Correctly situating the land promises as typological of the new creation allows one to see how the entire new covenant, both the spiritual and the physical aspects, has already been inaugurated.¹⁹⁴

For Lucas, if land promises to Israel are typological of the new creation, future blessings for Israel described here cannot include a specific territorial inheritance for the nation Israel as dispensationalists allege. However, this begs the question. Even if it is assumed that land promises are typological of the new creation, why does that necessitate that there be no territorial inheritance for national Israel in that new creation? Certainly, it is logically possible that both things could be true.

Lucas deals with Romans 11:25–32 in more detail. He thinks that central to

¹⁹² Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 240.

¹⁹³ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 240–41.

¹⁹⁴ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 241. See G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 751.

what the passage is teaching is the reversal of the OT salvation-historical pattern of salvation of the Jews first and then the gentiles. Drawing on D. A. Carson, Tom Schreiner, and C. E. B. Cranfield, etc., to arrive at his interpretation, it is helpful to quote Lucas at length:

Paul is revealing a previously hidden “mystery” in Romans 11, which is described by three clauses: (1) Israel’s partial hardening, (2) the “fullness” of the Gentiles (i.e., their salvation), and (3) the final salvation of Israel (Rom 11:25–26). Independently, each of these components is not new revelation. The combination of each of these components in this particular sequence is what is new. Again Paul is concerned not just with the fact of Israel’s salvation but with the manner of her salvation as it relates specifically to the Gentiles. Israel’s hardening will persist until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. The “fullness” of the Gentiles refers to the full number of the elect Gentiles who will come to saving faith. Only after and by means of the inclusion of the Gentiles will all Israel be saved (Rom 11:26). Once the salvation of the “fullness” of the Gentiles (Rom 11:25) and the “fullness” of Israel (Rom 11:12) takes place, the end of salvation-history will have been reached. The climax of this age is the resurrection following Christ’s return and is, therefore, the likely reference for the phrase “life from the dead” in Romans 11:15. Tom Schreiner is right to conclude, “If the fullness of the Gentiles enters in before Israel is saved, it is inconceivable that there will be a great ingathering among the Gentiles after this event.”¹⁹⁵

Although Paul is revealing a reversal of sorts in Romans 11, Lucas maintains that there is a sense in which the traditional pattern is also upheld. Drawing on Greg Beale and Benjamin Gladd he writes,

Greg Beale and Benjamin Gladd have a helpful discussion concerning how the NT actually fulfills both patterns of salvation for Jews and Gentiles. They write, “It is likely that those Jews first hearing and accepting the gospel at Pentecost and shortly thereafter in Jerusalem (Acts 2–7) represent the beginning fulfillment of the order ‘Jew first, then Greek.’” The first believers in the church were all Israelites. The massive numbers of Jews embracing Jesus as Messiah and repenting of their sin were certainly a revival and part of the “restoration” of Israel (Acts 3:19–21; cf. 1:6). “Three thousand souls” were added on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), and then not many days later another five thousand men, and presumably many of their wives and some of their children, heard the word and believed (Acts 4:4). Even at

¹⁹⁵ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 245–46. Among others, Lucas cites the following in reaching this interpretation: D. A. Carson, “Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul’s Understanding of the Old and the New,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 419–21; C. E. B. Cranfield and William Sanday, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 1975), 562–63; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 598–99.

the end of Acts 3, right before Luke records this second large embrace of the gospel, he quotes Peter's words concerning the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant included both that all the families of the earth will be blessed (i.e., Gentile inclusion) and that God sent the Messiah to Israel first (Acts 3:25–26). So the salvation-historical priority is not undone; it just becomes clear to Paul later that the final eschatological restoration of Israel will not be complete “until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in” (Rom 11:25).¹⁹⁶

In summary, Lucas understands Romans 11 (particularly 11:25–32) to be teaching a substantial reversal of the redemptive-historical pattern of salvation to the Jew first and then the gentile. In the church age, the church will be predominantly made up of gentiles, as elect gentiles come to saving faith during Israel's hardening, but in the closing chapter of redemptive history before Jesus returns, the remaining elect Jews will come into the church by faith in Christ, Christ will return, followed by resurrection and final judgement. If this is what the passage means, Lucas is also emphatic as to what the passage does not mean: “Romans 11 does not provide support for dispensationalism's distinctive teachings concerning a restored national Israel mediating blessings to Gentile nations in the millennial kingdom.”¹⁹⁷

There are several problems with Lucas's interpretation. First, he does not interact with the larger section of Romans (chaps. 9–11), in which Romans 11 is ensconced. Paul begins his discussion by recapitulating important truths conveyed about Israel in the OT. Blaising effectively summarizes,

Paul acknowledges that “Israelites,” that is Paul's own “kinsmen according to the flesh,” possess “the adoption . . . the covenants . . . the promises.” “To them belong the patriarchs [who were given covenant promises regarding the land and future physical descendants], and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ [the one who was prophesied to rule ethnic, national, territorial Israel together with the nations], who is God over all, blessed forever” (Rom 9:3–5 ESV).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 247–48. Lucas cites G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 88.

¹⁹⁷ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 252.

¹⁹⁸ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 93.

These affirmations are consistent with the OT storyline regarding Israel with the addition of the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁹ What Paul is interested in developing in Romans 9–11 is how the biblical plotline continues in light of the unexpected turn that a “partial hardening has come upon Israel” (Rom 11:25),” i.e., a large majority of Jews have not come to faith in their Messiah.²⁰⁰ It is important to note that, no resignification of the term *Israel* occurs here—these are Paul’s “kinsmen according to the flesh,” i.e., ethnic Jews who are identified with national and territorial Israel.²⁰¹ This is made clear as Paul elaborates on how the hardening will eventually dissipate such that “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). Here Paul is envisioning a future time in which Israel, in all of its constituents, will be composed of saved Jews.²⁰² Lucas disagrees with dispensationalists “who strictly reject any attempts to make the church supersede national Israel as the people of God.”²⁰³ However, this passage stands against such an understanding—the Israel that Paul observes is presently hardened in Romans 11:25 is the same Israel of the future which will be fully saved in Romans 11:26.²⁰⁴ In addition, as if to underline the point that there is a future for ENT Israel in the

¹⁹⁹ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 93.

²⁰⁰ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 93–94.

²⁰¹ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 94. Vlach notes that in the book of Romans, all of Paul’s uses of “Israel” or “Israelite” occur in chaps. 9–11. Outside of these chapters, Paul uses the term *Jew(s)*. Use of the term *Israel* emphasizes the twelve tribes descended from Jacob, and typically carries national implications. Michael J. Vlach, “A Non-Typological Future-Mass-Conversion View,” in *Three Views on Israel and the Church: Perspectives on Romans 9–11*, ed. Jared Compton and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 26. Vlach draws on Pablo Gadenz who argues that Paul’s switch from “Jews” to “Israel” in this section of Romans conveys that Paul is “considering the situation not just of individual Jews but of Israel as a collective whole.” Pablo T. Gadenz, *Called from the Jews and from the Gentiles: Pauline Ecclesiology in Romans 9–11*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 48.

²⁰² Blaising makes important qualifications here. “This does not imply salvation apart from faith in Christ. It does not imply the salvation of every descendant of Israel who ever lived or even the conversion of every living Jew at the time of this national conversion. However, it does envision an Israel in the eschatological consummation wholly made up of saved Jews, a vision that fits as well with nations of saved Gentiles.” Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 96.

²⁰³ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 252.

²⁰⁴ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 96.

plan of God, Paul propounds that “the gifts” and “the calling” of Israel (cf. 9:4–5), are “irrevocable” (11:29).

Another aspect of Lucas’s interpretation of this passage that is incongruent is his understanding of Romans 11:15: “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” Lucas writes, “The climax of this age is the resurrection following Christ’s return and is, therefore, the likely reference for the phrase ‘life from the dead’ in Romans 11:15.”²⁰⁵ However, verse 16 sheds further light on what Paul is communicating, “If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” Paul sees that the majority of Israelites in his day are hardened, but there is a minority (a small portion of the dough or the root of the tree—the faithful remnant) that are responding to the gospel. Although many Israelites will personally reject the salvation provided by God, his plan for corporate Israel stands.²⁰⁶ Blaising adeptly puts together verses 15–16 and Paul’s allusion to “resurrection” that fits better with the immediate context than the understanding rendered by Lucas: “The ‘whole’ remains holy. It remains holy even though only a small part is presently being ‘offered’ to God. That small offering is to be regarded as ‘firstfruits’ of the greater harvest in which the whole of Israel will be presented to God. When that occurs, it will be like Israel rising from the dead.”²⁰⁷

As was mentioned above, Lucas is primarily concerned with exposing what he considers to be errors in dispensational understandings of Romans 11. In particular, he structures his critique around what he believes is a misapplication of inaugurated eschatology among progressive dispensationalists, as they apply their already-not-yet understanding to Romans 11. In fairness, some examples of PD writings that he provides

²⁰⁵ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 246.

²⁰⁶ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 94.

²⁰⁷ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 94.

either need further clarification or may fall prey to his critique. However, neither of his major points of criticism apply to the PD articulated in the book *Progressive Dispensationalism* by Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock (which he also references).

Lucas articulates two major problems with the dispensational approach. The first he describes as the dispensational tendency to artificially divide “the new covenant into *spiritual* and *material* blessings and explain their fulfillment as though each happen in *completely separate stages* [emphasis added].” Lucas misconstrues the PD of Blaising and Bock in several important ways. First, he gives the impression that the progressive dispensationalism of Blaising and Bock understands kingdom blessings of the new covenant as bifurcated into “spiritual blessings” and “physical blessings” in an almost platonic way—rather than seeing these blessings as holistic and phased in their fulfillment (inaugural and final fulfillment). One needs to consider the theme of holistic redemption that is consistently emphasized by PD. For PD, “spiritual blessings” are works of the Holy Spirit, and are given to the physically embodied people of God, intended to be expressed by them in their physical embodiment. Blaising and Bock make this clear in the section of the book that Lucas draws from. Blaising writes, “As the divine, Davidic king, [Christ] is the one who gives the Spirit to His people, re-creating their hearts, and binding them in submission to Himself.”²⁰⁸ Lucas is correct that Blaising and Bock understand the Spirit’s transformation of his people to be experienced in an inaugurated way now and to be consummated later. However, it is not the case that the inaugurated blessings are lacking physical expression. Blaising writes,

We are called to walk by the Spirit, to live by the Spirit, *to put to death (daily) the deeds of the flesh to present ourselves to God for the work of righteousness* [emphasis added] (Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:13–14; 6:12–13). This is the condition of living under inaugurated new covenant blessings. Only in the future will those

²⁰⁸ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 206.

blessings be granted in full, and the complete transformation promised by the new covenant will be realized.²⁰⁹

The profound change affected now in the lives of believers by the Holy Spirit, is expressed through their physical embodiment. It takes place in God's people who are physical creatures who perform physical deeds. The transformative work of the Holy Spirit works at the deepest levels of human beings, in the inner man, in the heart, but this is meant to be made manifest in a holistically changed life—both in attitude and action.

It is true that for progressive dispensationalists, some aspects of the holistic blessing await the return of Christ such as: resurrection or transformation together with glorification in holiness. The consummated phase also includes the political and national reorganization of redeemed humanity under the direct political administration of Christ. At this future stage, PD believes that political blessings will come upon national Israel *and* upon gentile nations. However, these blessings cannot be categorized simply as “physical” in opposition to blessings that are “spiritual” since the political order is one permeated by the indwelling Holy Spirit in the lives of its constituents. It is integrated and holistic in nature.

Another misconstrual of the PD of Bock and Blaising that Lucas puts forward is conveying that PD sees spiritual blessings *now in the church* and *physical blessings later for Israel*. But, this categorization of humanity into “church” and “Israel” is to misread a major tenet of PD regarding the anthropology of the redeemed. Unlike older forms of dispensationalism that understood mankind to be divided among three groups: Jews, gentiles, and church or forms of covenantalism that understand OT, physical Israel to be typological of the NT, spiritual church, PD understands the anthropological categories of the redeemed to be consistent throughout the Bible as Jew and gentile. Moreover, another major work of the Holy Spirit tied to new covenant fulfillment is the

²⁰⁹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 209.

Spirit-wrought unity among Jews and gentiles in the worldwide body of Christ. Blaising notes how the earliest believers (who were almost all Jews) came to realize how the Spirit was uniting Jews and gentiles in the church:

As they proceeded to carry out His command to proclaim to all peoples, including Samaritans and Gentiles, the good news of the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 28:23, 28–31), they saw many of these peoples come to faith in Jesus. They also witnessed the fact that Jesus bestowed upon these Samaritan and Gentile believers the same blessing of the Holy Spirit as He had given to them (Acts 8:14–17; 10:44–48; 11:15–18). They interpreted this action as God “taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). Such activity was seen to be part and parcel of the plan of the eschatological kingdom, as predicted in passages like Isaiah 49:6 and Amos 9:11–12 (see Acts 13:46–48; 15:14–18). Together the believers constituted a microcosm of the coming kingdom in which all peoples Jews and Gentiles would be subject to the rule of the Christ and blessed by Him.

The nature of Christ’s blessing during this time of ascension, and the equality of its bestowal upon Jews and Gentiles (as well as both genders and all social classes), brought into history the reality known as the church. As they lived in hope of the coming of Jesus, both Jewish and Gentile believers would meet together regularly to worship the Lord and encourage one another in the faith. Their assembly was united by their one faith in one God and one messianic Lord and the fellowship of one Spirit.

For even as the body is one . . . so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. . . . Now, you are Christ’s body . . . the church (1 Cor. 12:12–13, 27–28).²¹⁰

In summary, PD affirms that new covenant blessings of the indwelling and sanctifying Holy Spirit are inaugurated now in the church which is physically present on earth. The complete and total fulfillment of all new covenant blessings awaits the return of Christ.

Lucas’s second major critique of dispensationalism appears as a heading in his chapter in *Progressive Covenantalism* which reads “Future Gentile Blessings Mediated Through Restored Israel.”²¹¹ Lucas quotes Robert Saucy, Michael Vanlaningham, and

²¹⁰ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 256–57. For more on the anthropology of PD, and how PD understands the relation between Israel and church, see Craig A. Blaising, “A Theology of Israel and the Church,” in *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 88–90; see also Carl B. Hoch, “The New Man of Ephesians 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Craig A. Blaising (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

²¹¹ Lucas, “Dispensational Appeal to Rom 11,” 242.

Vlach making clear that all three affirm this notion. Here, Lucas's criticism may apply to some of the language of those identifying with progressive dispensationalism, such as Saucy, Vanlaningham, and Vlach. For example, Vlach makes the following comment in his essay on Romans 9–11 in *Three Views of Israel and the Church*:

The church is the new covenant community of believing Jews and Gentiles in this age and is God's instrument for worldwide gospel proclamation. Yet this present age is not all there is to God's purposes. Jesus is coming again to earth to rule the nations with his saints (Rev. 5:10; 19:15). When he does, Israel will be saved and restored and will bring further blessings to the world under the Messiah (Rom. 11:12, 15, 26–27). Both the church of believing Jews and Gentiles and national Israel are strategic in God's purposes.²¹²

Fred Zaspel and Jim Hamilton note the inconsistency of this comment with progressive dispensationalism:

Indeed although Vlach acknowledges the unity of Israel and the church in the Abrahamic "tree," he sometimes describes their diversity in terms that seem to us too discontinuous. For example in his definition of the church he restricts the church to "this age" (p. 70) "between the two comings of Jesus" (p. 23). This seems to reflect the older dispensational understanding of two peoples of God (Israel and the church) that continue into the eschaton.²¹³

A more consistent position is stated by Blaising in his various publications. For Blaising, the church does not come to an end, but is a manifestation of the eternal kingdom now and will be the full expression of the kingdom of God in the eschaton. As described above, the kingdom in its consummation is characterized by holistic blessings to the multi-national order of redeemed peoples (Jews and gentiles, Israel and gentile nations) ruled by Christ and united in Him in all its diversity by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God (the communion of the church fulfilled in the consummation of the kingdom).

²¹² Vlach, "Non-Typological Future-Mass-Conversion View," 70–71.

²¹³ Fred G. Zaspel and James M. Hamilton Jr., "Response to Vlach," in Compton and Naselli, *Three Views on Israel and Church*.

Blaising articulates an understanding of the eternal consummation in which Christ is reigning over the entire earth from Israel, but blessings to the nations centrally flow from him—not the nation of Israel, as though Christ had somehow delegated rule and blessing to the world to Israel. Instead, as described above, this period is characterized by the consummation of physical and spiritual blessings to the church (composed of Jews and gentiles both individually and corporately, i.e., nationally).

Blaising writes,

As Messiah of Israel, Jesus will fulfill for that nation the promises covenanted to her and He will rule over all nations so that through him all nations might be blessed. He will rule with “a rod of iron,” imprisoning spiritual wickedness and subjugating all human authority to Himself. The spiritual blessings which were displayed in the previous dispensation in the life of the eschatological community, the church, will be extended in this stage of the kingdom through national and political dimensions of human life as well. The earthly blessings which were glimpsed in individual messianic works during the first advent will be extended around the world. At the end of this stage of the kingdom, evil itself will be destroyed in a display of Christ’s judgment against satanic and human rebellion, and death along with sin will be eliminated.²¹⁴

In short, although Lucas’s critique of some dispensational understandings of Romans 11 may be valid, his objections are shown to be inapplicable to the PD of Blaising and Bock.

Is It Consistent?

There are several aspects of the PC view that suffer from problems of consistency. These problems are made most apparent when one examines different affirmations of PC advocates regarding the eternal consummation.

New creation eschatology and Israel. Many evangelical theologians in the past several decades have embraced what Craig Blaising has termed “new creation eschatology.”²¹⁵ Blaising helpfully defines the term by posing it in contrast to what he

²¹⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 283.

²¹⁵ Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed.

calls a “spiritual vision eschatology.”²¹⁶ The latter emphasizes a timeless, non-material, eternal reality, and the former a material, spatial, durative, eternal existence on a renewed earth as part of a renewed cosmos.²¹⁷ Donald Gowan’s 1987 monograph *Eschatology in the Old Testament* provides a helpful description of the eschaton which is representative of those who affirm a new creation eschatology:

The OT does not speak of the end of the world, of time, or of history. It promises the end of sin (Jer. 33:8), of war (Mic. 4:3), of human infirmity (Isa. 35:5–6a), of hunger (Ezek. 36:30), of killing or harming of any living thing (Isa. 11:9a). One of the distinctive features of these hopes is their sense of the radical wrongness of the present world and the conviction that radical changes, to make things right, will indeed occur “in that day,” that is, at some time known only to God. The OT vision of the future deals throughout with the world in which we now live. All was made by God, so nothing is bad in itself, but sin has by now left it hopelessly corrupted. These texts promise transformation as the radical victory over evil.²¹⁸

The PC literature frequently uses the term “new creation,” and by its use appears to convey something very similar to Gowen. Oren Martin speaks of God’s “cosmological goal” that has been in place since the first creation of establishing his kingdom on the earth.²¹⁹ Martin goes on to write, “We anticipate the consummation of the new creation in its final form (Revelation 21–22),” which he describes as a “glorious new creation.”²²⁰ The term “new creation” is also frequently employed by Wellum and Gentry. Their approach to understanding how Scripture unfolds the path to the consummation of the new creation is nuanced (see “The nature of the eschatological land” above), but the

Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 160–81. For Blaising’s list of works of prominent supersessionists who affirm new creationism see Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*, ed. Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 335n17.

²¹⁶ Blaising, “Premillennialism,” 160–81.

²¹⁷ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 163.

²¹⁸ Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 2.

²¹⁹ Martin, “Land Promise Biblically Understood,” 273.

²²⁰ Martin, “Land Promise Biblically Understood,” 274.

final state comports with an understanding like Gowen's. Describing John's final vision in Revelation 21–22, Wellum writes,

In this final vision we discover our final inheritance—what Abraham is said to have looked for—namely, a city whose builder and Maker is God and a creation that is full of God's glory. And most important, at the center of this new creation is our covenant Lord, whose presence does not require a temple since the Lord and the Lamb are the temple. In his presence we will dwell for all eternity, not on the clouds of heaven but in a gloriously renewed universe where we will carry out our calling as God's sons for his glory and honor.²²¹

New creationism is consistent with biblical teaching in general, and with many texts in particular (e.g., Isa 65; 2 Pet 3:13; and Rev 21, 22).²²² These texts describe a new earth that is in continuity with the present world, but refined, purified, and without sin.²²³ In addition, in light of the biblical imagery of refinement of the current earth, extending from Isaiah to 2 Peter, is it not reasonable to conclude that the perfected new earth will retain features of geographical particularity found in the world now? This kind of particularity fits well with promises made to national and territorial Israel that are repeatedly said to be eternal (cf. Deut 4:40; Ps 105:7–11; Gen 13:14–18; 17:8).²²⁴ In light of PC's denial of a territorial future for Israel, this introduces a conceptual inconsistency for PC, but more importantly, it surfaces a textual inconsistency in that many OT texts that affirm a new creation picture of the eternal consummation, have embedded in them promises to territorial Israel! Blaising cites Isaiah 65:17–25 as an example: "In Isaiah, the promise of the new earth is linked to the promise of a restored Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:18–25), the chief part of the land of promise. The blessings of the new earth parallel the promised blessings of the land of Israel in many texts so that the land becomes an

²²¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 838.

²²² Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 163.

²²³ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 163.

²²⁴ Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 93.

example of what is intended for the whole earth.”²²⁵ It is inconsistent to point to an OT prophetic text like Isaiah 65 to affirm a new creation eschatology and then deny a territorial inheritance for Israel that is upheld in that same text.²²⁶ PC appeals to fulfillment of land promises to Israel through a kind of Christification are inadequate and will be discussed further under “Is It Coherent” below.

New creation eschatology and mystical equivalencies. A further inconsistency among PC advocates is their affirmation of a material, new creation in continuity with the original creation, and yet a rendering of the biblical storyline that includes mystical equivalencies that undermine that materiality and continuity. These problems stem from the PC view that the land of Israel is taken up in the canonical storyline in a type escalation that moves from Eden to the Land of Israel to the new creation.²²⁷ In the midst of critiquing hermeneutical presuppositions of Paul Feinberg, Wellum writes, “The land is a type that looks back to Eden and forward to the new creation, *and the Old Testament develops the promise in this way.*”²²⁸

In other words, for Wellum, the whole (the new creation) replaces the part (the land promised to Israel).²²⁹ Blaising points out the conceptual problem with such a view:

[The authors of *Kingdom through Covenant* argue] that the biblical narrative moves from a particular land to the whole of the new earth. While it is certainly true that the narrative moves from an expressed plan for the entire creation to God’s specific dealings with Israel in OT narrative and then to gospel proclamation to all nations with a culminating vision of a new creation (also predicted by the prophets of Israel), our authors draw the conclusion that the land of Israel somehow disappears and is replaced by the eschatological reality of the new earth. However, in this movement from the part to the whole, unless the so-called “whole” is a completely

²²⁵ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 163.

²²⁶ For a helpful discussion of this point see Steven L. James, “New Creation Eschatology,” esp. chap. 5.

²²⁷ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 122.

²²⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 155n116; see also 824–35.

²²⁹ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 123.

different reality (which our authors want to deny) the statement is nonsense. A whole logically includes all of its parts. If a part is removed from a whole, then it is a different “whole” from what it was before. Such a new whole does not replace a part in the old whole, rather, it replaces the whole. However, if the new whole is the old whole renewed, then all the parts of the old whole would be renewed as well. The particular part must be in the whole, renewed along with all the other parts, for the whole to be the whole that it is.²³⁰

Another inconsistent aspect of the progressive covenantal understanding of the new creation is a kind of mystical equivalency that is sometimes asserted among key persons and features of the biblical narrative. Parker engages in this kind of ambiguity when he writes, “The consummated state of Revelation 21–22 is a vision where the city of God is the people of God, where God dwells among all his saints.”²³¹ If the vision conveys that the city of God equals the people of God, is there no territoriality to this city? If not, do the people dwell in some kind of different, spiritual realm? Wellum’s description of the consummated state follows a similar pattern:

The prophets paint a picture of land restoration so glorious that it cannot be contained within the boundaries of the old covenant forms. *The historic city of Jerusalem takes on overtones of a city that is larger than life and ultimately identified with the people of God* [emphasis added]. It will be one without walls, where God’s glory will dwell (Hag. 2:9; Zech. 2:1–5) and into which the Gentile nations will stream, fulfilling the Abrahamic promises (Isa. 56:3–7; Ezek. 47:22). In addition, *this new Jerusalem will take on the very borders of the entire creation* [emphasis added] (Isa. 65:1–66:21). In other words, *the prophets anticipate a future day when the land will be God’s temple sanctuary and when its borders, like the rule of the king, will extend to the entire creation* [emphasis added] (Ps. 72:8–11, 17–19). It is this Old Testament prophetic vision that is picked up in Revelation 21–22 in light of the coming of Christ.²³²

This description also suffers from consistency problems. First, Wellum asserts that the city *is* the people of God, but then readers are told that the city *is* the whole of the new creation. Wellum goes on to argue that the prophets are indicating that the land of Israel will extend to be coterminous with the new creation which will serve as a God’s temple. Of course, apocalyptic literature invokes symbols and metaphorical language, but

²³⁰ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 123.

²³¹ Parker, “Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” 67.

²³² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 835.

one still must give a consistent accounting of what one considers symbolic. In addition, Blaising's critique of Wellum's description is insightful: "It is misleading to say that 'the borders' of the land 'are expanded to encompass the entire creation.' While Scripture is clear that the blessing is not confined to the land of Israel alone, the expansion of the blessing does not mean that the land in its territorial reality somehow in and of itself expands physically into a whole new world or that it no longer constitutes a 'place' in the larger world."²³³

Is It Coherent?

A coherent system of interpretation must be logically tight, and hang together, as an entire system—lack of coherence threatens the overall integrity of the interpretive system.

Speech-act theory and divine promise. In chapter 2, the problem of what amounts to changes in divine promise, or conceptions of fulfillment that are inconsistent with the original promise, were cited as objections to classic covenantalism. These problems of coherence can be raised with equal force against PC. As was argued in chapter 2, a rendering of the canonical narrative that can be demonstrated to result in the changing of divine promise, creates problems for the integrity of God.²³⁴ This point cannot be understated—what could be more fundamental to theological understanding than the trustworthiness of God and his word? If a biblical theology were compared to a spider web, bringing to light a divine, promissory, speech-act problem in that theology is

²³³ Blaising, "Critique of Gentry and Wellum," 123n19.

²³⁴ Blaising describes how advocates of PC understand meaning to change: "Wellum argues for a change in meaning from promise to fulfillment in his dispute with John Feinberg on pp. 122–24 [of 1st ed. of *Kingdom through Covenant*]. And this meaning shift is crucial to the way Progressive Covenantalism reads the biblical metanarrative. Wellum notes, on 122–23, that 'Feinberg acknowledges that a common way to view typology, such as we [i.e., Wellum Gentry] maintain, is . . . that the meaning of the antitype supersedes and cancels the meaning of the type in its own context.'" Blaising, "Critique of Gentry and Wellum," 117n10.

not like tampering with the periphery of the web, rather, it strikes at the very center of the web and threatens its overall integrity.

Problematic conceptions of fulfillment “in Christ.” Like many biblical theologies, PC affirms that the metanarrative of Scripture is Christocentric. This is to be commended, but the way it is worked out in PC creates coherence issues. Specifically, advocates of PC place much emphasis on the idea that all the covenant promises find their fulfillment “in him” or “in Christ.” But, the way this is conceptualized is problematic as can be seen in the eschatology section of *Kingdom the Covenant* where Wellum writes, “*The New Testament announces that the inheritance of the land is fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, who brings to completion all the previous covenants (along with their types and shadows), and who in his cross work inaugurates the new creation.*”²³⁵ Blaising incisively points out the problem:

“In Him” is a thick concept in Scripture that includes “through Him.” It includes multiple aspects of the relationship of Christ to the redeemed creation. However, KTC tends to read “in Him” in a reductive, mystical manner rather than in the thick, holistic political, material, and spiritual interconnectivity that Scripture ascribes to the kingdom of God, the inheritance of Christ.²³⁶

In the same section, Wellum goes on to say that Christ, “*receives* the land promise and fulfills it by his inauguration of a new creation [emphasis added].”²³⁷ In response to such a statement, it is understandable that a reader might ask: “what is meant by ‘Jesus receives the land promise?’” Somehow, Jesus, in his person, receives a promise of land, and inaugurates its fulfillment also in his person? Again, Blaising’s response is on target, “KTC, at times, reads the Person of Christ as Himself the mystical consummation of the whole narrative. He personally is the fulfillment of Israel, the land, the nation, the church,

²³⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 835.

²³⁶ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 124.

²³⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 836.

the creation. The result is a vague mysticism that looks somewhat like a variant of metaphysical Personalism.”²³⁸ The way that PC formulates fulfillment “in Christ,” may at first glance seem to be Christ-exalting, but it diminishes Jesus because it deprives him of the rich, holistic inheritance that Scripture predicts for him (more on this in chap. 5). The biblical description of the inheritance of Christ maintains the integrity of the original creation of the earth and the heavens, people and peoples, Israel and gentiles—Scripture does not convey that these realities somehow dissolve into Christ’s person.²³⁹

Problematic Approach to Biblical Typology

From what has been argued to this point, one can see how large a role a certain notion of typology plays in the PC rendering of the canonical narrative. However, there are problems with the PC understanding of typology, as well as how that understanding is applied by adherents of PC to render the biblical storyline. Both factors result in issues of coherence for PC as a whole Bible theology.

Key differences in evangelical notions of typology. No doubt typology is a literary phenomenon found in narratives generally, and the Bible specifically. At the most basic level, typology is pattern repetition, and in the case of Scripture, it serves as a unifying feature of the biblical storyline.²⁴⁰ Blaising helpfully summarizes some well-known scholars’ views of typology:

²³⁸ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 124. To justify his allusion to personalism, Blaising writes in footnote 20: “Wellum cites as ‘helpful discussions of land in biblical and systematic theology’ a number of works which mostly take as their point of reference the seminal study (also cited by Wellum) of W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). Davies argued that in the NT, the land promises were ‘Christified,’ meaning that their fulfillment takes place in the Person of Christ. Gentry and Wellum do not use the term christification but the way in which land fulfillment is described as presently taking place in Christ suggests this kind of conceptuality. Personalism is the term used of a philosophy that construes ultimate reality as essentially personal. In American philosophy, it was advocated by the so-called Boston School of which Borden Parker Bowne was a foremost representative.”

²³⁹ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 125.

²⁴⁰ Craig A. Blaising, “Typology and the Nature of the Church” (paper presented at the

Traditional views of typology, seen for example, in the works of Fairbairn, Robertson, Davidson, and Goppelt, stress a *heightening* in type repetition that indicates a vertical movement from promise to fulfillment. Steve Wellum has summarized Richard Davidson’s definition as follows: “Typology” refers to divinely designed correspondences that “predictively prefigure, *their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects* (inaugurated and consummated) in New Testament salvation history” (KTC, 103). Goppelt writes, types are “divinely ordained representations . . . of future realities that will be *even greater and more complete*” (emphasis added). The antitype represents “a heightening of the type,” not “merely a repetition” of it. (Typos, 18).²⁴¹

All of these views have in common an understanding that intrinsic to a typological relationship is a “heightening,” “intensification,” “vertical movement,” etc., that occurs when aspects of the narrative move from type to antitype. However, David Baker offers a more general definition of typology that is devoid of a heightening aspect.²⁴² In his monograph *Two Testaments, One Bible*, he defines typology in the following way: “A type is a biblical event, person or institution which serves as an example or pattern for other events, persons or institutions. Typology is the study of types and the historical and theological correspondences between them.”²⁴³

The problem of circularity. The PC understanding of typology is of the kind that sees heightening as a necessary part of a typological relationship. As was discussed above, Wellum defines typology as, “The study of the Old Testament redemptive historical realities or ‘types’ (persons, events, institutions) that God has specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated, appropriated, and consummated) in New Testament redemptive history.”²⁴⁴ Gentry and Wellum rely on Richard Davidson for this definition,

Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, San Diego, November 2014), 3.

²⁴¹ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 3.

²⁴² Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 3.

²⁴³ David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 180.

²⁴⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 130.

and then proceed to put it to work as a principal analytical tool to unfold the Bible's storyline. However, given the weight that PC advocates give to their particular understanding of typology, a robust argument for why one should accept this definition is necessary, but missing in the movement's key monograph, *Kingdom through Covenant*.²⁴⁵ This is especially problematic because typology has been understood and utilized to support different interpretive approaches throughout church history, and among evangelicals there is no consensus as to how it is to be understood and applied.²⁴⁶ Douglass Moo's general warning regarding hermeneutical circularity is specifically applicable to PC here. Moo writes, "A certain circularity of procedure [which] is often evident at this point, as scholars—according to the definition they have established—select what they think are genuine instances of New Testament typology."²⁴⁷ The PC understanding of the biblical storyline and its culmination is a kind of supersessionism

²⁴⁵ Brent Parker's dissertation on typology argues for PC's approach and Richard Davidson's understanding of biblical typology. However, it is not clear that Parker avoids Moo's concern about circularity of procedure (see above). Crucial to Davidson's definition of typology, and to PC's reading of the biblical storyline, is the component of escalation PC advocates argue is inherent in biblical typology. Parker writes, "This leads to another critical characteristic of typology: the aspect of *heightening* and *escalation* as the type looks forward to fulfillment. The OT type and NT antitype are not on the same plane as there is an element of intensification or qualitative progression. Matthew 12, for example, provides the explicit *a fortiori* quality of typological patterns as Jesus says he is greater than the temple (v. 6), greater than Jonah (v. 41), and greater than Solomon (v. 42). Many other examples abound. As the true bread from heaven, Jesus is greater than the manna provided in the wilderness as those who feed on him will not perish (John 6:32–50). The Passover anticipates the supreme Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). Jesus is the second Adam, the Messianic Davidic king, and the new Moses, which all entail a heightened realization of the OT type. The OT typical persons, events, institutions, and experiences were preparatory then, foreshadowing better and greater realities of the redemption and salvation of the new covenant age, the inaugurated kingdom of Christ, and the new creation." Parker, "Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern," 69–70. Part of the problem with Parker's approach is that he sees Christ as the antitypical fulfillment of almost all types, and essentially all biblical prophecy. (It should be noted, that Parker does acknowledge that not all types are Christocentric, as some "have a *Christotelic* emphasis as they are qualified by their relationship to Jesus, his redemptive work, and the consummation of the new heavens and earth" (72). However, if types and biblical prophecy first find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, escalation is guaranteed, because the antitype is God the Son incarnate! Moreover, it is this insistence on escalation, baked into the definition of typology, that seems to facilitate a supersessionist (or fulfillment in Christ) reading of the biblical narrative. In other words, when the much greater *antitype* arrives (the Lord Jesus Christ) the shadowy *type* fades/disappears into insignificance. Many types point forward to Christ as antitype, and much prophecy is fulfilled in him, but with PC's emphasis on typology and fulfillment *in* Christ, they seem to miss that fulfillment also happens *through* Jesus Christ.

²⁴⁶ See Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 170–71; Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 195–98.

²⁴⁷ Moo, "Problem of Sensus Plenior," 196.

that results in a redefined Israel, as the eschatological people of God—but this understanding is driven by and arrived at by utilizing PC’s specific notion of typology. This leaves PC open to a coherence objection: namely (to use a familiar colloquialism), is the PC definition of typology (the tail), wagging the larger biblical storyline dog? That is, is there a prior commitment to supersessionism that a tightly defined notion of typology (namely, one that requires escalation) renders when applied across the canon?

Above, Wellum differentiates between typology and allegory and warns of the vulnerability of an allegorical interpretive approach to allow an “extratextual framework” to function behind the allegory, and end up being the mechanism that determines the meaning of the text. All parties in the debate regarding typology agree that it is a biblical phenomenon, but could a particular notion of typology function in a way analogous to the above concern with allegory, i.e., could it be used as an extratextual interpretive key to unlock the meaning of the text/broader storyline?

In addition to the problem of circularity that is a weakness of the PC approach to typology, there are other issues that need to be addressed. For instance, the way that typology functions in the progressive covenantal reading of the Bible results in narrative incoherence which is explained below.

Typology functioning to change the meaning of Old Testament promises.

One of the important ways that progressive covenantalists understand typology to function in the canon is to signal significant changes in the plan of God as the history of redemption unfolds. Wellum writes,

Not only does the *a fortiori* [escalation] quality of typology serve as an important means by which Scripture unpacks the unique identity of Christ, but it is also a key way that Scripture grounds or warrants the uniqueness of the new covenant era. *When fulfillment arrives, legitimate discontinuity or change between the old and new in God’s unified plan is warranted [emphasis added], as the triune God has planned from eternity. When the antitype arrives in history—or better, when it is inaugurated—not only are the previous types brought to their telos, but also the entire era introduced entails anticipated changes in many areas, which the Old Testament had already predicted [emphasis added].* This is why the era of fulfillment inaugurated by Christ (the “already”), even though it still awaits the

consummation (the “not yet”), has introduced greater realities—realities that are directly linked to the inauguration of the kingdom, the dawning of the new covenant era, and the arrival of the new creation.²⁴⁸

For Wellum, types help to structure the biblical narrative so as to move it from the era of promise to the era of fulfillment. However, the nuances of how PC advocates understand this is brought to light more clearly as Wellum interacts with an essay written by dispensationalist John Feinberg. Wellum writes, “First, Feinberg recognizes that a common way to view typology, such as we affirm (though we would state it differently), is that the ‘type is shadow and the antitype is reality’; thus, the implication is that ‘the meaning of the antitype supersedes and cancels the meaning of the type in its own context.’”²⁴⁹ In addition, Wellum elaborates his disagreement with Feinberg in a footnote to the forgoing:

We would not draw the implications Feinberg does. He assumes that this understanding of typology (1) fails to do justice to the original context, (2) is not predictive-prophetic in the sense that God intended the type to point beyond itself to the antitype, and (3) is not developed intertextually in the Old Testament so that the New Testament’s fulfillment of the type is precisely what God intended. We affirm that types have a meaning in their own context, that they are prophetic, and that they find their fulfillment and terminus in the antitype. Also, *we know God’s intention regarding the type by tracing the interbiblical/intertextual development of it* [emphasis added], which is first fulfilled in Christ and then applied to the church.²⁵⁰

Craig Blaising points out a very important affirmation of PC revealed here. Blaising writes,

This last sentence is important. Wellum is saying that God’s intention is not to be found in the type itself but in its alleged antitype. Given the fact that in this discussion the word *type* refers to covenant promise [specifically, the promise of land to Israel that Wellum is critiquing Feinberg’s understanding of], the distinction between the meaning of the type (promise) in its own context and the meaning of the antitype (fulfillment of the promise) in its context needs to be noted. The issue at

²⁴⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 135.

²⁴⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 153n11. See John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 78.

²⁵⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 153.

dispute is precisely the predictive meaning of the promises. Accordingly, Wellum quotes Feinberg as saying that a proper typology “does not allow us to ignore or cancel the meaning of the type or substitute the meaning of the antitype for it. . . . NT antitypes neither explicitly nor implicitly cancel the meaning of OT types” (123). To this statement, Wellum responds, “it should be obvious that we differ with Feinberg on typology and that we are working with different understandings of it.”²⁵¹

Blaising’s objection is forceful. He is pointing out that Wellum is arguing that certain promises in the OT are types whose meaning can be developed/expanded/escalated as the narrative unfolds such that the real meaning is finally made manifest as the greater antitype arrives in redemptive history. At this point, the original type reaches its *telos* and is cancelled. But, as Blaising points out, this is problematic if the aspect of the narrative under consideration in the type/antitype relationship is promissory in nature!

Several additional objections must be raised at this point. If what is promised to the original audience changes and develops over time, how is it that Scripture actually functions as Scripture to that original audience?²⁵² The example just discussed pertains to the function of typology in the PC understanding of land promises in Scripture which they see as typological ultimately of Christ who fulfills land promises in himself and then brings the new creation. Thus, typology drives PC’s understanding of the eschatological place, and it also drives the PC understanding of the eschatological people. As was articulated in the “The nature of the eschatological people” for PC section above, OT Israel and Israel’s role is fulfilled in Christ, but also as Parker notes, “pointed forward to a singular, multiethnic nation of the redeemed—the church.”²⁵³ This is another major change in the biblical metanarrative that readers are to discern through the development of types and antitypes. Blaising poses a striking counterargument:

²⁵¹ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 117.

²⁵² See Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 146.

²⁵³ Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” 123, 146; Bock, “A Progressive Dispensational Response,” in Parker and Lucas, *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 227.

Gentry and Wellum believe that a major change occurs in the plot line of the Bible . . . whereby NT “higher” realities replace OT “lower realities” thereby constituting a change in the meaning of divine promises. The “fulfillment” of the promise thereby differs in meaning from the “promise” itself. And, they claim that typology establishes this reality shift. But, this expects too much from narrative pattern repetition. A shift in meaning of this magnitude is not likely to be based on pattern repetition.²⁵⁴

As Blaising points out, if changes in the plan of God of the magnitude envisioned by PC are what God intended, it seems reasonable that he would have revealed those changes in like manner as the original promises were communicated, i.e., by explicit divine declaration in the language of covenant promises.²⁵⁵

Typology driving the idea that the new covenant supersedes all previous covenants. Wellum articulates his understanding of the relationship among the covenants in the following way:

*The new covenant is the fulfillment, telos, and terminus of the biblical covenants. Since all the biblical covenants are part of the one plan of God and since no covenant is unrelated to what preceded it and since no covenant can be understood apart from its fulfillment in Christ, it is right to say that all the biblical covenants reach their telos in Christ and the new covenant.*²⁵⁶

Perhaps a more concise way of saying the above is found in the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant*: “It is the new covenant which all of the previous covenants anticipate and typify, and it is in this way that the new covenant *supersedes* all the previous covenants.”²⁵⁷ However, it is inaccurate to claim that the covenants relate to one another typically. Their relationship is better conceived of as progressive revelations of the divine plan coming in the form of divine promissory speeches, not as type patterns that are exhaustively fulfilled in the person of Christ and that merely point forward to the new

²⁵⁴ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 117.

²⁵⁵ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 116.

²⁵⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 660.

²⁵⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (2012), 644–45.

covenant.²⁵⁸ The covenants do not function in a simple chronology leading up to the coming of Christ. More will be said about this in chapter 5, but the Abrahamic covenant is never superseded in Scripture. Instead, it effectively frames the plan of God, and other covenants come under it, elaborating how the central aspect of the Abrahamic covenant will play out in redemptive history, i.e., all of the nations of the world will be blessed, ultimately, by existing in a renovated and perfected new earth and cosmos under the reign of the king of the new creation: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In this chapter, PC has been described and analyzed. A key feature of the hermeneutics of progressive covenantalists is the Israel-Christ-church typology that they employ. In contrast to classic covenantalists (who emphasize Israel-church typology), progressive covenantalists understand types to find antitypical fulfillment in Christ himself first, and then, derivatively, application is made to the church. This approach has at least two major consequences: Israel is redefined in the biblical storyline and major changes are seen to take place in the canonical narrative when Christ comes on the scene and brings the new covenant. This latter feature results in a Baptist ecclesiology for PC which is to be commended. Another strength of progressive covenantalists is that they seek to trace the biblical storyline through the biblical covenants (and not the theological covenants of CC). However, as is seen in the above analysis, Wolfe's criteria for a strong interpretive system reveal significant weaknesses in PC.

²⁵⁸ Blaising is correct to make the following objection to the PC approach: "Reading the New Covenant as a mechanism for shifting the entire promise-fulfillment process to a 'higher reality' which in effect changes the meaning of 'promise' in that process is not only highly exaggerated but misreads the carefully detailed presentation of the New Covenant in Scripture, both OT and NT. It misses the fact that the Abrahamic Covenant promise of land and nation are foundational to New Covenant promise and remain unchanged as the soteriological blessings of the New Covenant are revealed." Blaising, "Critique of Gentry and Wellum," 117.

CHAPTER 4

MODEL 2: INDIVIDUAL ETHNIC IDENTITY AND NATIONAL TERRITORIALITY PRESENT IN A DUALISTIC MANNER IN THE CONSUMMATION INVOLVING HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY PEOPLES (CLASSIC DISPENSATIONALISM) OR ISRAEL AND CHURCH (REVISED DISPENSATIONALISM)

The biblical theologies I discuss in chapter 4 are dispensational: classic dispensationalism and revised dispensationalism (for the purposes of this dissertation, at times, I will refer to both views under the category of “traditional dispensationalism”). The rationale for grouping both classic dispensationalism and revised dispensationalism under model 2 is that both views affirm an anthropological dualism that is at the core of each system. This dualism is retained all the way through the eternal consummation in the case of classic dispensationalism and through the duration of the millennium in the case of revised dispensationalism.

Classic Dispensationalism

Hermeneutics

At the heart of classic dispensationalism (CD) is a dualistic view of redemption involving heavenly and earthly peoples. In essence to do justice to both the OT and NT, advocates of CD affirmed that when rightly interpreted, the Bible reveals two separate plans of redemption: one for Israel as an earthly people and one for the church as a heavenly people.¹

Central dualism leading to two plans of redemption. Hence, one of God’s

¹ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 23.

purposes in redemption was to rid the earth of corruption and decay and to populate the earth with an immortal humanity that would be free from the ravages of sin.² According to CD, this humanity that would live forever on the new earth would first come on the scene in the millennial era, but would not attain its eternal glory until the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ.³ At that time, this perfected humanity would exist forever in paradise regained.⁴

The second prong of redemption in God's plan for CD, involves a heavenly purpose and a heavenly people.⁵ Those who constitute the heavenly people are a transdispensational humanity of the saved who have died during redemptive history and will be resurrected.⁶ This group of people will populate heaven for eternity. Blaising's summary of the two humanities of CD is helpful:

The heavenly humanity would be a "transdispensational" community. All the saved of previous dispensations are dead, and all those of the present dispensation prior to this generation are likewise dead. They are, of course, with the Lord now. But their future hope lies in the resurrection, by which they will fully receive their heavenly salvation in a heavenly inheritance. The earthly humanity will begin with that generation of the saved who are present on earth at the Lord's return. They will be preserved from death, as will all their descendants who are of faith. They will not be resurrected from the dead, for they would never have been dead nor will they be transformed into a resurrection mode of life. They are earthly people and they experience the earthly salvation which God has designed according to His purpose for the earth. In summary, the central dualism of classical dispensationalism asserts that God is pursuing two purposes in redemption, one relating to heaven and a heavenly people and one relating to the earth concerning an earthly people. Both purposes will be accomplished and confirmed forever.⁷

Of course, those who affirmed CD argued that the central dualism was exegetically derived, but their commitment to this view functioned as a kind of macro-

² Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 23.

³ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 23.

⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 23.

⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 24.

⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 24.

⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 24.

hermeneutic that was brought to bear on their interpretation of individual passages. In fact, classic dispensationalists ended up utilizing both a literal and symbolic hermeneutic to trace out the central dualism they thought was inherent in the biblical storyline.

Literal and symbolic interpretation. In light of the aforementioned it is fitting that a literal hermeneutic was used to elucidate truths of Scripture that applied to Israel the earthly people, and a symbolic approach was used to see truths that pertained to the spiritual people—the church.⁸ To understand this more clearly it is helpful to look at examples from the writings of two of CD’s leading voices in their day: John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) and C. I. Scofield (1843–1921). In response to a question about interpreting biblical prophecy, Darby writes the following:

In prophecy, when the Jewish church or nation (exclusive of the gentile parenthesis in their history) is concerned, i.e., when the address is directly to the Jews, there we may look for a plain and direct testimony, because earthly things were the Jews’ proper portion. And, on the contrary, where the address is to the Gentiles, i.e., when the Gentiles are concerned in it, there we may look for symbol, because earthly things were not their portion, and the system of revelation must to them be symbolical.⁹

This approach of normal, literal interpretation for texts relating to Israel and a more spiritual or sometimes allegorical approach with verses relevant to the church is also born out in the writings of Scofield. Benjamin Merkle draws out the nuances of Scofield’s approach:

Scofield not only accepted that sometimes Scripture needed to be spiritualized, he also endorsed it. He writes, “It is then permitted—while holding firmly to the historical verity—reverently to spiritualize the historical Scriptures.” He qualifies this statement by claiming, “Prophecies may never be spiritualized, but are always literal.” Thus, like Darby, Scofield did not hold exclusively to a literal interpretation of Scripture. When the passage of Scripture related to the church, a spiritual

⁸ Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 29.

⁹ J. N. Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 2 (London: G. Morrish, 1867), 53.

interpretation was sometimes permitted. When a passage (especially a prophecy) applied to Israel, however, only a literal interpretation was accepted.¹⁰

Typology. Most often for proponents of CD, an approach to biblical typology was utilized to discern the symbolic/spiritual significance of certain texts of Scripture. Scofield's definition of a type can be found in his comments on Genesis 1:16 when he remarks: "A type is a divinely purposed illustration of some truth. It may be: (1) a person (Rom. 5:14); (2) an event (1 Cor. 10:11); (3) a thing (Heb. 10:20); (4) an institution (Heb. 9:11); (5) a ceremonial (1 Cor. 5:7)."¹¹ In addition, Scofield affirms the following principles for a proper understanding of biblical typology:

Types occur most frequently in the Pentateuch, but are found more sparingly elsewhere. The antitype, or fulfillment of the type is usually found in the New Testament. . . . A type must never be used to teach a doctrine, but only to illustrate a doctrine elsewhere explicitly taught. For example, see John 3:14; I Corinthians 5:7. It cannot be positively affirmed that anyone or anything is a type that is not somewhere in Scripture treated as such ([in a footnote to this statement he writes:] It is undoubtedly true that there are many types which do not fall under this rule, but their recognition is a matter of spiritual discernment and cannot be dogmatically established. For example, Joseph is almost universally acknowledged to be a type of Christ, but no Scripture passage can be found which explicitly declares that he is). . . . Histories may be reverently spiritualized. Prophecies may be stated literally or figuratively, but will have an actual fulfillment. Types are interpreted by their use in the New Testament and by their analogy with clearly revealed doctrines.¹²

Although these principles indicate a desire to place biblically warranted controls on typology, in practice Scofield seems to employ more of an allegorical approach. From Genesis alone, Merkle provides a fascinating list of types identified by Scofield (and the passages from which he draws them):

- Eve is a "type of the Church as the bride of Christ" (Gen 2:23).
- Abel is a "type of the spiritual man" (Gen 4:2) and the sacrifice that he offered is a "type of Christ, the Lamb of God" (Gen 4:4).

¹⁰ Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 29. Merkle cites C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Bible Correspondence School* (Chicago: Moody, 1907), 45, 46. Merkle also cites notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible* on Gen 24:1; 41:45; Exod 2:2; 15:25; John 12:24, as well as the section on typology (C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1917]).

¹¹ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 4.

¹² Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 1:144–46.

- The ark is a “type of Christ as the refuge of His people from judgment” (Gen 6:14).
- Melchizedek is a “type of Christ the King-Priest” (Gen 14:18).
- Lot and Abraham are “types of the worldly and the spiritual believer,” respectively (Gen 19:36).
- Sarah is a “type of grace” and Isaac is a type of (1) the church as composed of the spiritual children of Abraham, (2) Christ as the Son “obedient unto death,” (3) Christ as the Bridegroom of a called-out bride, and (4) the new nature of the believer as “born after the Spirit” (Gen 21:3).
- Abraham typifies God who “spared not His own son, but delivered Him up for us all” and the ram is a “type of substitution—Christ as a burnt-offering in our stead” (Gen 22:9).
- Both Joseph and Benjamin are types of Christ (Gen 37:2, 43:34).¹³

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952), the first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, was another major figure of CD. Chafer also saw the recognition of types as an important part of biblical interpretation. He understood a type to be “a divinely purposed anticipation which illustrates its antitype.”¹⁴ He goes on to say, “The antitype serves to lift its type out of the commonplace into that which is inexhaustible and to invest it with riches and treasures hitherto unrevealed.”¹⁵ Other features of typology that Chafer identifies include like prophecy, typology recognized in its fulfillment, over one hundred legitimate types in Scripture, and typology as a major factor displaying the unity of Scripture (along with prophecy and its fulfillment, and the harmonious way in which narrative and doctrine unfold across the canon).¹⁶ Chafer also believed that there are many “easily recognized types which are not directly sanctioned as such by any specific New Testament Scripture,” and that the recognition of a type is largely left to the

¹³ M See Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 8–62.

¹⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, preface to *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 1:xxx.

¹⁵ Chafer, preface, 1:xxx.

¹⁶ Chafer, preface, 1:xxx.

“discernment of a Spirit-guided judgement.”¹⁷ Finally, he believed there was a Christological theme in biblical typology such that over half of the Bible’s types have Christ as their antitype: “Naturally, Christ is the outstanding antitype since the supreme object of both the Old and New Testaments is ‘the testimony of Jesus.’”¹⁸

The Structure of the Canonical Narrative as Understood by Classic Dispensationalism

Of course, central to dispensationalism is the concept of dispensations. The English word *dispensation* has its etymological roots in the Latin translation of the Greek word *οικονομία* to “*dispensatio*.”¹⁹

The dispensations. Scofield defines a dispensation as “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.”²⁰ Scofield goes on to write, “Seven such dispensations are distinguished in scripture”²¹:

1. Innocency [(Gen 1:28–3:6) Creation → Fall]
2. Conscience [(Gen 4:1–8:14) Fall → Flood]
3. Human Government [(Gen 8:15–11:9) Flood → Babel]
4. Promise [(Gen 11:10–Exod 18:27) Abraham → Exodus]
5. Law [(Exod 18:27–Acts 1:26) Moses → John the Baptist]
6. Grace [(Acts 2:1–Rev 19:21) Pentecost → Rapture]
7. Kingdom [(Rev 20–21) Millennium → Great White Throne]²²

¹⁷ Chafer, preface, 1: xxx–xxxii.

¹⁸ Chafer, preface, 1: xxx–xxxii.

¹⁹ Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 36.

²⁰ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 5. Dr. Craig Blaising pointed out to me that for CD, the testings and failures of man in the different dispensations functioned as a theodicy showing that regardless of the different administrations that God put man under, his sinful rebellion would be manifest, showing that man, not God, is culpable for the problem of evil. More will be said on this in the final section of this chapter.

²¹ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 5.

²² Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 5. Note: the information in the brackets following each dispensation (excerpted from Merkle) is an attempt to divide Scripture sequentially into each dispensation consistent with Scofield. See Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 36. Chafer identifies seven dispensations

In the early dispensations, God gave promises and was testing humanity with respect to earthly life, but human beings consistently sinned and failed to obtain the promises in any lasting manner.²³ For classic dispensationalists, the current dispensation of Grace (or “Church” for Chafer) is the first which clearly presents God’s heavenly purposes.²⁴ A key difference between the church and the people of God existing in prior dispensations is that the church is supposed to be cognizant of her identity as a heavenly people headed for a heavenly inheritance, whereas the people of God in earlier epochs were either unaware of, or dimly aware of, God’s heavenly purposes.²⁵ The earthly people of prior dispensations sought to obtain the earthly promises and failed, but God in his grace will include those who trusted in him (the elect) in the heavenly salvation.²⁶

The covenants. Scofield understood there to be “eight great covenants” in the Bible.²⁷ In like manner, Chafer also identifies eight covenants, some of which he views as conditional and others as unconditional.²⁸ Reflecting on the covenants, Chafer remarks, “Too much emphasis cannot be placed on the fact of the sovereignty of God as it is related to those covenants which are *unconditional*, and the absolute failure of man as it is revealed in the outworking of those covenants which are conditional. Whatever God

by the same names other than the sixth dispensation which he calls, “The Dispensation of the Church.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes: Presenting Forty-Nine Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures, Abbreviated and Simplified for Popular Use, Including Suggestive Questions on Each Chapter, with Topical and Textual Indices* (Chicago: Moody, 1926), esp. chap. 18; see also Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:40–41.

²³ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 24.

²⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 24.

²⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 25.

²⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 25.

²⁷ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 5.

²⁸ Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, chap. 19.

undertakes *unconditionally* will be completed in all the perfection of His own infinite Being.”²⁹ Below are the covenants as identified by Chafer:

1. The Covenant with Man in Eden (Genesis 1:26–31; 2:16–17).
2. The Covenant with Man after the Fall (Genesis 3:16–19).
3. The Covenant with Noah and His Sons (Genesis 9:1–18).
4. The Covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1–4; 13:14–17; 15:1–7; 17:1–8).
5. The Covenant with Moses (Exodus 20:1 to 31:18).
6. The Covenant with Israel concerning their Land (Deuteronomy 30:1–10).
7. The Covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:4–16).
8. The New Covenant Made in His Blood (Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Jeremiah 31:31–33; Ezekiel 37:26; Hebrews 8:6, 10–13; 10:16).³⁰

Classical dispensationalists understood the Abrahamic covenant to be the foundational covenant in redemptive history.³¹ In Genesis 13:16, God promises Abram to “make [his] offspring as the dust of the Earth.” Classical dispensationalists understood this to reveal God’s earthly purposes for his earthly people including the following: innumerable descendants for Abram, to become a great nation in a territory God would provide, and ultimately, to be the supremely blessed nation in the earth which would mediate blessing and cursing to gentile nations.³²

Tied to their central dualism and dual hermeneutic, classical dispensationalists believed that in addition to being understood in an earthly manner, the Abrahamic covenant could be interpreted spiritually. Hence God’s promise in Genesis 22:17: “I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven” was understood to predict a massive number of spiritual descendants of Abraham—the heavenly people.³³ In support

²⁹ Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, chap. 19.

³⁰ Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, chap. 19.

³¹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28.

³² Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28.

³³ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28.

of this view, classic dispensationalists understood the NT to be affirming a spiritual hermeneutic when it interprets the church as the spiritual offspring of Abraham.³⁴

As for The Mosaic, Palestinian, and Davidic covenants, Classic dispensationalists regarded them as earthly covenants dealing with God's earthly purposes.³⁵ The New Covenant (prophesied in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) was broadly seen as earthly, but variously interpreted by Darby, Chafer, and Scofield.³⁶ Despite the new covenant promise that God would put his Spirit in his people, Darby maintained that the new covenant was always tied to Israel, and so had only an anticipative bearing on God's heavenly people.³⁷ Chafer recognized that the NT spoke of a "new covenant" that he saw as in force for the church in the current dispensation, but he argued that it was a different "new covenant" than that which Israel would enter into in the future (thus, he affirmed two new covenants!).³⁸ Consistent with this, Chafer understood the spiritual new covenant blessings enjoyed by the church in this dispensation as different from those that would be given to Israel under their future new covenant.³⁹ For his part, Scofield interpreted the new covenant in a manner analogous to how he understood the Abrahamic covenant: literally, it related to God's earthly plan for Israel; spiritually, it related to God's

³⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28.

³⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28.

³⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28.

³⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28. Darby writes, "But the new covenant is not yet made with the two houses of Israel and Judah. Hence, in Hebrews, it is remarkable how the apostle, writing for those who now anticipatively enjoy its spiritual privileges, constantly waives the discussion of its direct application. In fact, that is reserved for converted Israel by-and-by." J. N. Darby, "The New Covenant," in *Letters 3* (Addison, IL: Bible Truth, n.d.), 877, ebook.

³⁸ Chafer writes of the two new covenants: "When a parallel is drawn between the New Covenant now in force for the church (Matt. 26:28) and the New Covenant yet to be made for Israel (Jer. 31:31-34), it is found that all that is promised Israel is now vouchsafed to the Church and that the range of blessing for the Church far exceeds the restricted provision for Israel." Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1951), 87. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 28-29.

³⁹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 1993, 29.

heavenly people—the church.⁴⁰ Blaising summarizes how classic dispensationalists understood fulfillment of the covenants for earthly people: “The biblical covenants would be fulfilled for earthly people in the Millennium and eternal state. Since the covenants did not concern heavenly people (except in a typological or spiritual sense) it was not proper to say that they were being fulfilled in the present dispensation (except in a spiritual or typological manner).⁴¹

The Consummate Anthropology of Classic Dispensationalism

As has been mentioned above, for classic dispensationalists, the central dualism in God’s plan of redemption is maintained throughout eternity with earthly people subsisting in the new earth and heavenly people living in the new heaven.

The eschatological people. Scofield affirms the eternal nature of Israel’s existence as earthly people in the eschatological new earth, as can be seen by the heading in *The Scofield Reference Bible* for Isaiah 65:17–25: “The eternal blessing of Israel in the new earth.”⁴² Apparently gentile nations will eternally be present in the new earth as well, as Scofield understands Revelation 21:24–27 to show the millennial kingdom’s relation to the church, and he thinks it describes the gentile nations going in and out of the celestial city, which Scofield understands to be the church (“the holy city, New Jerusalem” that comes down out of heaven, cf. 21:2, 9, 10).⁴³ Referring to Revelation

⁴⁰ Scofield’s dual application of the new covenant can be seen in his comments on Heb 8:8. He describes different aspects of it: “The New Covenant secures the personal revelation of the Lord to every believer Heb 8:11,” “the complete oblivion of sins Heb 8:12 10:17 10:3,” “rests upon an accomplished redemption Mt 26:27,28 1Cor 11:25 Heb 9:11,12,18–23,” “and secures the perpetuity, future conversion, and blessing of Israel. Jer 31:31–40.” Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1297. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 29.

⁴¹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 1993, 29–30.

⁴² Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 769.

⁴³ Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 6:1022.

21:10–23, Scofield remarks, “This picture of the Church in glory during the one thousand years gives also her eternal state. Such she is forever and ever.”⁴⁴ It seems safe to infer from this statement that if the church as the heavenly people will remain the same after the millennium in the everlasting state, so will the earthly people, i.e., be composed of Israel and gentile nations.

Scofield’s understanding of the church in its composition and uniqueness is most clearly laid out in his notes on Ephesians 3:6. He writes,

That the Gentiles were to be *saved* was no mystery (Rom. 9. 24–33; 10. 19–21). The mystery “hid in God” was the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing—“the church, which is his [Christ’s] body,” formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12. 12, 13) and in which the earthly distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears (Eph. 2. 14, 15; Col. 3. 10, 11). The revelation of this mystery which was foretold but not explained by Christ (Mt. 16. 18) was committed to Paul. In his writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk and destiny, of the church.⁴⁵

This statement conveys the classic dispensational anthropology which places people throughout redemptive history in three mutually exclusive categories: Jew, gentile, and church. As can be seen from above, for Scofield and other classic dispensationalists, the church is a wholly other thing, another identity, so sublime that identity features such as Jew and gentile “disappear” for those who are baptized by the Spirit into the heavenly community—the church.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 6:1022.

⁴⁵ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1252.

⁴⁶ Scofield understands Ephesians to reveal the loftiest truths regarding the church. He writes, “The epistle contains the highest Church truth, but has nothing about local church order. The Church here is ‘the body of Christ’; not the local church as in Philippians. So the revelation of truth is for the individual Christian as a member of the body of Christ. There is no mention of groups or sects as in Corinth; no mention of false teachers as in Galatia. But Ephesians is the summit of revelation for the members of the body of Christ.” Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 6:805–6. In his reference Bible, Scofield elaborates on the positional realities of the saved who are part of the church. Regarding Eph 1:1, he comments, “The believer’s place as a member of the body of Christ, vitally united to Him by the baptism with the Holy Spirit 1 Cor 12:12,13”—this is a unique identity for Scofield of the subset of the saved throughout time who have this unique relationship with Christ. Regarding Eph 1:2, he writes, “Literally, *the heavenlies*. The same Greek word is used in Jn 3:12 where ‘things’ is added. In both places the word signifies that which is heavenly in contradistinction to that which is earthy. In Ephesians ‘places’ is especially misleading. ‘The heavenlies’ may be defined as the sphere of the believer’s spiritual experience as identified with Christ in nature. 2Pet 1:4, life, Col 3:4 1Jn 5:12, relationships Jn 20:17 Heb 2:11 service,

Chafer's articulation of the nature of the eschatological people is similar to that of Scofield, but Chafer lays it out in a more detailed fashion. First Chafer classifies the creatures of God into four categories: angels, gentiles, Jews, and Christians.⁴⁷ Thus, like Scofield, he understands humanity to be exhaustively categorized by gentiles, Jews, and Christians (the church which is the body of Christ). He then explains each category more fully.

First he describes "Saved Gentiles" as those like Adam, Enoch, Noah, etc., who are "the original stock which Gentiles perpetuate," who have been called out, saved by grace into the eternal likeness of Christ, and who will share his glory with him forever.⁴⁸ In addition, Chafer refers to "Gentiles of the Kingdom" who are a distinguished group of believers who "appear before the throne of Christ's glory at the end of the tribulation, and on the basis of their ministry to Israel are received into the earthly kingdom."⁴⁹ These are those who Jesus says are received into the kingdom prepared for them since the foundation of the world (cf. Matt 25:34).⁵⁰ Then Chafer clearly affirms the reality of the earthly people—Jews and gentiles who will live forever in the new earth:

This kingdom . . . is prepared for these Gentiles from the foundation of the world. A purpose which thus originates in eternity past may well be expected to continue into eternity to come. It is evidently given to these Gentiles to continue with Israel in the new earth under the everlasting reign of Messiah. It is written of Gentiles in relation to the eternal city that will be, "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it" (Rev. 21:24–26). The same allotment of Gentiles is to be seen in their relation to the everlasting kingdom in Acts 15:17, where they are described as "all [that is all of those

Jn 17:18 Mt 28:20, suffering Phil 1:29 3:10 Col 1:24 inheritance Rom 8:16,17 and future glory in the kingdom Rom 8:18–21 1Pet 2:9 Rev 1:6 5:10. The believer is a heavenly man, and a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. Heb 3:1 1Pet 2:11." Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1249.

⁴⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:415.

⁴⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:416.

⁴⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:416.

⁵⁰ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:416.

particularly] the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called.” Those Gentiles who are of one generation and who enter Israel’s kingdom and continue with Israel forever, will be distinguished from those Gentiles who throughout this age have been called and saved into heavenly glory.⁵¹

Next, Chafer moves to describing saved Jews, who he puts in two subcategories the first of which is, “Jews in the Kingdom.”⁵² These are saved Jews exclusive of those who are saved in the time of the Church (and baptized into the body of Christ). Understanding this group to be those that Paul refers to in Romans 11, Chafer writes, “The portion of this people who are destined to enter the kingdom become the ‘all Israel’ who will be saved (cf. Isa. 63:1) when the Deliverer comes out of Sion according to God’s unalterable covenant (Rom. 11:26–27,29).”⁵³ The other subcategory of Jews for Chafer are “Jews Saved by Entry into the Church.”⁵⁴ He describes this group in the following way:

As is true of Gentiles, those from among Israel who have believed have been wholly changed with respect to their estate. They as sons of God have come upon new ground where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but where Christ is all and in all (cf. Gal. 3:26–28; Col. 3:11). Jews saved in this age are not destined to an earthly kingdom, but will go on to the highest glory with Christ and be like Christ.⁵⁵

Finally, Chafer describes the third anthropological category: “The Christians.”⁵⁶ These are Jews and gentiles who are saved, are positionally in Christ, and are one, unified body that is never to be divided.⁵⁷ Chafer sees the unity of the church to be of supreme importance such that Satan arrays his forces to try to disrupt the unity the

⁵¹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:416.

⁵² Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:416.

⁵³ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:417.

⁵⁴ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:417.

⁵⁵ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:418.

⁵⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:418.

⁵⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:418.

church displays to the world.⁵⁸ Chafer also sees sectarian divisions of the body of Christ to do great harm and understands acts like these to be “branded by the Apostle as the fundamental sin which causes carnality (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1–4; John 17:21–23; Eph. 4:1–4).”⁵⁹ It seems that this unity in the body of Christ combined with the privileged position of being in Christ (via the baptism of the Spirit) in a way that is unique to those saved in the church age, is what drives Chafer’s conception such that “Church” or “Christian” identifies who these people are. Former identify features like “Jew” and “gentile” simply melt away in insignificance compared to the “in Christ” identity of God’s heavenly people—the church.

A noteworthy ambiguity appears in Chafer’s writings regarding the inhabitants of the new heaven. In light of his understanding of Hebrews 12:22–24, he enumerates people who will be present in the new heaven: “God will be there, Christ will be there, the angels will be there, the Church will be there, and the ‘spirits of just men made perfect’—according to Hebrews—and the twelve tribes of Israel—according to Revelation—will be there. The reference to the ‘spirits of just men made perfect’ may designate saints of other dispensations or ages than the present.”⁶⁰ But, Chafer seems adamant that it is the church that is the heavenly people, and elsewhere he defines the church as follows: “People called out from the old creation into the new, being gathered by the Spirit into one organism or body of which Christ is the Head. *This company includes all those, and only those, who have been saved in the period between the day of Pentecost and the return of Christ to receive His own* [emphasis added].”⁶¹ So, it seems that Chafer believes saved people who lived prior to the dispensation of the church will

⁵⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:418.

⁵⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:418.

⁶⁰ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:419.

⁶¹ Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, chap. 35.

be heavenly people (i.e., in the realm of the church), but not actually be part of the church.

The eschatological place. Chafer believes the passing away of the present earth and heaven described by John in Revelation 21:1, is followed by another work of the Creator which produces the new heaven and the new earth.⁶² Chafer asserts that of all the final acts of God, none surpasses this one; and though only the angels may have witnessed the first creation, all creatures will behold God's final act of creation.⁶³

In keeping with CD's central dualism, Chafer describes two eternal spheres: "Among those who stand in eternal favor with God are the earthly citizens whose destiny it is to go on into eternity as the dwellers on the earth (cf. Rev. 21:3–4; Isa. 66:22), and the heavenly citizens whose destiny it is to occupy the new heaven (cf. Heb. 12:22–24; Rev. 21:9–22:7; John 14:1–3)."⁶⁴

As has been stated above, the eternal earthly people, Israel, will inhabit the new earth along with the gentiles of the kingdom.⁶⁵ Life in the new earth will be the eschatological realization of the eternal Davidic kingdom which will be centered in Jerusalem and composed of Israel and gentile nations (cf. Isa 9:6–7; Dan 7:14; Luke 1:31–33; Rev 11:15).⁶⁶ Chafer understands Rev 21:3–4 to be describing the new earth with its unfathomable reality of life with no mourning or crying or pain—features which were so prevalent in the old earth.⁶⁷

As Chafer explains the new heaven, it is interesting to note how he relates the

⁶² Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:400–401.

⁶³ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:401.

⁶⁴ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:401.

⁶⁵ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:416, 419.

⁶⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:419.

⁶⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:419.

city that is said to come down out of heaven to the new heaven. He writes,

In addition to these two spheres of abode—the new heaven and the new earth—there is a city which three times is said to come down from God out of heaven (cf. Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10). The natural conclusion is that in some way this city is separate from the new heaven from which it comes down. The description of that city, identified as “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” is given in Revelation 21:10–22:7. No glory could be more exalted, and this may be the glory of heaven itself.⁶⁸

There is some ambiguity in the description provided here by Chafer. He seems to conceive of the new heaven containing the heavenly city but being a far larger entity in total. Also, is it the case that the new heaven and new earth overlap in the sphere of the celestial city? This seems to be the implication of his description.

Finally, it is helpful in understanding how Chafer conceives of the new heaven to consider four heavenly spheres that he sees as a biblical cosmology. First, there is the earth’s atmosphere, which Chafer says, “Surrounds the earth, for reference is made to ‘the birds of the heaven’ (Matt. 8:20; 13:32, RV) and to ‘the clouds of heaven’ (Matt. 24:30; 26:64).”⁶⁹ Then there is “the stellar spaces for Scripture refers to ‘the stars of heaven’ (Gen. 26:4; Rev. 6:13).”⁷⁰ Interestingly, Chafer understands this sphere to be the habitation of the angels: “It would seem that the stars of heaven are [the angels] abode. In leaving the third heaven, which was His abode, Christ became lower than the angels (Ps. 8:5) and, returning from this sphere into heaven, He passed through the sphere of principalities and powers (Eph. 1:21). Thus it would seem that the angels are occupying an abode between earth and the third heaven.”⁷¹ The third heaven is understood by Chafer to be a place where God dwells, in a location that has never been revealed, a place where

⁶⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:419.

⁶⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:438.

⁷⁰ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:438.

⁷¹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:438.

believers who die instantly go to be with Christ (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23).⁷² Finally, there is the new heaven, which according to Chafer, is created by God when the old earth and old heaven pass away (Rev 21:1).

Scofield's understanding of Revelation 21:1 goes a different direction than that of Chafer.⁷³ He describes the great white throne judgement as happening neither on earth nor in heaven, but in space.⁷⁴ He then acknowledges that Scripture provides few details, but he seems to understand the formation of the new earth to be a kind of cleansing of the old earth when he writes,

At its conclusion John sees heaven and earth again, but they have been made new. 21:1. During the interval the predicted purgation of the earth has occurred. II Pet. 3:10–13; Isa. 51:6. This subject is very obscure, no details being given. The statement of this fact completes, so to speak, the story of the earth. Scripture has told its history from chaos (Gen. 1:2) to purification (Rev. 21:1), from creation to re-creation.⁷⁵

Revised Dispensationalism

As is obvious from the heading, revised dispensationalists, make changes to the system of classic dispensationalists. Therefore, in what follows, I will focus on these modifications.⁷⁶

⁷² Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:438.

⁷³ Darby's view of Rev 21:1ff is difficult to discern, but in his "Notes on Revelation," he affirms, "There was an actual physical change—a new heaven and a new earth, and no more sea." He goes on to focus on the New Jerusalem which he seems to equate with the new heaven: "not the throne or heavenly dwelling of God and the Lamb, but God all in all—the tabernacle of God with men. . . . To man's fall, the ruin of the first Adam, is here contrasted the perfect, unfailing, and new and durable blessing of the second—all things made new—no more death—all evil put in the lake of fire. Darby, *Collected Writings*, 390–91.

⁷⁴ Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 6:1020.

⁷⁵ Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 6:1020. Chafer and Scofield are representatives of the annihilationist view and new creationist view with respect to how God brings into existence the final heaven (or new earth and new heaven). David MacLeod provides an extensive list of annihilationist and new creationist commentators; see David J. MacLeod, "The Seventh 'Last Thing': The New Heaven and the New Earth (Rev 21:1–8)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 628 (October 2000): 441n11–12.

⁷⁶ In this section of the dissertation, I focus on the seminal theologians of RD who modified CD. However, a current defense of RD (which the author calls "traditional dispensationalism") is contained in a four views book published in 2022. See Mark Snoeberger, "Traditional Dispensationalism," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker

Hermeneutics

The fundamental change that revised dispensationalists implemented was the abandonment of the eternal dualism that characterized CD.⁷⁷

Removal of eternal aspect of central dualism. Revised dispensationalists did not believe that there would be an eternal heavenly people inhabiting the heavenly realm and an eternal earthly people living in that sphere; instead, they believed all of the redeemed would spend eternity in the same locale, and so they dropped the terms heavenly and earthly people.⁷⁸ However, they did maintain the three anthropological categories of CD: Israel, gentiles, and church. As was true in CD, in revised dispensationalism (RD), one could only be part of one of these three groups.

“Literal interpretation.” Another change associated with RD is the de-emphasis of typology in favor of a foundational emphasis on consistent, literal interpretation as opposed to spiritual interpretation. In his 1965 monograph *Dispensationalism Today*, Charles Ryrie famously cited “normal or plain (literal)” hermeneutics as one of three aspects of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism—a practice that dispensationalists argued results in dispensationalism.⁷⁹ In addition, Ryrie argued that only dispensationalists (in reality RD, because CD clearly engaged in spiritual hermeneutics) consistently practiced literal interpretation.⁸⁰

and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 147–82. Snoberger essentially defends Ryrie’s *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: (1) A distinction between Israel and the church; (2) A consistently literal approach to hermeneutics; (3) The focus of God’s working in history is for his glory of which the salvation of man is one aspect. Snoberger nuances Ryrie’s three points and interacts with contemporary scholarship to make his case.

⁷⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 31.

⁷⁸ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 31.

⁷⁹ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 45; Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 35.

⁸⁰ Blaising argues that the field of hermeneutics was developing in the mid-twentieth century such that Ryrie’s claim is overly simplistic, and a more nuanced approach to grammatical-historical interpretation (informed by genre studies, rhetorical structure, newer approaches to biblical theology, and a realistic assessment of the interpreter’s historical and cultural situatedness/pre-understanding brought to the text) were being implemented which was part of what moved some dispensational scholars to formulate

Typology. Connected to their call for consistent, literal interpretation, revised dispensationalists began to move away from typology.⁸¹ This shift becomes apparent when one compares the notes of the original *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909, 1917) and the *New Scofield Study Bible* (1967). The 1967 version removes most of the notes regarding OT types.⁸² Interestingly, where the notion of a type is explained in the 1967 version, the notes are the same as that of the 1917 version, with the exception of the following caution: “Two warnings are necessary: (1) nothing may be insisted upon as a type without explicit N. T. authority; and (2) all types not so authenticated must be recognized as having only the authority of analogy, of spiritual congruity.”⁸³

The Structure of the Canonical Narrative as Understood by Revised Dispensationalism

Revised dispensationalists retained much of the structure of the canonical narrative as understood by classic dispensationalists with some important exceptions which I will take up below.

The dispensations. For the most part, advocates of RD affirmed a similar understanding of the dispensations as that put forward by advocates of CD.⁸⁴ For example, most of them retained Scofield’s seven dispensations.⁸⁵ However, conceptually, they thought of God’s purposes throughout redemptive history in terms of three primary

progressive dispensationalism. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 35–36.

⁸¹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 35.

⁸² Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 53.

⁸³ C. I. Scofield et al., *The New Scofield Reference Bible: Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version, with Introductions, Annotations, Subject Chain References, and Such Word Changes in the Text as Will Help the Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 6n1. To observe the change, see Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 4n4.

⁸⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 33.

⁸⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 33.

categories: God's purpose in the era before the church, God's purpose in the dispensation of the church, and God's purpose in the millennial age (the kingdom dispensation).⁸⁶

Blaising effectively describes their understanding of God's purposes in these three epochs:

Prior to the present dispensation, God was pursuing His purpose for Israel and the nations. This purpose is political, national, and territorial. But it was also spiritual. God granted eternal life to those who were of faith. In the present dispensation, God is pursuing an individual spiritual purpose only. The spiritual purpose is the same as that given to Israel past and future *except* for certain ministries of the Spirit such as baptism, sealing, and permanent indwelling. Also, the structure of the church is unique in this dispensation (e.g., offices and ministries), and she has a unique dispensational relationship to Christ. She relates to the Christ who is in heaven, not the Christ to come or the Christ on earth. He is her Head, not her king since the church is not a political, national entity.⁸⁷

The covenants. For the most part, revised dispensationalists understood the biblical covenants in the same way as classic dispensationalists: the Abrahamic covenant was foundational to the whole storyline of the Bible, and the Mosaic, Palestinian, and Davidic covenants were understood to be political, national, and earthly.⁸⁸

However, a significant modification was made to CD by revised dispensationalists related to how they understood the new covenant. As an example of this change, Ryrie initially defended Chafer's notion of two different new covenants.⁸⁹ In the midst of arguing against a view that affirmed one new covenant with two aspects: one for Israel and one for the church, Ryrie writes, "However, since the new testament will support two new covenants, is it not a more consistent premillennialism to consider that Israel and the Church each has a new covenant?"⁹⁰ Not long after, both Ryrie and

⁸⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 33.

⁸⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 33.

⁸⁸ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 37.

⁸⁹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 38.

⁹⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros., 1953), 118.

Walvoord rejected the two new covenants position and embraced the idea that the new covenant predicted in the OT was currently regulating God's relationship to the church.⁹¹

However, was the idea that the NT was "literally" teaching that the church was fulfilling spiritual aspects of Israel's new covenant consistent with the cherished belief of revised dispensationalists that only their system used a consistently, literal hermeneutic?⁹² In reality by making this move, revised dispensationalists were moving back into a more spiritual interpretation like that of CD, and displaying an inconsistency between their hermeneutical teaching and their hermeneutical practice, as Blaising points out:

Generally, revised dispensationalists fell back on classical dispensationalism's *spiritual* hermeneutic to interpret the Old Testament's relationship to the church: the new covenant was being fulfilled spiritually in the church today, but Israel would experience the national and political aspects (the earthly features) of the covenant in the future. This was also the way the Abrahamic covenant was handled and the way Scofield had treated the new covenant as well.⁹³

The Consummate Anthropology of Revised Dispensationalism

Because advocates of RD eliminated the eternal dualism of CD, broadly speaking, they end up with two different schools of thought regarding the eternal consummation: those who understand God's eternal purposes for Israel and the church to be fulfilled in heaven forever, and those who understand God's eternal purposes for Israel and the church to be fulfilled on a new earth forever.⁹⁴ As representatives of each of these schools of thought, I will discuss the heavenly consummation of John Walvoord and the earthly consummation of Dwight Pentecost below.

⁹¹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 38.

⁹² Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 38.

⁹³ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 38.

⁹⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 34.

Walvoord's view of the eschatological place. Two views (mentioned above) regarding the nature of the everlasting state are annihilationism and new creationism. Walvoord's view is of the first kind. That is, he understands a number of passages to convey that God will destroy his first creation before creating the new heaven and new earth (cf. Rev 20:11, 21:1; 2 Pet 3:10–12).⁹⁵ Walvoord even speculates that an atomic explosion could be what destroys the first creation:

In view of the tremendous energy locked into every material atom, the same God who locked in this energy can unlock it and destroy it, reducing it to nothing. The atomic structure of matter is possibly referred to in Colossians 1:17, where in connection with Christ it is declared, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Since the power of God that locked in atomic power can also unlock it, it is possible that the destruction of the physical earth and heaven will be a gigantic atomic explosion in which all goes back to nothing. Out of this God could create a new heaven and a new earth as a base for eternity.⁹⁶

Another aspect of Walvoord's view that is consistent with annihilationism is that he conceives of the new heaven and new earth as very different than the original creation. He writes, "As brought out in such passages as 2 Peter 3:10–12, the inference is that a new heaven and a new earth are entirely new creations and are not similar to the old creation," and "the new earth will be totally different from the old earth, and one of these differences is that there will no longer be any seas. All the old landmarks will be gone, and the new earth will look different."⁹⁷

Walvoord understands the New Jerusalem to be the abode of the redeemed for eternity. Although he grants that it is speculative, he envisions the New Jerusalem as a satellite city above the earth during the millennium which allows saints who have been resurrected to live in a different sphere than those who have not experienced resurrection

⁹⁵ John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies That Affect You Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 413.

⁹⁶ Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 413.

⁹⁷ Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 413–14.

and are alive in the millennium.⁹⁸ He writes, “If it is a satellite city, it could conceivably be the residence of the resurrected and translated saints who could commute to earth to carry on their earthly functions.”⁹⁹ Walvoord’s conjecture that the New Jerusalem is a satellite city during the millennium is grounded in the fact that there is an earthly Jerusalem during the millennium—so it cannot be on the earth, and given that the new Jerusalem seems to be in existence already when the new heaven and new earth are created perhaps the city’s locale is above the earth.¹⁰⁰

After the millennium ends and God creates the new heaven and new earth, Walvoord believes that the New Jerusalem descends from the new heaven and comes to rest on the new earth (Rev 21:2). Walvoord sees Revelation 21:9–22:5 as the description of an unimaginably beautiful city (it is compared to the beauty of a bride; cf. Rev 21:2) that is the eternal abode of the saints. Walvoord understands the whole city to be the temple of God: “aglow with the glory of God: ‘like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal’ (v. 11).”¹⁰¹ Walvoord surmises that the city is shaped like a pyramid with the river of the water of life flowing down from the throne of God (22:1–2), and it is massive measuring 1500 miles in length, width, and height.¹⁰² Walvoord points out that a city of this magnitude could not exist on the millennial earth, but he surmises that the new earth is much larger and is conducive to the size of the city.¹⁰³

Walvoord’s view of the eschatological people. Walvoord’s description of the

⁹⁸ John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy: 14 Essential Keys to Understanding the Final Drama* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1993), 170.

⁹⁹ Walvoord, *Prophecy*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ Walvoord, *Prophecy*, 170.

¹⁰¹ Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 418.

¹⁰² Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 420–23.

¹⁰³ John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 638.

inhabitants of the city fits the anthropological scheme of RD that has been mentioned earlier: eternity is populated by Jews, gentiles, and the church. Walvoord comments regarding Revelation 21:24, “Reference to the nations is in contrast to the reference to Israel and makes clear that the New Jerusalem is not simply the home of Israel or of the church but of the saints of all ages, regardless of race and dispensation (Heb. 12:22–24).”¹⁰⁴ Walvoord understands Hebrews 12:22–24 to directly address the inhabitants of the city.¹⁰⁵

Walvoord especially hones in on verse 23b: “the spirits of the righteous made perfect,” which he believes refers to all the saints throughout redemptive history.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Walvoord thinks that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates of the city, and the twelve apostles that appear on the foundations of the walls of the city indicate that all of redeemed humanity will exist in the city for the rest of eternity.¹⁰⁷

Pentecost’s view of the eschatological place. Pentecost’s view of the transition from the old earth and old heaven to the new earth and new heaven can be characterized as new creationist. Certainly Pentecost affirms that it is a new creation act of God that brings into existence the new heaven and new earth, but the raw material of this new creation seems to come from the purgation and renovation of the old earth and heaven (in contrast to Walvoord who understands the old earth and old heaven to be taken out of existence).¹⁰⁸ Pentecost understands John in Revelation 20:11 to reveal the

¹⁰⁴ Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 423.

¹⁰⁵ Heb 12:22–24 states, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

¹⁰⁶ Walvoord, *Prophecy*, 172.

¹⁰⁷ Walvoord, *Prophecy*, 172.

¹⁰⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids:

fact of the dissolution of the old earth and sees Peter (cf. 2 Pet 3:7–10) as giving the means by which this happens, i.e., a purging fire that is contemporaneous with the great white throne judgment of evil men.¹⁰⁹

To understand Pentecost's conception of the everlasting kingdom, one must consider aspects of his millennial understanding. Pentecost wades into the debate over whether Revelation 21:9–22:5 is describing the millennium or the eternal state and concludes that an either/or approach misses the point. He affirms what he calls a mediating position regarding this passage:

A mediating view, that the eternal state of the resurrected during the millennium is seen in the passage, is suggested as a better view. When the occupants of the city are described it must be seen that they are in their eternal state, possessing their eternal inheritance, in eternal relationship with God who has tabernacled among them. There will be no change in their position or relation whatsoever. When the occupants of the earth are described they are seen in the millennial age. They have an established relationship to the heavenly city which is above them in whose light they walk. Yet their position is not eternal nor unchangeable, but rather millennial.¹¹⁰

Like Walvoord, Pentecost affirms a hovering New Jerusalem during the millennial era, but with some interesting nuances. As stated above, Pentecost believes resurrected saints will dwell in the city of the New Jerusalem during the millennium and will, along with the Lord Jesus Christ, exercise their right to reign.¹¹¹ Those who have never experienced resurrection will inhabit the earth wherein Israel will see fulfillment of many of her promises. Pentecost understands the sequence of events in the following way: the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven (cf. Rev 20:10) and is suspended in space above the earthly Palestine during the millennial era. Then Pentecost conveys, “At the expiration of the millennial age, during the renovation of the earth, the dwelling place

Zondervan, 1965), 553.

¹⁰⁹ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 553.

¹¹⁰ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 580.

¹¹¹ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 580.

is removed during the conflagration, to find its place after the recreation as the connecting link between the new heavens and the new earth,” i.e., the city comes down again now to rest on the earth (cf. Rev 20:1).¹¹² So for Pentecost, the everlasting state has the eternal city, the New Jerusalem, firmly planted on a new earth that is renovated, cleansed, and perfected.

Pentecost’s view of the eschatological people. For Pentecost, an eternal new earth as part of the everlasting consummation (what he calls “the eternal kingdom”) must exist for the following reasons: “Israel’s covenants guarantee that people, the land, a national existence, a kingdom, a King, and spiritual blessings in perpetuity. Therefore, there must be an eternal earth in which these blessings can be fulfilled.”¹¹³ But, how will Israel in the millennium end up in the new earth in light of the conflagration that occurs? Pentecost believes,

By a translation out of the old earth Israel will be brought into the new earth, there to enjoy forever all that God has promised to them. Then it shall be eternally true, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:3). The creation of the new heavens and new earth is the final preparatory act anticipating the eternal kingdom of God. It is now true that God has a kingdom “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).¹¹⁴

To sum up, Pentecost understands the anthropology of the everlasting kingdom to include Israel and gentile nations dwelling on the earth. In the holy city, the New Jerusalem (which is also on the earth), lives the church (the bride of Christ), as well as saints who experienced death and resurrection in any dispensation.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 578, 580.

¹¹³ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 561.

¹¹⁴ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 561.

¹¹⁵ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 562, 580. Blaising states that Pentecost affirms the existence of gentile nations with Israel in the eschaton: “Pentecost also envisions national identities continuing into the eternal state, with distinctions drawn between Israel and the Gentile nations.” Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 45. Snoeberger, in his current defense of RD, devotes only one paragraph to the eternal state. However, his view bears a resemblance to that of Pentecost. He writes, “We find that the eternal state will feature the subsumption of the kingdoms of the whole earth under the universal reign

Assessment of Classic Dispensationalism and Revised Dispensationalism Using Wolfe’s Criteria for Strong Interpretive Systems

In the assessment that follows, I will treat classic dispensationalism and revised dispensationalism together.

Is It Comprehensive?

In general, dispensationalists should be commended for their comprehensive treatment of the Bible. Deep in the tradition is a commitment to the Word of God and a belief that making believers “people of the book” is crucial to sanctification. This commitment was true from the outset as can be seen by the roots of dispensationalism in the Brethren movement and its emphasis on personal Bible study, and the role of dispensationalists in the Bible conference movement of the late-nineteenth century through early-twentieth century.¹¹⁶ Thus, this section of critique will be shorter, as dispensational scholars have been quite comprehensive in dealing with the scope of Scripture.

“Kingdom of heaven” versus “kingdom of God.” In CD, much was made of a difference in biblical language in the Gospels: namely, what they understood as the spiritual “kingdom of heaven” and the earthly “kingdom of God”—tied to their central dualism. However, Ladd points to a problem of comprehensiveness related to this distinction.

First Ladd argues that the “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God”

of God the Father (1 Cor 15:28). This fact does not mean, however and secondly, that the nations of the earth will simply disappear. Instead, the closing chapters of the Revelation indicate that historical nations will persist into the eternal state, and further, that they will continue their pattern of streaming to the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:24, 26; 22:2). The reason they will do this, thirdly, is that they will enjoy here the continued priestly services of the Jewish nation, which retains a distinctive place among the nations forever (so Rev 21:12). We should expect this in view of the fact, observed repeatedly throughout this essay, that the fulfillments of Israel’s covenants feature eternal benefits—benefits that extend beyond the close of the millennial age and into the eternal state.” Snoeberger, “Traditional dispensationalism,” 178–79.

¹¹⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 10, 14, 17–18, 28; see also Bernard L. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 177.

distinction is seen to be fallacious when one considers a comprehensive list of uses of those terms in the Gospels. Ladd writes,

There is no need in support of this statement to present a complete list of the uses of the two expressions; but no student who is investigating this question can be satisfied until he has done this and the evidence for himself. A few illustrations must suffice. In Matthew, Jesus begins his ministry with the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is near (Matt. 4:17) but in Mark he announces that the kingdom of God has come near and men are to repent and believe in the Gospel (Mark 1:15). In Matthew, the twelve offer the kingdom of heaven to Israel (Matt. 10:6–7), but in Luke they offer the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2). If in Matthew the Sermon on the Mount announced as the law of the kingdom of heaven is the law of the future earthly kingdom (Matt. 5:3), in Luke it is announced as something else, the law of the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20). According to Matthew the parables portray the mystery of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13 :11), but in Mark (4:11) and in Luke (8:10) it is the kingdom of God. If in Matthew a Jewish remnant is to announce at the end of the age the good news that the earthly kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, is about to be set up (Matt. 24:14), then Mark says something quite different — that the *gospel* must be preached first to all the nations (Mark 13 :10).¹¹⁷

Ladd goes on to argue against the alleged distinction by pointing to the four times that the phrase “kingdom of God” occurs in Matthew.¹¹⁸ The use of “kingdom of God” in Matthew is noteworthy, because in the vast majority of cases, Matthew uses the term “kingdom of heaven.”¹¹⁹ Ladd adduces Matthew 19:23–24 which contains both phrases: “And Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’” Here the terms are synonymous and in both cases are referring to salvation, i.e., eternal life.¹²⁰ This is made clear as the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples continue in the following

¹¹⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God: The Sixth Annual Mid-Year Lectures of 1952 Delivered at Western Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary of Portland, Oregon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 107–8.

¹¹⁸ Ladd, *Crucial Questions about Kingdom of God*, 108.

¹¹⁹ Commentators consistently observe that of the four Gospels, the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is only used by Matthew. Scofield notes this and defines it in the following way: “The phrase, kingdom of heaven (lit. of the heavens), is peculiar to Matthew and signifies the messianic earth rule of Jesus Christ, the Son of David. It is called the kingdom of the heavens because it is the rule of the heavens over the earth (Mt. 6.10).” Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 996.

¹²⁰ Ladd, *Crucial Questions about Kingdom of God*, 108.

two verses: “When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” Jesus is teaching the disciples that salvation is a work of God and not of human attainment—a work that is made especially evident when a rich man comes to faith because salvation involves complete surrender to God, and a rich man has so much more to give up.¹²¹

In sum, the distinction between the “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” that was maintained by classic dispensationalists, seems to have resulted from a failure to do a comprehensive study of the relevant biblical data towards formulating a specific doctrine. In fact, it appears that this is a case of reversing that process and starting with a theological position and reading it back into biblical texts. Among revised dispensationalists, although there was little acknowledgement of Ladd’s influence, it appears his critique was persuasive because, for the most part, they dropped the “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” distinction.¹²²

Colossians 1:13. Another problem of comprehensiveness in dispensational writings is seen in the lack of treatment of Colossians 1:13 among both classic dispensationalists and revised dispensationalists. This is a crucial text that relates the kingdom of the OT to the church of the NT. However, the *Scofield Reference Bible* has no note on this important passage.¹²³ *The Ryrie Study Bible* contains one sentence of explanation: “Believers have been *rescued* from the authority of Satan to that of Christ.”¹²⁴ In his monograph *Thy Kingdom Come*, Pentecost references Colossians 1:13

¹²¹ Ladd, *Crucial Questions about Kingdom of God*, 108.

¹²² Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 39.

¹²³ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1262.

¹²⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*, exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 1897.

to show that Satan’s kingdom is one of darkness and not light and then later in the book writes regarding Colossians 1:13–14: “Here it is evident that the phrase ‘the kingdom of the Son He loves’ is equated with the redemption and the forgiveness of sins that we receive by faith in Jesus Christ.”¹²⁵ In Pentecost’s book *Things to Come* (583 pp.), Colossians 1:13 is mentioned just once.¹²⁶ In Chafer’s eight-volume systematic theology, Colossians 1:13 is referenced three times: once as a proof-text that believers are delivered from darkness,¹²⁷ second when Colossians 1:13–17 is reproduced in full in a list of passages supporting the incarnation of the Son,¹²⁸ and third (apparently missed in vol. 8, “Index of Scripture References”) where it is explained as entrance “into the present form of the kingdom of God and of Christ,” and “removal from the sphere of Satan’s dominion.”¹²⁹ In Walvoord’s monograph *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (769 pp.), Colossians 1:13 receives no mention nor is it taken up in *The Millennial Kingdom*.¹³⁰ Finally, the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains Colossians 1:13 in the following way: “From this dominion (*exousias*, “power, authority”) of darkness (cf. John 3:19–20) believers have been rescued, delivered. Through Christ they were brought from a rebel kingdom and placed under the sovereignty of their rightful King.”¹³¹

¹²⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God’s Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises Throughout History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 26, 283.

¹²⁶ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 471.

¹²⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:323.

¹²⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:353.

¹²⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:248.

¹³⁰ Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*; see John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959).

¹³¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Colossians*, in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. 2, *New Testament*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 672, Logos.

Is It Congruent?

There are a number of explanations of scriptural passages produced by the interpretive systems of classic dispensationalism and revised dispensationalism that simply do not seem to fit—or adequately explain certain passages that are key to these systems. In many cases it seems that their unwavering commitment to a central dualism in the redemptive plan of God is to blame.

Misconstrual of the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Both classic dispensationalists and revised dispensationalists affirm an interpretation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that is consistent with the central dualism of their systems, but incongruent with specific texts and the overall biblical storyline. Merrill Unger’s book *The Baptizing Work of the Holy Spirit* sets forth the problematic view that many dispensationalists adopted. Unger understands the baptism of the Spirit to be unique to the current dispensation and to be the key identity marker of the church:

Oneness of the believer with the Lord is emphatically “by one Spirit . . . into one body” (I Cor. 12:13) by “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5). The agent of the union is unique (“one Spirit”). The result of the union is unique (“one body”). The operation by which it is accomplished is unique (“one baptism”). The duration of the operation is unique. The baptizing work of the Holy Spirit is the only ministry of the Spirit confined to this age. It is distinctive to the formation of the Church, the Body of Christ. When this Church is completed and called out of the world [the rapture], there will no longer be any need for the baptizing work of the Spirit, and it will terminate.¹³²

Chafer was clearly influenced by Unger, as Chafer quotes extensively *The Baptizing Work of the Holy Spirit* in volume 6 of his systematic theology. Chafer writes, “[The baptism of the Spirit] was not in operation before the Day of Pentecost, and that there is no anticipation of it in the age to come restrict it to the present age and its benefits are seen to be exclusively the portion of the Church, the New Creation.”¹³³ Ryrie, states the same doctrine but includes some additional implications of it:

¹³² Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptizing Work of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Scripture, 1953), 83.

¹³³ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 6:157.

But the principal evidence that the church began on the day of Pentecost concerns the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. The Lord declared that this particular and distinctive ministry of the Spirit was still future just before His ascension (Ac 1:5). On the day of Pentecost it first occurred (the record does not say so in Ac 2 but it does in Ac 11:15–16). Now, what is it that Spirit baptism does? The answer to this is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13: it places the believer in the body of Christ. Since this is the only way to enter the body (i.e., by the baptizing work of the Spirit), and since this work of the Spirit first occurred on the day of Pentecost, then the conclusion seems obvious that the church, the body of Christ, began on the day of Pentecost.

If the church, the body of Christ, began at Pentecost, then to say that it will be completed at the rapture when the Lord calls it to Himself is not to say that there will not be others saved after that event. Just as there were redeemed Israelites before the day of Pentecost so there will be redeemed people after the rapture of the church, both during the tribulation period and the millennium. But though redeemed and assured of heaven, they will apparently not be a part of the body of Christ, which will be distinct from other redeemed people.¹³⁴

Blaising points out several problems with Unger's understanding that the baptism of the Spirit marks off a special group of the redeemed in this dispensation (the church) from the rest of the redeemed in the final consummation. This entailment of Unger's view is most clearly articulated by Ryrie above: "Though redeemed and assured of heaven [the saved who are not part of the church dispensation], they will apparently not be a part of the body of Christ, which will be distinct from other redeemed people." Specifically, in what follows, Unger's view is shown to suffer from problems of congruence.

First, it is crucial to see that the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for Paul, is linked to the era of the new covenant.¹³⁵ Within 1 Corinthians, themes of union with Christ and unity in the body of Christ have been conveyed by Paul in the terms of the new covenant which Christ inaugurated through his death on the cross.¹³⁶ In 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, as Paul teaches on the eucharist, he explains to the Corinthians that their common partaking of the bread is both symbolic of their union with Christ and unity with each other.

¹³⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, Christian Handbooks (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 157–58.

¹³⁵ Craig Blaising, "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit in the History of Redemption" (paper presented to the Dispensational Study Group of the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, Lisle, IL, November 1994), 17.

¹³⁶ Blaising, "Baptism with Holy Spirit," 17.

Referring to Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 11, Blaising writes, “[Paul] cites the Lord as saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood.’ The unity of the Body flows from a new covenant relationship. As the unity of the Body in 1 Corinthians 12:13 stems from the baptism with the Holy Spirit, it would seem that the baptism with the Holy Spirit should also be considered as a new covenant relationship.”¹³⁷

Another problematic feature of Unger’s view is that the accent of his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:13 is on 12:13a which describes the Spirit baptizing believers into the body of Christ, but in the same breath in 12:13b, Paul writes, “and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” This makes evident what is a clear intertextual linkage intended by Paul to Ezekiel 36–37 that describes God giving his indwelling Spirit to believers, which is part and parcel of the new covenant revealed in the OT. Another important aspect of the baptism of the Spirit can be seen in Romans 6 where Paul connects being baptized into Christ with death to sin and the call to live in resurrection life.¹³⁸ In chapter 7, Paul describes one’s relationship to sin, the law, and Christ to a marriage covenant and concludes, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”¹³⁹ He uses parallel language in 2 Corinthians 3:6 describing himself as a minister of the new covenant: “not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”¹⁴⁰ All of this shows that in Pauline theology, the baptism of the Spirit into the body of Christ is a new covenant relationship.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Blaising, “Baptism with Holy Spirit,” 17.

¹³⁸ Blaising, “Baptism with Holy Spirit,” 18.

¹³⁹ Blaising, “Baptism with Holy Spirit,” 18.

¹⁴⁰ Blaising, “Baptism with Holy Spirit,” 18.

¹⁴¹ Blaising, “Baptism with Holy Spirit,” 18.

Another problem of congruence for Unger's view, is that Paul sees the believer's relationship to the Spirit in the current era as an inaugurated aspect of the new covenant.¹⁴² That is, contra Unger, the new covenant *is effectual now* in an inaugurated way in the church and the baptism of the Spirit manifests this, as Blaising points out:

Paul speaks of the blessings of writing the law on the heart and the sanctifying, glorifying presence of the Holy Spirit as already effectual in the lives of believers. This is surely the point of 2 Cor. 3:6f. The church is a letter of Christ. We are being transformed from one degree of glory to the next. God has removed the veil of hardness and blindness from our hearts. We do have this treasure in earthen vessels. There is a true koinonia of the Holy Spirit. God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. We have been born of the Spirit. And as such, for Paul, this is a new blessing of grace which goes beyond the blessings given in the old dispensation.¹⁴³

In this way, Unger and other dispensationalists who hold that new covenant fulfillment is entirely future, have an incongruent interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:13 and other texts mentioned above that tie the Spirit's work now to the new covenant.

Moreover, since the baptism of the Spirit is a new covenant blessing, and the new covenant was promised to Israel, it is expected that God will give the Holy Spirit to eschatological Israel.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, since the baptism of the Spirit is operative in the church today (albeit in an inaugurated fashion), it cannot be the case that the baptism of the Spirit distinguishes the church from future redeemed Israel or future redeemed gentiles for that matter.¹⁴⁵

Finally, there is a soteriological problem with Unger's view.¹⁴⁶ Namely, how is it that someone can be saved and not be united to Christ by the baptism of the Spirit? Once someone reaches death, resurrection, ascension, and the baptism of the Spirit that occurs on the day of Pentecost in redemptive history, the Scriptures know of no other way

¹⁴² Blaising, "Baptism with Holy Spirit," 18.

¹⁴³ Blaising, "Baptism with Holy Spirit," 18.

¹⁴⁴ Blaising, "Baptism with Holy Spirit," 18.

¹⁴⁵ Blaising, "Baptism with Holy Spirit," 18–19.

¹⁴⁶ Craig A. Blaising, personal conversation with the author.

to be saved than being united to Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 6:1–11; Gal 3:26–27; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 2:12).

Errant interpretation of the new humanity (Eph 2:11–3:6). As was described above, once the church age comes (and due to the special work of baptism of the Spirit during the church age), classic dispensationalists and revised dispensationalists end up with a tripartite humanity composed of Jews, gentiles, and church (this is the case from the church age through eternity). In fact, in their understanding of the baptism of the Spirit, that action of the Spirit is precisely what confers upon the saved in this dispensation the all-encompassing identity of “Church” such that Jew and gentile identity features fall away for members of the body of Christ. This in turn leads to an incongruence in the classic and revised interpretation of passages like Ephesians 2–3 which describe one new humanity/one people of God (as opposed to two humanities that will persist forever: the church and redeemed Jews and gentiles not of the church age). Scofield’s comments on Ephesians 3:6 regarding the mystery of the church (discussed above) elucidate this point and bear repeating:

That the Gentiles were to be *saved* was no mystery (Rom. 9. 24–33; 10. 19–21). The mystery “hid in God” was the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing—“the church, which is his [Christ’s] body,” formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12. 12, 13) and in which the earthly distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears (Eph. 2. 14, 15; Col. 3. 10, 11).¹⁴⁷

Walvoord reflects the same understanding in his revision of Chafer’s *Major Bible Themes*: “As was previously discussed in the doctrine of the of the Spirit. Once the church is complete and caught up in the Rapture into heaven, the divine purpose will return to the normal distinction between Jew and gentiles who are saved in the period of

¹⁴⁷ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1252.

trial following the Rapture and also in the millennial kingdom.”¹⁴⁸ Walvoord goes on to convey his understanding of how this truth is reflected in Ephesians:

The unity of the body comprising both Jews and Gentiles and people of various races and cultures is set forth in Ephesians 1:23; 2:15–16; 3:6; 4:12–16; 5–30. The church as the body of Christ has a marvelous unity in which the division between Jew and Gentile is ignored, and Gentiles and Jews have equal privilege and grace. The body of Christ contrasts sharply with the relationship of God to Israel and Gentiles in the Old Testament and is a unique situation limited to the present age.

But, is this what Paul is revealing in Ephesians 2–3? Some problems of congruence follow.

The essence of the traditional dispensational misinterpretation of this passage is that they understand it to be describing a change in redemptive history that is temporary whereas the passage is indicating a permanent change. Robert Saucy argues this point by more closely examining the scope of the mystery that Paul has in mind as he comes to the specifics of Ephesians 3:6. The new relationship between Jew and gentile in Christ is the particular aspect of the mystery that Paul is focusing on in verse 6, but this flows from the more sweeping mystery of Christ mentioned in the verses prior (“the mystery” in v. 3 and “the mystery of Christ” in v. 4).¹⁴⁹ Some scholars, citing the specific contents of verse 6, limit the meaning of the mystery discussed here to refer only to the inclusion of gentiles in salvation.¹⁵⁰ But, Saucy argues Paul’s field of vision is broader:

The singular reference “the mystery” along with its description simply as “of Christ” leads many to understand the mystery as God’s whole saving action in the person and work of Christ, but with special reference in chapter 3 to the participation of Gentiles in it. As Heinrich A. W. Meyer explains, “Christ Himself, His person and His whole work, especially His redeeming death, connecting also the Gentiles with the people of God (ver. 6), is the *concretum* of the Divine mystery.”

¹⁴⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer and John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes: 52 Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 238.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 153–54. Saucy notes that “mystery” does not appear in v. 6 of the Greek text: “In the original Greek, verse 6 begins with an infinitive (εἶναι), which is understood by most scholars as epexegetical, meaning ‘that is’ or ‘namely.’” Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 153n39.

¹⁵⁰ Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 154.

This broad understanding of the mystery would connect the mystery of chapter 3 to the mystery mentioned in chapter 1. Chrys C. Caragounis says that “the mystery [Eph 1:9–10] which deals with the universal *anakephalaiosis* [‘to bring . . . together under one head’] in Christ stands hierarchically above the other *μυστήριον* [mystery] concepts in this Epistle and includes them as parts of a whole.” The mystery dealing with the unity of the Gentiles and Jews is thus simply “a more particular facet of the general, programmatic use of the concept in ch. 1.”¹⁵¹

This broader view of the mystery of Ephesians 2–3 conveys that Paul is describing a permanent change in salvation history that has occurred.

Carl Hoch provides other evidence that Ephesians must be interpreted along redemptive-historical lines.¹⁵² Hoch cites several linguistic and grammatical reasons for this. First, he notes the significance of the sixty-five uses of the aorist tense in the first three chapters of Ephesians, as well as the “in Christ” formula that recurs:

The aorists usually mark historic, point actions of God that establish his redemptive base for the church. Present tenses express the continuing significance of these redemptive acts for the church.

A representative selection of texts illustrates this point. The aorist tense appears in the clauses “God blessed” (1:3), “he has freely given us” (1:6), “he lavished on us” (1:8), “we were also chosen” (1:11), “you were marked in him with a seal” (1:13), “which he exerted in Christ” (1:20), “when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand” (1:20), “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head” (1:22), “God made us alive with Christ” (2:5), “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him” (2:6), “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (2:10), “you have been brought near” (2:13), “who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier” (2:14), and “he put to death their hostility” (2:16).

The case for the redemptive-historical use of the aorists is strengthened when one observes the concentration of locative cases used of Christ in the first three chapters. The constructions “in Christ,” “in him,” “in the beloved,” “in whom,” “in the Lord,” “in his blood,” “in his flesh,” and “in Jesus” occur a total of thirty-one times in Ephesians. Of these thirty-one occurrences only two are found outside the first three chapters: “in the Lord” (4:1) and “in Jesus” (4:21). Even these two are related to Christ’s redemptive work. It appears, therefore, that Paul was very careful to lay a solid redemptive-historical base in the first three chapters of Ephesians for the ethical exhortations he draws inferentially (4:1) in chapters 4–6.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 154; see also Chrys C. Caragounis, “The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content” (LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1977), 29, 118, cited in Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 154n43.

¹⁵² Carl B. Hoch, “The New Man of Ephesians 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Craig A. Blaising (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 99. Hoch commends Ridderbos’s work on the redemptive-historical method as “masterful.” See Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

¹⁵³ Hoch, “New Man of Eph 2,” 99–100.

In addition, Hoch argues that the *ποτέ-νῦν* construction that Paul utilizes indicates a sweeping redemptive-historical change and that Paul's language and time scheme parallel Peter's:

Peter [writes]: "Once [*ποτέ*] you were not a people, but now [*νῦν*] you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:10).

I conclude that Paul was employing a redemptive-historical time scheme when he used *ποτέ* and *νῦν*. There was a definite status of Jews and Gentiles prior to Christ's coming. His coming has changed that status into a new man, a reality that was not historical until Christ made peace through the blood of his cross.¹⁵⁴

Hoch notes that the far-reaching, redemptive-historical nature of what has taken place in Christ among Jews and gentiles is well-summarized by Barclay's heading to Ephesians 2:11–12: "B.C. and A.D.," and Ralph Martin's which is titled "The Gentiles Before and After Christ's Coming."¹⁵⁵

To summarize in light of what has just been argued linguistically, grammatically, and theologically: the new humanity ("new man") that Paul describes is not bifurcated into the church as one group and Jews and gentiles as another (an old humanity as it were). That is, after the first advent and Pentecost, the Church will be made up of all the people of God regardless of dispensation *without remainder*. In this way, the traditional dispensational view of the church does not comport with what Paul describes in Ephesians 2–3.

A final problem of congruence with traditional dispensational interpretations of Ephesians 2–3 is an entailment of above. Namely, the inheritance of Christ described by Paul, as interpreted by traditional dispensationalists, is partial instead of full—it is a

¹⁵⁴ Hoch, "New Man of Eph 2," 103. Hoch provides a detailed argument as to why Paul's use of *ποτέ-νῦν* does not refer only to pre-conversion and post-conversion, "but covers a more extended period (i.e., the period prior to the coming of Christ and the present interadvent period). It is the writer's contention that the wider sense was intended by Paul. Obviously, this latter sense includes the former, at least for Jews, but the former does not necessarily include the latter." Hoch, "New Man of Eph 2," 102–3.

¹⁵⁵ Hoch, "New Man of Eph 2," 106. See William Barclay, "The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians," in *The Daily Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 124; see also Ralph Martin, "Ephesians," in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, 3rd ed., ed. D. Guthrie et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1111.

truncated body of Christ (consisting of only saved Jews and gentiles during the church age, and not all Jews and gentiles regardless of dispensation). This is incongruent with the nature of the church as revealed in Ephesians and elsewhere. Blaising notes that the word *church* initially appears in Ephesians 1:22, “at the end of an exalted view of Christ the King according to the patterns of Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:14 (this follows the kingdom imagery of [Eph] 1:9–10).”¹⁵⁶ Paul presents the church in relation to Christ as his kingdom inheritance according to Ephesians 1:18: “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”¹⁵⁷ Gentiles are brought near with Israel (not as part of a new Israel contra covenantal readings)¹⁵⁸ to participate in her covenants (Eph 2:12) and to be recreated by the Lord into a new humanity according to Ephesians 2:15.¹⁵⁹ Through the imagery of creation, Paul is ultimately envisioning an eschatological humanity (individuals and nations) filling the earth: not of Jews, church, and gentiles, but of Jews and gentiles all of whom are his eternal inheritance (Dan 7:14) in the consummation to come (Eph 1:14), that is the kingdom to come (Eph 5:5) (this will be argued more extensively in chap. 5).¹⁶⁰

Incongruent understanding of the presence of the kingdom in the church age. Ladd’s conception of inaugurated eschatology (or the “already-not-yet kingdom”) is widely held by evangelical scholars today as a way of understanding the church’s present

¹⁵⁶ Craig A. Blaising, “Typology and the Nature of the Church” (paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, San Diego, November 2014), 10.

¹⁵⁷ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 11.

¹⁵⁸ See Hoch’s article on the syn-compounds in Ephesians: Carl B. Hoch, “The Significance of the Syn-Compounds for Jew-Gentile Relationships in the Body of Christ,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 2 (June 1982): 175–83.

¹⁵⁹ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 11.

¹⁶⁰ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 11.

manifestation of the kingdom of God. As Bruce Ware insightfully notes, “Although the ‘already and not yet’ is nowhere explicitly taught in Scripture, its validity and verification comes in how it illumines so many biblical prophecies.”¹⁶¹ Thus, the wide acceptance of Ladd’s view today, but revised dispensationalists who were contemporaries of Ladd rejected his proposal—notably John Walvoord. In the writer’s view, this resulted in many instances of incongruence in revised dispensational interpretations regarding the church as a manifestation of the kingdom.

One passage that clearly relates to the kingdom, but as was noted above is either overlooked by or minimized by revised dispensationalists is Colossians 1:13. This is a text that functions like a bluff from which a whole vista of NT teaching becomes visible regarding how the church is related to the kingdom: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” In fact, by surveying interpretations of this verse, one is able to identify how systems of theology understand the relationship of the church to the kingdom in the present era—in the case of revised dispensationalists, missing this clear connection between the church and the kingdom results in obscuring a crucial biblical truth.

Another verse connecting the church and kingdom is Jesus’s statement in Matthew 12:28: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Though not with a great amount of detail, some revised dispensational interpreters do treat this verse. However, among classic dispensationalists, Pentecost does not comment on Matthew 12:28 in *Thy Kingdom Come*, nor does Chafer in his entire systematic theology. Furthermore, there are no notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible*.¹⁶² Walvoord gives minimal treatment to this verse in his commentary

¹⁶¹ Bruce A. Ware, “A Progressive Dispensational Understanding of Scripture as a Whole,” in *God’s Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays in Honor of Tom Schreiner*, ed. James M. Hamilton Jr., Denny Burk, and Brian J. Vickers (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2019), 11–12.

¹⁶² See Scripture indices: Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 349; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8:102; Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1009.

entitled *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*. The immediate context of Matthew 12:28 involves the Pharisees accusing Jesus of healing by the power of Beelzebul after he delivers a demon-possessed man. Walvoord writes,

Jesus then drove home His point. If demons have been actually cast out, then it must have been by the Spirit of God, and then, in the person of Christ, the kingdom of God had come unto them. One could not enter the demonic realm victoriously unless he first had bound the strong man. The Pharisees had to make a choice. They were either with Jesus or against Him. But if they were against Him, they were guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.¹⁶³

Walvoord's statement is true, but so much more could be said! *The Ryrie Study Bible*¹⁶⁴ is silent on this verse, but Ryrie comments on it in his *Basic Theology* in a manner similar to Walvoord: "The only logical conclusion to be reached from these facts is the kingdom of God had come, since Christ was defeating Satan by taking his victims from him and doing so in the power of the Spirit of God."¹⁶⁵

By contrast, Schreiner's interpretation of this passage fits the immediate context, and the larger redemptive-historical teaching of the NT regarding the dawning of the kingdom through Jesus's presence and ministry—in this sense Schreiner's interpretation is truly congruent:

One of the most remarkable statements in the Gospels is found in Matt. 12:28 where Jesus says, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you." In the parallel saying, instead of "Spirit of God," Jesus uses the expression "finger of God" (Luke 11:20). Our interest at this point is not on the difference between "Spirit" and "finger," for in either instance the emphasis is on that the kingdom of God had broken into history. Some interpreters have maintained that the saying means only that the kingdom has drawn near; however, the natural meaning of the verb *phthanō* in this context is "arrived" "has come." Indeed, some promote such an interpretation because they assume that the kingdom is only future and eschatological—the same view the Pharisees likely held. Jesus proclaimed that Israel should have perceived in his victory over Satan that the salvation promised in the OT had arrived. The new creation was in some sense, a

¹⁶³ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 89.

¹⁶⁴ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 1534.

¹⁶⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), 352.

reality, for Adam failed to cast the snake out of the garden, but Jesus succeeded in casting out Satan (Matt. 12:28).¹⁶⁶

In addition to his lucid interpretation of the passage, Schreiner identifies what seems to inhibit some interpreters from perceiving the “already” aspect of the kingdom in passages like Matthew 12:28 and Colossians 1:13, namely, a pre-understanding of the kingdom being only future. This resolute commitment is evident in what Walvoord describes as “the postponed kingdom.”

Walvoord’s postponement view is articulated in his Matthew commentary. He understands Matthew 11 to anticipate the rejection of the king and his kingdom, as Jesus indicts the cities with severe words for the people’s sinful rejection despite his miraculous works.¹⁶⁷ In chapter 12, the rejection continues to escalate, climaxing in the Pharisees accusing Jesus of performing his miracles by the power of the devil.¹⁶⁸ As Walvoord moves to explain the significance of Matthew 13, he comments, “With this as a background, chapter 13 faces the question, What will happen when the rejected king goes back to heaven and the kingdom promised is postponed until His second coming?”¹⁶⁹

Walvoord goes on to explain:

The rejection of Christ by His own people and His subsequent death and resurrection were absolutely essential to God’s program. Humanly speaking, the kingdom, instead of being brought in immediately, was postponed. From the divine viewpoint, the plan always included what actually happened. The human responsibility remains, however, and the rejection of the kingdom from this standpoint caused the postponement of the promised kingdom on earth.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 54–55.

¹⁶⁷ Walvoord, *Matthew*, 95–96.

¹⁶⁸ Walvoord, *Matthew*, 96.

¹⁶⁹ Walvoord, *Matthew*, 96.

¹⁷⁰ Walvoord, *Matthew*, 96.

In light of the rejection, Walvoord notes that Jesus's teaching ministry takes a turn in Matthew 13 from plainly setting forth the truth to teaching in parables that veiled the truth to the hard-hearted and unresponsive.¹⁷¹

Two new covenants. A final example of incongruence can be seen in the idea of two new covenants advanced by Chafer: one pertaining to Israel and the other to the church. Again, this flows from the intrinsic dualism of classic dispensationalist, that in Chafer's case, essentially amounted to two different religions. He argues, "The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity."¹⁷²

Chafer understands certain passages (Jer 31:31–40; Heb 8:8–13; 10:16–17) to anticipate a new covenant for Israel that will replace the Mosaic covenant which was conditional and broken by Israel, whereas the new covenant is unconditional and dependent upon God.¹⁷³ For Chafer, Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24 refer to the new covenant currently in force for the church.¹⁷⁴ Chafer compares and contrasts the two new covenants which is helpful in understanding how they function in his theology. He sees the provisions of each as analogous, but the church's being far greater:

All that is promised Israel is now vouchsafed to the Church and that the range of blessing for the Church far exceeds the restricted provisions for Israel. (a) Jehovah's law will be written on the heart of the Jew, but God by His indwelling Spirit is now working in the believer both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13; cf. Rom. 8:4). (b) Jehovah will be Israel's God and they will be His people, but the Christian is now in Christ and his life is now "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). (c)

¹⁷¹ Walvoord, *Matthew*, 96–97.

¹⁷² Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, 107.

¹⁷³ Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, 85–86.

¹⁷⁴ Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, 87; see also Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:98–99.

All Israel shall know the Lord, but the Christian is in the most vital union and communion with God as Father, (d) Israel's iniquities will be forgiven and her sins remembered no more, but for the one in Christ judicial forgiveness is secured to the extent that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1), and they have been forgiven all trespasses (Col. 2:13).¹⁷⁵

Even in what Chafer enumerates above, which frames the comparison as a difference of degree, if one looks past his theological grid, it can be ascertained that this is the same covenant: promised to the Jews in the OT, but revealed to be expanded to gentiles, as well as Jews, in the church in the NT. The fact that the NT so clearly applies the one new covenant to the church reveals Chafer's view to be incongruent (the biblical application of the new covenant to the church will be argued more extensively in chap. 5).

Is It Consistent?

Although much of CD was retained by RD, there were significant changes made among the revised that were not uniform. Thus, inconsistent interpretations and views resulted. This is particularly noteworthy among the revised in their conceptions of the kingdom.

Inconsistent notions of the kingdom. As was mentioned above, Ladd's influence was widely felt among evangelicals, and revised dispensationalists saw the need to adjust the older understandings of CD.¹⁷⁶ However, as the revised made changes, they went in many different directions. This is particularly noticeable in the inconsistent ways they conceptualized notions of the presence of the kingdom in the church age.¹⁷⁷

Alva J. McClain employed the terms *universal kingdom* and *mediatorial kingdom* to describe redemptive history—the former was understood as God's sovereignty over all things throughout all dispensations, and the latter was defined as

¹⁷⁵ Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, 87.

¹⁷⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 39.

¹⁷⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 39.

God's rule over the earth through a divinely appointed mediator.¹⁷⁸ McClain believed that due to Israel's rejection of her messiah, a period that he called "the interregnum" (the time between the reigns) would ensue between the first and second comings of Christ—during this period the mediatorial kingdom would be absent¹⁷⁹:

In view of His final rejection by the nation of Israel, a prospect now become evidently certain in the movement of Biblical history. In this ministry the death of the King and His second coming will hold the central place. And the chief purpose of the new phase of teaching will be to prepare the disciples for His rejection and also for the interregnum which will intervene between His death and His return from heaven in glory to establish the Kingdom on earth in accordance with Old Testament prophecy.¹⁸⁰

Thus, for McClain, there is no kingdom present on the earth during the church age.

Ryrie conceives of several different notions of kingdom. His idea of universal kingdom is similar to that of McClain: "In the universal kingdom God is the Ruler; He rules over all; and He does it in all time and eternity."¹⁸¹ In the inter-advental period, Ryrie believes there are two forms of the kingdom that function. The mystery form commenced after Jesus's rejection when he began to teach in parables which Ryrie understands to include "people on the earth who have related themselves in a positive, neutral, or negative way to 'Christendom.'"¹⁸² A subset of the mystery kingdom for Ryrie is the "spiritual" kingdom which is inclusive of all true believers, and they are currently ruled by Christ in the church dispensation.¹⁸³ In addition to being inconsistent with other

¹⁷⁸ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures*, Christian Theology 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959). See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 39–40.

¹⁷⁹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 40.

¹⁸⁰ McClain, *The Greatness of Kingdom*, 321.

¹⁸¹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 398.

¹⁸² Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 398.

¹⁸³ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 398.

revised dispensationalists, Blaising points out that there are internal inconsistencies in Ryrie's own theology at this point:

The dispensational uniqueness and isolation of the spiritual kingdom produces a number of inconsistencies in Ryrie's theology. On the one hand, he says that the spiritual kingdom is the sphere of new birth. Since the spiritual kingdom is limited to this dispensation, logically it would seem that regeneration is likewise so limited. However, elsewhere Ryrie teaches that regeneration is transdispensational. Also, the existence of a spiritual kingdom which is the church would indicate that Christ relates to the church *as a King*. On the one hand, Ryrie acknowledges that Christ rules the church as His kingdom and that He is a King today. However, in the same work he contradicts himself by denying that Christ is the King of the church or by asserting that even if He is king, He does not rule!¹⁸⁴

Like McClain, Walvoord has many different notions of kingdom in his theology. The Davidic kingdom started when David came to the throne in the OT, is political in nature, and will only truly be fulfilled when Jesus returns and sets up his millennial kingdom.¹⁸⁵ The postponed kingdom (described above) was the Davidic kingdom offered to Israel by Jesus, but when he was rejected, it was postponed. For Walvoord, during the time of the postponement, there exists a "mystery form of the kingdom" which is essentially the spiritual rule of Christ over the church in this dispensation (it is a mystery because this kingdom was not clearly revealed in the OT).¹⁸⁶

Lastly, Dwight Pentecost envisions another kingdom scheme. He uses the term *eternal kingdom* to designate God's rule over all he has created. In addition, Pentecost's notion of the *theocratic kingdom* which spans redemptive history, is similar to McClain's idea of a mediatorial kingdom.¹⁸⁷ However, what is unique about Pentecost relative to the views above, is that he understands the period between Israel's rejection of the king to its

¹⁸⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 41–42. See Ryrie, *Basic Theology*; Blaising points out that a comparison of p. 259 with pp. 398–99 reveals the contradiction.

¹⁸⁵ John F. Walvoord, "Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted," in *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 79–80, 82–83.

¹⁸⁶ Walvoord, "Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted," 80–82.

¹⁸⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 44–45.

future embrace of Jesus as messiah, to be another form of the theocratic kingdom.¹⁸⁸ In other words, there is a degree of continuity in Pentecost's theology not seen in the other revised dispensationalists surveyed above. For Pentecost, the parables of Matthew 13 explain, "The previously unrevealed form in which God's theocratic rule would be exerted in a previously unrevealed age, made necessary by Israel's rejection of Christ."¹⁸⁹ In other words, although it was previously unrevealed, there is another manifestation of the theocratic kingdom during the inter-advental age. This is in direct contrast to McClain who understands there to be a gap in the kingdom during the inter-advental period.

Though the kingdom schemes summarized above have some overlapping conceptions, it is clear that there is great divergence and inconsistency in understandings generated by what purports to be the same theological system.

Two ways of salvation? A common objection against classic dispensationalists, particularly from covenantalists, was that the dispensational system involves two ways of salvation. John Bowman's critique is a scathing example:

If any man is saved within any dispensation other than those of Promise and Grace, he is saved by *works* and not by faith! . . . For the dispensationalist of the Scofield type, in the end faith becomes works, a mark of man's obedience which saves! Or, if he will not admit of this conclusion, then he is clearly left with two methods of salvation on his hands—*works* for a majority of the dispensations, *faith* for the rest— and we have, as already remarked, to deal with a fickle God who deals with man in various ways at various times. This is clearly not the God of the Scriptures, who is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).¹⁹⁰

Although dispensationalists vigorously opposed this charge, and there were some uncharitable representations of their views, nevertheless, the objection surfaces a consistency problem for the system. Apparently it is one that continued to plague revised

¹⁸⁸ Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 228.

¹⁸⁹ Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 220.

¹⁹⁰ John Wick Bowman, "Bible and Modern Religions, Pt 2: Dispensationalism," *Interpretation* 10, no. 2 (April 1956): 178.

dispensationalists, as Ryrie devotes most of chapter 6 of his apologetic for dispensationalism, *Dispensationalism Today*, to respond to the charge that some forms of dispensationalism affirm two ways of salvation.¹⁹¹ In so doing, Ryrie refers to as, “unguarded,”¹⁹² the following note in the *Scofield Reference Bible*: “The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ.”¹⁹³ But, the underlying problem cannot be adequately addressed by clarifying statements, or affirmations of justification by faith alone. Rather, the core consistency issue is inextricably tied to the central dualism of classic and revised dispensationalism that runs contrary to the thrust of the biblical narrative towards one, unified salvation in Christ. This problem is most pronounced in classical dispensationalism which features the following: two different kinds of people governed by two different kinds of dispensations, two different kinds of destinies, two different religions—it is no wonder that sometimes this structure seems to imply, or even affirm, two different kinds of salvation.

Although Chafer was largely defending the teaching he had received from his mentor in Scofield, he responded to the charge of affirming two ways of salvation more than anyone else, so I will focus on his writings in what follows. As was made clear above, Chafer maintains the distinction of a heavenly and earthly people throughout his theology. These two different kinds of people move towards two different everlasting destinies in the biblical storyline: one towards an earthly eternity and the other towards a heavenly eternal destiny.

It was Chafer’s understanding of the dispensations and the correspondingly

¹⁹¹ See esp. chap. 6, “Salvation in Dispensationalism,” in Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 110–31.

¹⁹² Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 112.

¹⁹³ Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1115n2.

different rules of life governing the heavenly and earthly people that made him especially vulnerable to the charge of affirming two ways of salvation. Although Chafer held to Scofield's seven dispensations, most of his writings focused on distinguishing the present dispensation of grace from the prior dispensation of law, and the subsequent dispensation of the kingdom.¹⁹⁴ However of more fundamental concern for Chafer (and more directly tied to charges of teaching two ways of salvation) was how he conceived of law and grace functioning in redemptive history: "In respect to the character of divine government, both the age before the cross and the age following the return of Christ represent the exercise of *pure law*; while the period between these two ages represents the exercise of *pure grace* [emphasis added]."¹⁹⁵ Tied to his iron-clad distinctions among the dispensations and between law and grace, perhaps one can see the problematic flow of his thought most clearly by observing the table of contents of his book *Dispensationalism*. In the third chapter, "Scripture Doctrine Viewed Dispensationally," the first heading reads, "An Acceptable Standing on the Part of Man Before God," followed by this statement:

Whatever may have been the divine method of dealing with individuals before the call of Abraham and the giving of the law by Moses, it is evident that, with the call of Abraham and the giving of the law and all that has followed, there are two widely different, standardized, divine provisions, whereby man, who is utterly fallen, might stand in the favor of God, namely, (a) by physical birth into Judaism or (b) by spiritual birth into Christianity or the kingdom of God.¹⁹⁶

Blaising, summarizes what appears to be a problematic implication of Chafer's theology when he writes, "These two religions [the earthly religion of Judaism and heavenly religion of Christianity] presented in Scripture entail *completely different kinds of*

¹⁹⁴ Craig A. Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 88–89.

¹⁹⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1922), 124). See Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," 88–89.

¹⁹⁶ Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, 41.

salvation!”¹⁹⁷ Although Chafer wants to distinguish between theocratic Israel and individual Israelites, and affirms that there is unmerited grace manifest to the Jews because they were born into their covenant standing apart from any works, there is much that is confusing here.¹⁹⁸ However, the core inconsistency seems to be the belief that there is one Bible, from one God containing two different religions. In addition, Chafer continues to maintain as distinct in Scripture, what the biblical storyline is bringing together as one, unified salvation for all peoples of all times in Christ, as the narrative moves from the OT to the NT.

Is It Coherent?

Some problematic areas of CD and RD mentioned above suffer from problems of coherence as well.

Areas that are incoherent (as well as inconsistent). In addition to being inconsistent, the CD idea of two new covenants lacks coherence. The error of Chafer’s view is made apparent in this summary statement, “To suppose that these two [new] covenants—one for Israel and one for the Church are the same is to assume that there is a latitude of common interest between God’s purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church.”¹⁹⁹ But, that is exactly what the NT makes clear! Namely, that God does have a common interest of the holistic redemption of Jews and gentiles (individually and corporately) in one everlasting kingdom (this will be argued for in chap. 5). To miss the way the NT applies the new covenant to the church in an inaugurated and consummated fashion, is to tear asunder what God has brought together and results in an incoherent reading of the biblical storyline as a whole.

¹⁹⁷ Blaising, “Lewis Sperry Chafer,” 89.

¹⁹⁸ Blaising, “Lewis Sperry Chafer,” 89.

¹⁹⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:98–99.

In addition, the inconsistency among RD advocates regarding the nature of the inter-advental kingdom reveals a coherence problem. For RD, the diverse conceptions are numerous: ranging from no kingdom present in the church age (an interregnum), to a postponed kingdom, to a parenthesis, to a mystery kingdom, to a Christendom kingdom, to a spiritual kingdom, to a manifestation of the eternal kingdom. That what is considered to be one theological system is generating so many variants, and so little clarity, at such a crucial point in the system; namely, as the storyline moves from OT to NT, from pre-cross to post-cross, is indicative of a coherence problem in the underlying theological system.

A biblical narrative characterized by discontinuity? Both CD and RD end up with a canonical storyline that is disjunctive due to the central dualism they maintain. As was noted above, an advocate of CD like Chafer, understands the Bible to reveal two different religions! If this is the case, it seems impossible to have a unified canon in any cohesive sense. It would seem more fitting to see the OT and NT as two different books. Again, flowing from the central dualism, CD affirms two different plans of redemption that continue throughout eternity! RD pulls that back a bit and maintains two different plans of redemption all the way through the millennial era, but then brings Israel and the church together in one sphere (either heavenly or earthly) in the eternal state, but still keeps Israel and the church distinct.

Given the foundational presupposition of dualism, both CD and RD then utilize analytical tools or categories to conceptualize the whole Bible that only exacerbate the narrative incoherence. One such misdirected, analytical tool is to see the whole Bible as a theodicy, i.e., an attempt to vindicate God of responsibility for evil in the world.²⁰⁰ Along these lines, as early as Darby, dispensationalists have understood the dispensations

²⁰⁰ Craig A. Blaising, "Developing Dispensationalism: Pt 2, Development by Contemporary Dispensationalists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145, no. 579 (July 1988): 264.

as various tests of mankind and man’s resultant failure; Darby seems to have solved the theodicy by understanding the dispensations to educate mankind in the perfections of God.²⁰¹ Scofield, too, understood the dispensations this way: “These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God’s method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions: of sin, and of man’s responsibility. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment, marking his utter failure in every dispensation.”²⁰² In a more formal way in 1982, Norman Geisler reflects on dispensationalism as theodicy and concludes: “In brief, the scheme of dispensations provides a significant insight into the purposes of God in testing man in various ways. . . . These [dispensations] are all part of a complete (sevenfold) and progressive plan to defeat evil both fairly and finally without destroying the good but in the process to bring about a greater good.”²⁰³ Undoubtedly, Scripture assigns responsibility for evil in the world to rebellious creatures and exonerates God, but is this what binds the biblical narrative together? To borrow Stephen Wellum’s term, this seems to be a case of bringing an extratextual philosophical concern to bear on Scripture to find what ends up being an artificial unity.

Another analytical category used by dispensationalists that tends towards narrative incoherence can be seen in the writings of John Feinberg. In comparing his biblical theology to others along a continuum, he writes, “I see more discontinuity between the Testaments than others do, and my system qualifies as a discontinuity system.”²⁰⁴ The title of Feinberg’s edited work *Continuity and Discontinuity*:

²⁰¹ Blaising, “Developing Dispensationalism Pt 2,” 264. Regarding Darby, Blaising cites Crutchfield: Larry Crutchfield, “The Doctrine of Ages and Dispensations as Found in the Published Works of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882)” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1985), 82–83.

²⁰² C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (N.p.: Jawbone Digital, 1921), loc 113.

²⁰³ John F. Walvoord and Donald K. Campbell, *Walvoord: A Tribute* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 110.

²⁰⁴ John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis*

Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments makes clear that this is the key analytical tool employed in the different essays contained in the book.²⁰⁵ But, Blaising brings an incisive criticism when he asks: “What narrative is discontinuous?,” and then goes on to recommend plot development and resolution as better analytical tools when trying to understand a narrative.²⁰⁶

Instead of conceptualizing a single narrative, albeit with different twists and turns as the plot develops, classic and revised dispensationalists end up with a number of disconnected themes in a narrative characterized by discontinuity. Both CD and RD have a biblical storyline characterized by dispensations that are quite distinct and may be vertically related as tests coming from God, but they are not horizontally related to one another as the story progresses. Each system also fails to apprehend how the church fits into the storyline. Far from an interruption, or parenthesis in the story, the NT relates the church to the covenant promises of the OT and the future kingdom consummation. Finally, both classic dispensationalists and revised dispensationalists have numerous concepts of kingdoms that are loosely connected; however, they fail to see that different kingdom manifestations throughout redemptive history are progressively revealing phases of the one eschatological kingdom—a kingdom consummation of Jewish and gentile individuals, Israel and gentile nations, living with God in the midst, in a new creation characterized by everlasting *shalom*.

What is needed is a biblical theology that does justice to the numerous promises and unresolved aspects of the storyline related to ethnic, national, territorial, Israel (i.e., that is anti-supersessionist), but then connects that plotline in a coherent and cohesive manner to the church revealed in the NT, as well as a unified eternal

Johnson Jr., ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 86.

²⁰⁵ Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*.

²⁰⁶ Craig A. Blaising, “A Critique of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant*: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 111–27.

consummation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, traditional dispensational views (RD and CD) have been described and analyzed. Traditional dispensationalists were commended for their commitment to being comprehensive in their treatment of Scripture. They also seek to do justice to yet to be fulfilled promises to ENT Israel, but in doing so, they end up with a bifurcated canonical narrative that is really two storylines. When evaluated using Wolfe's criteria, TD is shown to have significant weaknesses. What is needed is a biblical theology that does justice to unresolved aspects of the OT storyline regarding ENT Israel, and that connects that plotline in a coherent and cohesive manner to the church revealed in the NT resulting in a unified eternal consummation. To such a biblical theology I now turn.

CHAPTER 5

MODEL 3: INDIVIDUAL ETHNIC IDENTITY AND NATIONAL TERRITORIALITY PRESENT IN A UNIFIED MANNER IN THE CONSUMMATION (KINGDOM THEOLOGY)

As I come to the final chapter of this dissertation, although I have sought to be fair to the different views I have considered and to represent them as accurately as possible, I have not entered into this project as an objective observer without a viewpoint. I am persuaded by kingdom theology—referred to as Progressive Dispensationalism (PD) for the remainder of this chapter in which I will make a case for it.¹ In doing so, I endeavor to show that PD addresses many of the weak points of the other systems brought out in the assessment sections of the foregoing. I want to reiterate that the burden of this dissertation is not to show that PD is completely correct and other views are incorrect; rather, as evaluated through the criteria proposed by Wolfe for a strong interpretive system, I argue that PD is just such a system.

In arguing for PD, a breadth of contributors to this model will be utilized and interacted with. However, the writings of Craig Blaising will be prominently featured, as he was a principal formulator of the view from its inception in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In addition, since that time, Blaising has made the largest contribution to the continuing explication and refinement of PD.

¹ More recently, PD is also being referred to as “Redemptive Kingdom Theology,” or simply, “Kingdom Theology.” Although kingdom theology is out of the dispensational tradition, it is distinct from earlier forms of dispensationalism and makes a unique contribution to evangelical theology—thus, a different name is warranted. See Craig A. Blaising, “A Theology of Israel and the Church,” in *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 88; see also Craig A. Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology” (paper presented at Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, Fort Worth, TX, November 2021), 1.

Progressive Dispensationalism

Hermeneutics

In what follows, I wish to show that PD's approach to hermeneutics is a development and an advance of the interpretive practices of CD and RD. In addition, the hermeneutics of PD are distinct in some important ways from other contemporary models considered in this dissertation, and the interpretive practices of PD can be shown to produce a stronger interpretive system.

Development beyond the hermeneutics of classic dispensationalism and revised dispensationalism. In the history of Christian interpretation there has been much debate regarding spiritual versus literal hermeneutics. John Walvoord traces this debate (and the church moving in a wrong-headed direction towards spiritual interpretation) back to the church fathers, to the Alexandrian school which championed allegorical interpretation, to Augustine proposing literal interpretation for most of Scripture but spiritual interpretation for the prophetic portions, to the Catholic church carrying on Augustine's approach, and eventually even the Reformers adopting it.² It seems for Walvoord (as seen in the preface of his book *The Millennial Kingdom* in which he briefly discusses hermeneutics) and other revised dispensationalists, that problematic interpretations can almost always be traced to violating the fundamental principle of literal interpretation: "Though recognizing that some Scriptures are contextually indicated as containing figures of speech and not intended for literal interpretation, premillennial interpretation finds no need for spiritualizing prophecy any more than any other portion, of Scripture."³ A similar posture comes across in Ryrie's second point of his *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: "Spiritualizing may be practiced to a lesser or

² John F. Walvoord, preface to *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), v–vi.

³ Walvoord, preface, vi.

greater degree, but its presence in a system of interpretation is indicative of a nondispensational approach. Consistently literal or plain interpretation is indicative of a dispensational approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures.⁷⁴ However, as was argued in chapter 4, there are inconsistencies in how Ryrie, Walvoord, and other revised dispensationalists actually practice what they claim to be consistent, literal hermeneutics. In fact, Ryrie and Walvoord's view that involves the translation of Jewish believers at the end of the millennium from an earthly existence to a heavenly existence for the rest of eternity, entails a spiritualization of numerous OT prophecies that describe Israel in possession of earthly land forever.⁵ As will be shown below, progressive dispensationalists affirm a new creation eschatology in which Israel will indeed possess her earthly land forever. Thus, the inconsistency of RD, which seems to practice a literal hermeneutic from creation through the millennium in the storyline, is removed in PD which practices a literal hermeneutic from creation through the eternal consummation in the canonical narrative. In this way, the hermeneutics of PD are actually more consistently literal than that of RD.

Although the revised dispensational emphasis on literal interpretation along with their stern warnings to avoid spiritualizing were very important contributions, their overall approach to hermeneutics was too simplistic. Commenting on the development of interpretation in the dispensational tradition, Blaising writes,

Biblical interpretation developed from the middle to the latter part of the twentieth century. Dispensationalists changed from advocating a dual hermeneutic of spiritual and literal interpretation [the approach of CD] to an emphasis on consistently literal

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 45–46. Radmacher maintains that of Ryrie's three points of *sine qua non*, it is point two that is the fundamental pillar of dispensationalism: consistent, literal interpretation. Radmacher writes, "Why should one make such a fuss over a proper statement of the basic principle? Because it is so utterly fundamental to understand that the foundational premise of dispensationalism is not theological but hermeneutical." Earl D. Radmacher, "The Current Status of Dispensationalism and Its Eschatology," in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology: Papers from the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 166.

⁵ This insight was pointed out to me by Craig Blaising in a private conversation.

interpretation [the approach of RD]. This “literal” interpretation then developed from the “clear plain” method of attaching to words whatever meaning “seemed clear” to the interpreter to a more critical awareness of how bias (or pre-understanding) conditions our intuitions, our impressions of certainty, and clarity of interpretation. Literal interpretation also developed as grammatical-historical interpretation. From an early emphasis on the grammatical analysis of words, interpretation broadened to include syntactical rhetorical, and literary study. Historical interpretation expanded beyond dates and chronologies to include the historical setting and development of themes, words and ideas. It also came to bear on the history of interpretation the matter of tradition and the historical context of the interpreter [the approach of PD].⁶

In addition to the aforementioned, there are other aspects of the modern art and science of biblical interpretation that PD has integrated enabling more hermeneutical precision.⁷ For instance, greater recognition of the literary/formal level of interpretation in which words, sentences, and paragraphs are structured so as to form different kinds of literary genres.⁸ Progressive dispensationalists more readily appreciated the variegated genres of Scripture (narrative, poetry, law, reports, letters, songs, etc.), and recognized that when an interpreter comes to a text, he must be aware of the kind of literature he is reading and ascertain the literary connection of the passage to its surrounding context.⁹

Another advance in the hermeneutics of PD (beyond that practiced by CD and RD) is an emphasis on thematic and intertextual development.¹⁰ More careful attention was given to biblical themes like the “Kingdom of God” or the “Day of the Lord,” and how they are developed through the canon to come to an understanding of the meaning of

⁶ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 51–52.

⁷ Craig A. Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*, ed. Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 154.

⁸ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 154.

⁹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 154–55.

¹⁰ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 155. Blaising argues that the “thematic is an aspect of contextual interpretation that recognizes that themes weave their way through larger literary structures. Thematic connection in a larger literary work is a context just as important as, and maybe more than verbal proximity.”

particular uses in various places in Scripture.¹¹ These considerations move in the direction of the broadest level of biblical interpretation: the canonical.

Canonical interpretation. Although what has just been described distinguishes PD from traditional forms of dispensationalism, most of the above—what one might call “micro hermeneutics”—is broadly agreed upon by evangelicals today. However, it is in the area of what one might call “macro hermeneutics,” or narratological canonical interpretation, in which interpreters synthesize themes and intertextual development rendering an understanding of the biblical storyline that differences between the models considered in this dissertation become more apparent. It is here that PD shows itself to be distinct from both traditional dispensationalism (model 2) and forms of covenantalism (model 1).

Progressive dispensationalism’s understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church. How one understands the relationship between Israel and the church in the plan of God is most certainly an act of canonical interpretation. As was discussed in chapter 2, one such approach to the Israel-church relationship is supersessionism (model 1A). Supersessionists understand Israel of the OT to be replaced (superseded) in the NT by a different reality.¹² In this view, from the divine perspective, Israel, was an earthly people that was always intended by God to be replaced by “a new Israel,” a spiritual people, the church.¹³ Given this macro hermeneutical move, it follows that promises to ethnic, national, territorial (ENT) Israel in the OT have to be spiritually interpreted to be fulfilled in the church in the NT.¹⁴

¹¹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 155.

¹² Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 85.

¹³ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 86.

¹⁴ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 86–87.

As was seen in chapter 3, traditional dispensationalism (model 2) represents another way of understanding the inter-testamental relationship between Israel and church. In TD, human anthropology consists of gentiles, Israel, and church, each of which has a unique purpose and place in the plan of God.¹⁵ For TD, the church comes on the scene in the NT as a new people group, as Blaising effectively explains:

The church is . . . a spiritual or heavenly humanity formed from, but not in replacement of, the existing earthly peoples, Jews and Gentiles. The church is not a “new Israel.” The church does not replace ENT Israel in the plan of God. It does not “spiritually fulfill” the promises covenanted by God to Israel. Rather, its appearance in history is more properly understood as an interruption in God’s dealings with Israel. Gods “earthly” plan for ENT Israel is temporarily suspended during the formation of the church. In God’s appointed time, the interruption will cease. The spiritual people will be removed (raptured) and God’s purpose for the earthly people Israel will resume. All three people groups, Israel, Gentiles and the church, have a place in the consummation of the divine plan.¹⁶

Progressive dispensationalists conceive of the Israel-church relationship in a way that is different from both of the above models. Like TD, PD rejects a supersessionist understanding of the church replacing or fulfilling Israel. However, the crucial difference between PD and TD, is that progressive dispensationalists do not conceptualize the church as a separate people group.¹⁷ Rather, for PD, human anthropology as revealed throughout the biblical storyline is composed of Jews and gentiles (not Jews, gentiles, and church).¹⁸ To illustrate this point: to be included in the church as a Jewish believer does not entail exclusion from the promises of God for Israel, nor does inclusion in the church for a gentile believer mean exclusion from the blessings God has planned for gentile peoples or nations.¹⁹

¹⁵ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 87.

¹⁶ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 87–88.

¹⁷ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 89.

¹⁸ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 89.

¹⁹ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 89.

If the church is neither a spiritual people intended to replace Israel of old, nor a special anthropological category that is distinct from Jew and gentile, what is it?²⁰ For progressive dispensationalists, to understand the role of Israel and church in the plan of God, it is misguided to focus on their relationship one to the other; rather, their essence is better illuminated when one sees the relationship of each to the progressively revealed eschatological kingdom of God.²¹ The relationship of Israel and the church to the kingdom is cogently explained by Blaising:

The divine plan for Israel and for the Gentile peoples and nations is a future worldwide kingdom of nations—a multi-national kingdom—ruled and blessed by God through His Messiah on earth forever. In this future kingdom, God’s covenanted promises to Israel will be fulfilled and secured forever. Also, in that kingdom, under the reign of the messiah, Gentile peoples and nations likewise come under the everlasting blessing of God. This future worldwide kingdom is a progressively developed theme in biblical theology, which is linked to a future salvation prophesied for Israel and for all peoples. The prophesied salvation makes possible the future fulfillment of Israel’s promises. The extension of its benefits to Gentile people as well secures the stability of the kingdom forever.²²

A complementary hermeneutic. Progressive dispensationalists, like Darrell Bock, have argued for a form of literal interpretation that they call a “complementary hermeneutic” to differentiate their view from the form of literal interpretation held by revised dispensationalists. In what sense do advocates of PD believe they have developed the understanding of literal interpretation held by traditional dispensationalists? In essence, they think that there no longer needs to be an either/or choice between an “exegetical” reading of the text of Scripture focused on discerning the original author’s intended meaning and a “theological” reading which ascertains the eventual significance

²⁰ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 89.

²¹ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 89.

²² Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 89.

of the text in light of the canonical development of its subject matter.²³ Instead, a both/and approach can be taken that is complementary.²⁴

A historical-exegetical reading is primarily concerned with understanding the original author's intended meaning and how that message would have been understood by his immediate audience in its specific historical context.²⁵ This is relatively straightforward and is generally agreed upon. However, it is when one considers a theological-canonical reading that the hermeneutical debate intensifies. In a theological-canonical reading the force of the passage may be developed or clarified in a way that is beyond what the original author would have understood.²⁶ Bock notes three views of how this is done among evangelicals:

(1) Some argue that the later NT meaning tells us what the original OT author meant (even though in the original OT context that meaning was not very transparent). (2) Others argue that the OT revelation determines the meaning and defines the limits of the concept and thereby fixes that meaning. (3) Others argue that the NT meaning can develop or complement what the OT meant, but not in a way that ends up denying what the OT originally affirmed.²⁷

The approaches that Bock enumerates above correspond to the three models under consideration in this dissertation: method 1 above is that of covenantalists (model 1); method 2 is that of traditional dispensationalists (model 2); and method 3 is that of progressive dispensationalists (model 3).²⁸

²³ Darrell L. Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde, Counterpoints: Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 115.

²⁴ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 115.

²⁵ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 116.

²⁶ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 116.

²⁷ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 116.

²⁸ This is intended as a rough categorization of the models and could be more nuanced. Some progressive covenantalists, as well as classic covenantalists, would claim that they practice approach 3. The debate would then coalesce around what was originally affirmed in the OT and what would count as "denying" it.

For further clarification, it is helpful to consider the interpretation of a specific text utilizing the complementary hermeneutic of PD. For instance, a historical-exegetical reading of Genesis 3:15 notes that enmity is introduced into the created order between the serpent and the seed of the woman.²⁹ Each party attacking at his adversary's most vulnerable area: the man's heel and the snake's head.³⁰ Essentially the text teaches that because of Adam's sin, there is now disharmony between man and God and man and nature; however, for centuries Christians have commonly referred to this text as the *protoevangelium*, or the first introduction of the gospel, which is a theological-canonical reading.³¹ The human author could not have connected the "seed" to Jesus Christ or the "serpent" to Satan; "that understanding is 'refracted' by the progress of revelation."³² A complementary hermeneutic maintains that one does not need to choose between these two interpretations, but can affirm both:

It is simply a matter of which type of reading and how much context is being drawn into the reading that allows one to make either point. Subsequent revelation makes it clear that Jesus is a son of Adam (Luke 3:38), even the Second Adam (Rom. 5:12–21), and compares Satan to one crushed by God through Jesus (16:20). The key in thinking through interpretations related to the use of the OT in the NT is understanding how the NT text is reading the OT text. Which of the two levels of the reading is being applied? It is not always the case that a reading of the OT was or is limited to its exegetical level. It is often the case that the NT is reading these OT texts more canonically than exegetically.³³

Inattention to either aspect of meaning short-circuits the richness of the biblical narrative.³⁴ Some interpreters err by jumping immediately to a text's canonical

²⁹ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 116–17.

³⁰ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 117.

³¹ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 116.

³² Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 116.

³³ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 117.

³⁴ Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 117.

significance and losing the earlier sense, while others flatten “God’s development of the imagery by limiting themselves only to the short-term, historical context.”³⁵

While affirming the reality that later revelation can enrich the meaning of earlier revelation, progressive dispensationalists maintain that this does not entail change or reinterpretation of the original meaning.³⁶ Robert Saucy provides several examples of how this happens in Scripture. Earlier revelation may be developed by *elaboration* as can be seen in the case of the Abrahamic international “blessing” that is given fuller meaning, and more details as one moves across the canon, than what was expressed in the initial giving of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–3).³⁷ Later Scripture may also give *greater clarity regarding the referents* of an initial prediction such as Jesus Christ being named as the “seed” of the woman who would defeat the serpent who is Satan.³⁸ In addition, sometimes later revelation *expands the meaning of earlier revelation by connecting multiple referents* to the original promise, e.g., prophecies of Israel’s return from Babylonian captivity and a final, future return from exile.³⁹ Saucy helpfully summarizes the progressive dispensational understanding of a complementary hermeneutic:

In all such instances where later revelation enlarges the meaning of the original statement, the essential meaning of the original is retained in the fuller meaning. There is an organic relationship between them. As a bud develops into a blossom and then fruit so the meaning of the original prediction develops a fuller meaning in the later revelation. In other words, the fruit is the expression of the original genetic information of the DNA of the bud.⁴⁰

³⁵ Bock, “Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts,” 117.

³⁶ Robert L. Saucy, “The Progressive Dispensational View,” in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: Four Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 158.

³⁷ Saucy, “Progressive Dispensational View,” 158.

³⁸ Saucy, “Progressive Dispensational View,” 158.

³⁹ Saucy, “Progressive Dispensational View,” 158; cf. Jer 24:4–7; 29:10–14; Ezek 36:8–15.

⁴⁰ Saucy, “Progressive Dispensational View,” 158.

Revised dispensationalists see the hermeneutics of PD as a shift away from the form of literal interpretation that has been a hallmark of dispensationalism and towards nondispensational systems. Robert Thomas, who was a vocal critic of PD, is emphatic that a text's meaning is fixed in its historical context and original sense.⁴¹ His concern regarding PD comes through in his quotation of Milton Terry: "A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture."⁴²

At the heart of Thomas's objection is a concern for stability of meaning which he believes is threatened by a complementary hermeneutic.⁴³ However, progressive dispensationalists argue that their view maintains stability of meaning. It respects authorial intent and sees the original meaning as "a relevant aspect of ultimate meaning."⁴⁴ As Blaising and Bock note, PD's approach allows for "complementary additions, however, it does not jettison old promises. The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise."⁴⁵ Thus, progressive dispensationalists believe there are two aspects of their hermeneutical methodology that prevent destabilization of meaning. First, is the belief that later revelation may expand earlier revelation, but it will not reinterpret or contradict it thus meaning is maintained. Second, is their view that a

⁴¹ Robert L. Thomas, "The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 6, no. 1 (1995): 89.

⁴² Milton Spenser Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1900), 205.

⁴³ Thomas, "Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," 87.

⁴⁴ Darrell L. Bock, "Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 90.

⁴⁵ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 393.

hermeneutic that does justice to the dual authorship of Scripture will not only be concerned with the meaning of the human author in his setting, but as Bock conveys, will also “be sensitive to the meaning of the divine Author, who knows the whole of the story and the entirety of canonical promise.”⁴⁶ In this way, stability of meaning is anchored both textually and canonically.

Inaugurated eschatology. Another feature of the hermeneutics of progressive dispensationalists is their embrace of inaugurated eschatology⁴⁷ in their conception of the kingdom of God. Thus, for PD, the kingdom is a present reality in contrast to the wholly future notions of many earlier forms of dispensationalism.⁴⁸ Blaising writes, “Since in [PD] the church is an inaugurated form of the universal spiritual communion that unites all peoples of the Kingdom of kingdoms, across all national, territorial, ethnic boundaries,

⁴⁶ Bock, “Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism,” 90.

⁴⁷ The origin of the concept of inaugurated eschatology traces back to Geerhardus Vos and was developed by Oscar Cullman and George Eldon Ladd, with Ladd popularizing the “already, not yet” description of the kingdom. See Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998); Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), esp. chap. 2, “Eschatology of the New Testament,” where Vos conveys the idea of inaugurated eschatology without using the term: “Even though [the NT] regards the present work of Christ as preliminary to the consummate order of things, it does not separate the two in essence or quality, it does not exclude the Messiah from a supreme place in the coming world, and does not expect a temporal Messianic kingdom in the future as distinguished from Christ’s present spiritual reign” Vos, *Redemptive History*, 27; see also 304–19; Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God: The Sixth Annual Mid-Year Lectures of 1952 Delivered at Western Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary of Portland, Oregon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

⁴⁸ Chafer’s systematic theology provides an apt illustration of a future kingdom formulation. Chafer writes, “[Kingdom] Postponed Until Christ Returns: One of the greatest errors of theologians is an attempt, as essayed now, to build a kingdom on the first advent of Christ as its basis, whereas according to the Scriptures it will be realized only in connection with the second advent. All Scriptures conform to this arrangement, strange though it may look.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 7:224.

the people of Israel as well as various Gentile peoples it is apparent that progressive dispensationalism affirms an inaugurated kingdom eschatology.”⁴⁹

In 1992, in his book *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, Bock explained the current presence of the kingdom tied to his view that Jesus began his reign (predicted by the Davidic covenant) after his ascension.⁵⁰ Thus, for Bock, Christ is currently reigning as he is seated at the right hand of the Father. Bock’s interpretation of Acts 2:29–35 makes this clear:

What is crucial is that David’s awareness of this covenant promise is immediately linked to his understanding of the resurrection promise in Psalm 16, which in turn is immediately tied to the resurrection proof text of Psalm 110 (vv. 31–35). *Being seated on David’s throne is linked to being seated at God’s right hand.* In other words, Jesus’ resurrection-ascension to God’s right hand is put forward by Peter as fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.⁵¹

In addition, for progressive dispensationalists like Bock, “The works of Jesus give dynamic glimpses of the kingdom: sins are forgiven, diseases are cured, disabilities are healed, demons are exorcised, and the dead are raised.”⁵² These demonstrations of power testify to the presence of the kingdom, but the kingdom is not fully initiated until the sending of the Spirit which marks the dawn of the eschaton and the inauguration of the new covenant in Acts 2.⁵³

Bock also believes the present kingship of Jesus is manifested in his rule over the current sociological expression of the kingdom—the church. Bock finds support for this throughout Luke-Acts, but particularly in the final portion of Luke’s Gospel (Luke

⁴⁹ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 3.

⁵⁰ Darrell L. Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 49–50.

⁵¹ Bock, “Reign of the Lord Christ,” 49.

⁵² Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 279.

⁵³ Russell Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 40.

24:45–49) in which Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to see that the entirety of his career is summarized in the OT.⁵⁴ Conveying the force of Luke 24:45–49, Bock writes, “The key Christological point in this passage is the reference to Jesus as the promised Messiah (Christ) of the Old testament, clearly a regal function, something that is his through his connection to David as David’s seed. A king, indeed, shows his authority by ruling a kingdom. Jesus rules by saving and calling a new community made from all nations.”⁵⁵

This new community, the church, showcases the reign of God through his Messiah and provides a sneak preview to the world of what is to come.⁵⁶ Bock writes, “Jesus reigns from heaven invisibly but powerfully, transforming people through his Spirit. Jesus also reigns in that his exaltation gives him claim and sovereignty over all.”⁵⁷ The church is to operate as a kingdom in the midst of the kingdoms of the world but it functions as salt and light following the example of its Savior ministering to all who are in need: including “the least of these” and the “tax collectors and sinners.”⁵⁸ In this way, Bock believes there is continuity in the already, and not yet, phases of the kingdom because both “reflect the activity and presence of God’s righteousness in the world.”⁵⁹

Misunderstanding and clarification of Bock/progressive dispensationalists.

Blaising notes that in the thirty years of discourse about PD since Bock first affirmed the current reign of Christ from the heavenly throne, there has been much confusion about what Bock/progressive dispensationalists affirm on this point (both inside and outside of

⁵⁴ Bock, “Reign of the Lord Christ,” 44.

⁵⁵ Bock, “Reign of the Lord Christ,” 44.

⁵⁶ Bock, “Reign of the Lord Christ,” 65.

⁵⁷ Bock, “Reign of the Lord Christ,” 65.

⁵⁸ Bock, “Reign of the Lord Christ,” 66.

⁵⁹ Bock, “Reign of the Lord Christ,” 66.

the dispensationalist camp).⁶⁰

First, Blaising contends that in light of the current reign of Christ, it is incorrect to say that progressive dispensationalists affirm a “spiritual” version of the kingdom’s future reality; rather, the current form of the kingdom is “a partial aspect of a part of that reality.”⁶¹ Blaising elaborates, “The progressive revelation of the Kingdom from the incarnate ministry of the Christ to the final appearing of the eschatological kingdom in its fullness is a sequence of stages by which aspects of a complex future reality progressively come to be, or better are brought into existence by God in accordance with the eschatological plan for Christ Himself.”⁶²

In addition, although progressive dispensationalists affirm that the church is a present phase of the eschatological kingdom which features the Holy Spirit created communion of the kingdom’s constituents—which is a literal feature of the eschatological kingdom—this does not involve a spiritualization of the future coercive rule of Christ.⁶³ Moreover, despite the objections of traditional dispensationalists, that Bock’s notion of a current reign *on the throne of David* seemed to obviate a future earthly reign; at the appointed time, Christ will return and initiate his international, political, economic, administrative rule on earth.⁶⁴

Seeking to cut through some of the semantic aspects of the enthronement debate, Blaising suggests that disputing the propriety of ascribing to Jesus a current reign from the throne of David could be temporarily set to the side. Instead, for the sake of clarity, perhaps it is more fruitful simply to describe what Jesus is currently doing

⁶⁰ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 4.

⁶¹ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 3.

⁶² Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 3–4.

⁶³ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁶⁴ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 4.

compared to what he will do in the future.⁶⁵

All progressive dispensationalists agree that whether one designates Christ's present, ascended activity as reigning *on the throne of David* or not, he will reign in the future from Jerusalem.⁶⁶ The description of Matthew 25 of the Son of Man coming in power and sitting on his glorious throne is a future reality tied to the millennial phase of the eschatological kingdom—something that is not taking place now.⁶⁷

It is also affirmed by progressive dispensationalists, that Jesus presently has all authority according to Matthew 28:18. Blaising argues, “That *all* [emphasis original] has to include the authority of the Davidic throne. It is not a question of whether he has authority; it is only a question of what he chooses to do with it. It is because of this that Peter implored Israel on that Pentecost to recognize that *Jesus is, not will be, the Christ* [emphasis added].”⁶⁸

Another important point of clarification of the progressive dispensational view of enthronement is Christological in nature; namely, that the Son of God is not currently acting independently of his human nature.⁶⁹ When Jesus was received by his Father and seated in the heavenly throne at the right hand of God (according to Acts 2), he did so *not* in exclusion of his human identity, but in the totality of his person as God the Son incarnate.⁷⁰ As such, he is enthroned there as the Son of David indicating that this is not a spiritualization of a future earthly reign, but a stage of receiving the authority associated

⁶⁵ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁶⁶ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁶⁷ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁶⁸ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁶⁹ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁷⁰ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

with his future coming.⁷¹ Blaising remarks,

If *the Son of David* is seated now on the *throne of Heaven*, he has all the authority that could possibly be given to him. The future seating on the throne of David in Jerusalem cannot be the acquisition of authority. It can only be the revelation of authority. That . . . is why Peter linked the passages. Jesus, Son of David, has been seated on the throne in heaven. The implication is not that anything earthly has been spiritualized but that *he* is now expected to come to exercise here the authority that he has received there. That is why Israel must recognize him as the Christ of Israel now. The Day of the Lord is imminent.⁷²

The parable of the nobleman in Luke 19 brings further clarity. The man goes to a far country to receive a kingdom, and after doing so, he returns to exercise his rule.⁷³ The point is that the man receives the kingdom in the far country before he returns; the logic of the situation is that having received the authority there, the man is able to act on it in his realm whenever and however he chooses.⁷⁴ In the same way, all authority has been given to Jesus and his reign has been inaugurated—his consummate reign on the earth is not yet.

Typology. In the sphere of canonical interpretation, typology plays an important role. Advocates of all the models considered thus far understand typology to be a literary feature that binds the testaments together and that brings cohesion to the biblical storyline. However, understandings of the nature of typology, and how it functions in the canonical narrative, are various. For example, classic covenantalists (model 1) are prone to see type-antitype relationships between Israel and the church even as they understand the church to be a “new Israel.” Progressive covenantalists (model 1) understand typology to be characterized by escalation such that almost all types find their antitype in Christ, in such a way that the type is cancelled, or the shadow fades away when the

⁷¹ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁷² Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁷³ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

⁷⁴ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 5.

reality comes. Classic dispensationalists (model 2) invoked typology, but moved in an allegorical direction, as they looked for spiritual meanings in texts tied to the heavenly people of God—the church. As was noted in chapter 4, revised dispensationalists (model 2), perhaps in reaction to the excesses of CD, gave little attention to typology. What then are the distinctives of the progressive dispensational (model 3) view of typology?

In *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Blaising and Bock define typology in the following way: “Typology in historical-literary hermeneutics refers to patterns of resemblance between persons and events in earlier history to persons and events in later history.”⁷⁵ They then give examples of such historical resemblances: “The Davidic-Solomonic kingdom is a type of the eschatological kingdom, the Day of the Lord judgement in the sixth century B.C. is a type of a future, eschatological Day of the Lord.”⁷⁶

In light of PD’s understanding of the canonical narrative as a progressive revelation of the multi-personal, multi-national, multi-territorial eschatological kingdom of God (more on this below), Blaising understands this framework to be the broadest level at which typological connections are made.

Blaising argues that traditional ecclesiological type patterns connecting Israel and the church are present in Scripture (cf. 1 Pet 2:9–10; 3:18–22; 1 Cor 10:1–11; Rom 9:24–26, Matt 2:15; and type patterns in Heb), but biblical typology is not limited to these or Christological type patterns (cf. Matt 2:15; and type patterns in Heb).⁷⁷ In texts

⁷⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 52. Elsewhere, Blaising affirms the definition of typology provided by Baker which is very similar: “A type is a biblical event, person or institution which serves as an example or pattern for other events, persons or institutions. Typology is the study of types and the historical and theological correspondences between them.” Craig A. Blaising, “A Critique of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response*,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 116; see also David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 180. Saucy also appeals to Baker’s definition; see Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 31–32.

⁷⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 52–53.

⁷⁷ Craig A. Blaising, “Typology and the Nature of the Church” (paper presented at the

like those listed above, a pattern is applied from Israel to the church, and this fits very naturally with the PD understanding of the biblical storyline in which covenant blessings flow from Israel to gentiles in the move towards the eschatological kingdom both in its inaugurated and consummated phases.⁷⁸

A noteworthy example of kingdom typology is provided by Blaising in his explication of Ephesians 2. Traditional notions of typology see the church, in this passage, as Israel expanded or reconstituted, but Blaising argues that there are aspects of the letter that direct one's attention to a broader context:

The word church first appears in Ephesians 1:22 at the end of an exalted view of Christ the King according to the patterns of Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:14 (this follows the kingdom imagery of 1:9–10). There are several images coalescing here, not the least of which is the marriage imagery which is developed further in Ephesians 5. But, . . . here the church is placed in relation to Christ as His kingdom inheritance (1:18). In Ephesians 2, Gentiles are brought near with Israel not as Israel . . . so that both are re-created (2:15) into a new humanity, not a new Israel. The imagery of creation anticipates an earth filled with a humanity manifest as multiple peoples and nations, which of course are Israel and the Gentiles. This international order finds “peace” in Isaiah 2 by streaming to the Mountain of the House of the Lord. But it is David's Son, in 2 Samuel 7, who will build the house of the Lord. In Ephesians 2 he builds the nations (which he receives as an inheritance [Eph 1:18; Ps 2]) into a house for the Lord.⁷⁹

In light of the above, what is the church? It is an inaugurated phase of the final, eschatological kingdom that Christ is “building” of all the nations (Jews and gentiles), united together “in Christ”—which is royal imagery as can be seen from the “in you” or “in him” theme stretching from Genesis 12 to Genesis 49 to Psalm 72.⁸⁰ Christ is accomplishing all of this through the Holy Spirit who produces unity out of diversity in

Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, San Diego, November 2014), 8–9.

⁷⁸ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 9. Blaising notes how this way of conceptualizing typology “fits very well with the more recent appreciation for early Jewish Christianity and more recent re-estimations of 1 Peter (along with other General Epistles) as addressing primarily Jewish and Jewish-Proselyte Christians (note 1 Peter 1:1).”

⁷⁹ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 10–11.

⁸⁰ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 11.

the church, his kingdom people, which has its consummation in the redemption to come (Eph 1:14), and pictures the final unity and peace that will characterize the coming eschatological kingdom (Eph 5:5).⁸¹

The Structure of the Canonical Narrative

Summarizing the canonical narrative as understood by PD is no small task, so as has been necessary throughout this dissertation, I will need to take a selective approach. Toward this end, I seek to focus on aspects of the biblical storyline as understood by PD that differentiate it from that of the other models.

The kingdom theme in the Old Testament. For progressive dispensationalists, the kingdom of God (specifically, the eschatological kingdom that is being progressively revealed throughout redemptive history) is the umbrella theme under which all of the other biblical themes fit. In his book *He Will Reign Forever* Michael Vlach notes, “The kingdom of God is the grand central theme of Scripture that encompasses all other biblical themes.”⁸² Vlach goes on to observe that the theme runs from the very beginning of the Bible thru the end: “Genesis 1 begins with God as Creator/King of the universe and man as God’s image-bearer who is created to ‘rule’ and ‘subdue’ the earth for God’s purposes and glory (see Gen 1:26–28). Then, at the end of the Bible, Revelation 22 describes God and the Lamb on the throne and God’s people ruling on the new earth (Rev 22:3, 5).”⁸³

This focus on the progressively revealed kingdom is a distinguishing feature of PD (model 3) *vis a vis* progressive covenantalism (model 1) in which kingdom is not a highly developed theme. With respect to traditional dispensationalism (model 2), PD is

⁸¹ Blaising, “Typology and Nature of Church,” 11.

⁸² Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever* (Silverton, OR: Lampion House, 2017), 21.

⁸³ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 22.

different, because rather than many different kingdoms, PD understands there to be one kingdom that is progressively revealed throughout redemptive history until it reaches its consummation in the eschatological kingdom. For CC, the kingdom is an emphasized theme (particularly among certain schools of thought that focus on producing redemptive-historical biblical theologies⁸⁴), but PD is different because it is anti-supersessionist and affirms a future, one-thousand-year millennial phase of the kingdom.

At the beginning of the canonical narrative as understood by PD, the divine intention for a worldwide kingdom is first expressed in Genesis 1:26 through the creation mandate, and then is renewed after the fall of man through the *protoevangelion* (Gen 3:15) in which it is prophesied that the future seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.⁸⁵ Next as the plan unfolds, God promises to Abraham to make his descendants into a great nation (with a specific territorial location on earth that is promised forever), and that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed (cf. Gen 12:1–3, 18:18; 22:17–18).⁸⁶ The final aspect of the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:3) expresses God’s desire for universal blessing of all nations as well as Israel, and as the narrative unfolds, readers learn by the end of Genesis that there will be a multi-national kingdom under the rule of one from the tribe of Judah: “The scepter shall not depart from

⁸⁴ Authors connected to Moore Theological College produce such works. Examples include the following: Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2012); Donald Robinson, *Faith’s Framework: The Structure of New Testament Theology* (Sydney: Albatross, 1985); William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984).

⁸⁵ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 90. In surveying the literature, Blaising provides a very fine, yet concise, treatment of the kingdom of God theme from a progressive dispensational standpoint in “Theology of Israel and Church.” Thus, it is footnoted extensively here. For another progressive dispensational analysis of the kingdom theme, see Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, chaps. 7–8, 212–83. For an extensive treatment see parts 2 and 3 of Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 57–527.

⁸⁶ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 90.

Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Genesis 49:10)."⁸⁷

As the narrative progresses, the next major step toward a universal kingdom comes in the form of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:8–17; 23:5; 1 Chr 17:3–15; cf. Ps 89; 110) in which God promises to David and his descendant an everlasting kingdom in which Israel will enjoy security and peace with all the nations (2 Sam 7:9–11; 16).⁸⁸

Psalm 2 reveals more as Blaising describes:

The Lord declares that the kingdom of His king, His messiah, His Son (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14), will be worldwide and multi-national: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." (Ps. 2:8). The kings and rulers of the earth are warned to serve him and delight in him (Ps. 2:10–12) with this promise: "Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Ps. 2:12). Likewise, Psalm 72 sees the Abrahamic universal blessing channeled through the Davidic King: "May people be blessed in him [May] all nations call him blessed! (Ps. 72:17)."⁸⁹

Of course, throughout the narrative, the destructive power of sin which brings death and threatens not just individuals, but the corporate aspects of human life, is made clear; Israel, despite being called to holiness, experiences the consequences of sinful disobedience, nationally, through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.⁹⁰ Thus, Israel, provides an object lesson regarding the gravity of sin, yet through the nation, God will reveal his grace and commitment to covenant promise through national and territorial restoration of Israel.⁹¹ However, to accomplish this, a means of final forgiveness of sin and fundamental change of the human heart is required.⁹²

Blaising makes three crucial observations regarding the OT prophets. First, he

⁸⁷ Blaising, "Theology of Israel and Church," 90–91.

⁸⁸ Blaising, "Theology of Israel and Church," 91.

⁸⁹ Blaising, "Theology of Israel and Church," 91.

⁹⁰ Blaising, "Theology of Israel and Church," 91–92.

⁹¹ Blaising, "Theology of Israel and Church," 92.

⁹² Blaising, "Theology of Israel and Church," 92.

notes that God’s kingdom plan that was first revealed to the patriarchs and subsequently covenanted to the house of David, remains unchanged as it is reiterated and reaffirmed by the later prophets.⁹³ Blaising writes,

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets foresee a future Davidic king who will be given sovereignty over Israel and the Gentile nations to rule the world in righteousness and peace forever (e.g., Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–12; Amos 9:11–15; Zech. 9:9–10). The same prophets clearly predicted that ENT Israel would be restored to be an essential feature of that kingdom, and they foresaw that the Gentiles would join themselves to the Lord and His messiah (Isa. 11:10–12; 49:14–52–10; 54:1–17; 60:1–62:12; Jer. 30:1–31:37; 32:36–33:26; Zech. 2:11; 8:7–15, 20–23; 10:8–10–14:9,16–19).⁹⁴

Second, the prophets describe a coming redemption: a new covenant characterized by forgiveness of sin, renewal of the heart, and the indwelling Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31–37; Ezek 36:24–27), and a suffering servant who will “make many to be accounted righteous” (Isa 53:4–12).⁹⁵ Third, the prophets link the predicted redemption to the restoration of ENT Israel and to the kingdom plan for all nations; the Servant responsible for this will be a light to the gentiles (Isa 49:1–8) and will be king over the whole earth (cf. Isa 11) establishing righteousness, restoring Israel, and drawing gentiles into the kingdom.⁹⁶

The kingdom theme in the New Testament. The Gospels advance the theme of the eschatological kingdom by identifying Jesus as the Messiah, Son of David, Son of God—he is the king of the coming kingdom.⁹⁷ Jesus calls himself the Son of Man connecting himself to the figure who in Daniel 7:13–14 is predicted to receive a worldwide kingdom of all peoples and nations; by this title, Jesus is also linked to the

⁹³ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92.

⁹⁴ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92.

⁹⁵ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92.

⁹⁶ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92.

⁹⁷ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92.

servant who would give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45).⁹⁸ The kingdom was the theme of Jesus's preaching: he taught people that they were to seek it above all else, that they would need to be born of the Spirit to enter it (John 3:3, 5), and that to experience rebirth they would need to trust in his redemptive death (John 3:14–16).⁹⁹ In Matthew 25, Jesus explicitly describes the kingdom as a global reign which he will establish when he comes again in glory (Matt 25:31–46; cf. 19:23–30).¹⁰⁰ He commissions his disciples to make disciples of all nations forming his international kingdom (Matt 28:18–20).¹⁰¹

The epistles explicate the theology of the redemption accomplished by Jesus including all the salvific blessings contained therein: the forgiveness of sins, imputed righteousness, adoption as sons, regeneration, sanctification by the indwelling Spirit, etc.¹⁰² Believers in Jesus are said to be presently transferred into the kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13–14) even though the full manifestation of his kingdom is yet future (1Tim 4:1).¹⁰³

The book of Acts starts and ends with the kingdom theme: Jesus instructs his disciples on the topic in Acts 1:3, throughout Acts the apostles preach the gospel to the Jews and then the gentiles, and by the end of the book, Paul is preaching the kingdom in Rome (Acts 28:30–31).¹⁰⁴ Regarding Israel, Blaising notes, “The certainty of the future restoration of Israel in the prophesied consummation is proclaimed by Peter in his sermon

⁹⁸ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92–93.

⁹⁹ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 93.

¹⁰⁰ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 93.

¹⁰¹ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 93.

¹⁰² Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 93.

¹⁰³ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 93.

¹⁰⁴ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 93.

in Acts 3 in two points: (1) Jesus will remain in heaven until the time for the restoration of all things predicted by the prophets (2) when Jesus comes, that restoration will take place (Acts 3:20–21).¹⁰⁵

Romans involves Paul’s most systematic treatment of doctrine, but in the latter portion of the book, more is revealed about Israel’s future related to the kingdom.

Blaising writes,

The future restoration of Israel is also affirmed by Paul in Romans 11, the same epistle that clearly presents the redemption and justification of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. Paul expects that “all Israel,” that is the corporate people Israel, will be saved when the Redeemer comes (Rom, 11:26). “He will banish ungodliness from Jacob” and “take away their sins (Rom.11:26–27) because “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). The plan of God for Israel and the Gentiles will be fulfilled through Christ as Paul says in Romans 15:8–9 . . . Gentiles glorify God in accordance with kingdom prophecies in which they are featured (Rom. 15:9–12), including the noted prophecy of Isaiah 11, the coming Davidic king who will rule all nations on earth (Rom. 15:12; cf. Isa.11:10).¹⁰⁶

By the end of the canon, Revelation, 5:9–10 states that the Lamb of God has redeemed a “people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” and has “made them a kingdom,” and “they shall reign on the earth.”¹⁰⁷ Revelation 19:15 depicts Jesus coming to rule the nations, Revelation 20:4–6 reveals the millennial era of the kingdom, and Revelation 21:22–22:5 describes the everlasting kingdom.¹⁰⁸ Blaising notes that Revelation 21:22–22:5 concludes John’s prophecy “with the eternal reign of God and the Lamb over the nations of earth from a new and holy Jerusalem (whose gates are always open to Israel and the nations; Rev. 21:12–13, 24–26), on a new earth (Rev.

¹⁰⁵ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 94.

¹⁰⁶ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 94.

¹⁰⁷ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 94.

¹⁰⁸ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 94.

21:1–2) with all things made new (Rev. 21:3–5). This is the kingdom that will be forever (Rev. 22:5).”¹⁰⁹

The Structure of the Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism

Progressive dispensationalists understand the covenantal unfolding differently than adherents of models 1 and 2. Unlike the classic covenantal version of model 1, progressive dispensationalists do not bring a structure of theological covenants to bear on the text, but work with the biblical covenants that are in the text. Unlike the progressive covenantal version of model 1, progressive dispensationalists do not understand the covenants to be a series of arrangements, one replacing the next, headed by different covenant heads who function as “new Adams” that inevitably fail, until one comes to Christ who is head of the new covenant. Rather progressive dispensationalists understand the covenants to be successive promises in the biblical storyline that reveal and advance the plan of God given in the form of divine declaratory speeches.¹¹⁰ Also, in contrast to progressive covenantalists, progressive dispensationalists understand the Abrahamic covenant to be the framework under which the other covenants function to bring about the telos of the Abrahamic promise: an everlasting worldwide kingdom of people and nations ruled by Jesus Christ.

Model 2 of the classic dispensational variety is distinct from PD (model 3), in that progressive dispensationalists do not seek to render spiritual and earthly interpretations of the covenants, and rather than affirming two new covenants, progressive dispensationalists understand there to be one new covenant that is fulfilled in inaugurated and consummated phases. In contrast to revised dispensationalism (model 2),

¹⁰⁹ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 94.

¹¹⁰ Blaising, “Critique of Gentry and Wellum,” 117.

for progressive dispensationalists, the covenants are a more developed theme and more tightly integrated into PD's overall system as a redemptive-historical biblical theology.¹¹¹ Just as is true with the kingdom theme, progressive dispensationalists understand the covenants to progressively unfold God's plan for the eschatological kingdom.

The Noahic and Abrahamic covenants.¹¹² For PD, the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants bring to light aspects of the overall plan of redemption and lay the groundwork that structures God's relationship to humanity and life on the earth.¹¹³ Blaising notes, "This foundation is established in an unconditional divine determination to bless. It is revealed both in the patriarchal narratives themselves and in the repetitive reaffirmation of the covenant through the progress of revelation."¹¹⁴ As future covenants are revealed, this foundation is confirmed, clarified, and expanded even as the covenants in their inaugurated and consummated forms usher in new dispensations.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Although the designation of a "redemptive-historical biblical theology" has typically been reserved for reformed redemptive histories that are supersessionist in nature, it is a fitting term for PD because PD understands the canonical storyline in a unified manner. The term is not an apt designation for traditional dispensationalism because what is produced in these systems is not an integrated version of the biblical narrative but different siloed eras/dispensations that are vertically related towards God but are relatively unrelated horizontally, i.e., they lack historical continuity. See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 46.

¹¹² It is noteworthy that progressive dispensationalists deny the existence of a covenant with creation or an Adamic covenant. Instead, they agree with John Murray who argues that Scripture nowhere designates the events of Gen 1–2 as a covenant—rather, covenants are redemptive in nature and come after the fall in the biblical story. See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 49.

¹¹³ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 140.

¹¹⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 140.

¹¹⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 140. Blaising points out that the terms covenant and dispensation are overlapping concepts in that both relate to arrangements between God and people. See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 128. A helpful example of the interrelation of the two concepts can be seen when one considers the new covenant. The new covenant endures from its inauguration by Jesus in his first advent through eternity future. However, there are dispensational (management arrangement) changes that occur along the way. Moving from the inauguration to the consummation of the new covenant, there is a dispensational change from what Blaising calls the Ecclesial dispensation to the first phase of the Zioniac dispensation. This change involves the expansion of Christ's manifest reign on the earth from the church to the polity of the nations in the millennium. A further dispensational change occurs at the end of the millennium when final judgement takes place, sin is removed, and the eternal reign ensues. All of these dispensational changes are management changes that happen under the relational structuring of the new covenant. This example was provided in a conversation with Dr. Blaising related to his Eschatology seminar (SYSTH 7804, Southwestern Baptist Theological

The covenant with Abraham is foundational because it connects to the promise of the Noahic covenant with all of human life, and it introduces the idea that these blessings will be mediated.¹¹⁶ In contrast to his just judgments against human sin in the flood, the covenantal blessings reveal that God’s plan is inherently redemptive.¹¹⁷ The Abrahamic covenant promises blessing to man in both his individual and national identities.¹¹⁸ As was noted earlier, in many ways the expansion and clarification of this covenant through subsequent revelation fills out the rest of the story of the Bible.¹¹⁹

The Mosaic and Davidic covenants. The blessings and mediation of the Abrahamic covenant were designed by God to be passed to Abraham’s descendants.¹²⁰ In the time of Moses, a new dispensation for blessing was introduced, as the Mosaic covenant constituted the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a nation (Israel).¹²¹ In this era, the dispensational way of experiencing the Abrahamic blessing was through covenant obedience, i.e., demonstrating trust in God by obeying his commandments.¹²² The true heirs of the patriarchal grant were those who were of the faith of Abraham manifested by obedience even as they “mediated its blessing (in the specific dispensational form of the Mosaic blessing) to the rest of the nation and to other peoples as well.”¹²³ When the Israel of faith constituted only a small portion of physical Israel,

Seminary, Spring 2017).

¹¹⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 172.

¹¹⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 130.

¹¹⁸ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 172.

¹¹⁹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 172.

¹²⁰ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 172.

¹²¹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 172.

¹²² Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 172.

¹²³ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 172–73.

the nation was characterized by disobedience and experienced the requisite cursings of the covenant including misery, destruction, and exile.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the faithful remnant clung to the hope of receiving divine blessing in an eschatological age.¹²⁵

During the Mosaic dispensation, Blaising observes that “the role of mediating blessing was politically restructured as a function of the Davidic king. A covenant was made with David to bless him and his son(s) with rulership over Israel and the rest of the nations, an intimate and blessed relationship with God, and the mediation (even priestly mediation) of *blessing* to Israel and to all people and nations.”¹²⁶ In the Mosaic dispensation, the blessings of the Davidic grant were most clearly manifested in the reigns of David and Solomon, but the kings that followed were largely faithless. This pattern of disobedience builds tension in the canonical narrative: when will a truly faithful king arrive on the scene?

The new covenant. As the history of Israel’s faithlessness and disobedience led to national destruction and exile, the prophets foretold of a new dispensation in which the Mosaic covenant would be replaced by a new covenant—one that would entail the creation of a new heart in the people of God, his law being written on their hearts, and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁷ Blaising writes, “[God] would eliminate the problem of sin so that the grant of blessing would be received fully, completely, and eternally. He would grant full forgiveness of sins and resurrection from the dead to life immortal. All the promises of blessing for personal and national life in communion with

¹²⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 173.

¹²⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 173.

¹²⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 173.

¹²⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 173.

God, with peace and prosperity, would be fulfilled forever.”¹²⁸ This new covenant would eventually bring the Abrahamic covenant into everlasting fulfillment.¹²⁹ Finally, Blaising notes, “The new covenant blessing would be exemplified in the life of a Davidic king under whose rule and through whose mediation the blessing would come to the Israel of faith—that remnant of physical Israel which trusts in God—and to all those of the nations who trust in God through this king.”¹³⁰

Dispensations in progressive dispensationalism. PD differs from model 1 with respect to dispensations, because as was observed in chapter 2, covenant theologians see covenant as the “archetechtonic” structure of the Bible. Consequently, the biblical dispensations receive much less emphasis. Progressive covenantalists discuss “epochs” (which they use as a synonym for dispensations), but they, too, are more concerned with covenants. As for TD, both varieties of model 2 views, divide biblical history into seven dispensations. As adherents of model 3, Blaising and Bock articulate four primary dispensations to describe salvation history: “Patriarchal (to Sinai), Mosaic (to Messiah’s ascension), Ecclesial (to Messiah’s return), Zioniac (with a millennial phase and an eternal phase).”¹³¹

The most significant difference between how advocates of model 2 and model 3 conceptualize the dispensations has to do with how they function in the canonical narrative. For model 2, the dispensations are *different* arrangements between God and man (often serving as tests of man’s obedience), whereas in PD, the dispensations are

¹²⁸ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 173.

¹²⁹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 173.

¹³⁰ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 173.

¹³¹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 123.

successive arrangements that progress towards the consummation goal.¹³² God’s plan of redemption is multi-faceted, and so different dispensations may emphasize one aspect of redemption more than another: for example divine political administration in the prior dispensation or multi-ethnic, multi-national connection and unity in the present dispensation of the church.¹³³ But, all of the dispensations as Blaising notes, “point to a future culmination in which God will *both* politically administer Israel and gentile nations *and* indwell all of them equally (without ethnic distinctions) by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the dispensations *progress* by revealing different aspects of the final unified redemption.”¹³⁴

In addition, as the dispensations progress, there is a qualitative advance in the manifestation of grace such that, e.g., the grace that was revealed to OT Israel is an advance on that which was revealed and experienced by the patriarchs; as well, the manifestations of grace in the millennial phase of the Zionitic dispensation will be an advance on what is currently experienced by the church.¹³⁵ In this way, in contrast to the classic covenantal version of model 1, in which redemptive history involves historical expressions of the same experience of redemption, in PD, God’s redemption advances as it progresses towards its consummation in the eschatological kingdom.¹³⁶

The Consummate Anthropology of Progressive Dispensationalism

For progressive dispensationalism, the eternal consummation is the goal and completion of God’s plan for creation and redemption. It is precisely what redemptive

¹³² Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48.

¹³³ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48.

¹³⁴ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48.

¹³⁵ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48.

¹³⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48.

history has been building, or progressing, towards. In fact, if traditional dispensationalism were compared to a compendium of short stories (each about different testing periods, i.e., dispensations), or two different stories (of earthly/Israel and heavenly/church people) with two different endings, progressive dispensationalism is one novel that pulls all the narrative threads together in a climactic conclusion.

The nature of the eschatological place. Like many of the views of the eschaton that have been surveyed, progressive dispensationalists affirm the renewal of the present creation, rather than an annihilation of it and replacement with something completely different.¹³⁷ For PD, there is ontological continuity between creation and final redemption—that is, the created order in which the plan and purposes of God have been revealed is the same sphere in which those purposes will be fulfilled.¹³⁸ In this way, PD (model 3), is different from some forms of revised dispensationalism (model 2) that features ontological continuity from creation through the millennial era, but then have a re-creation that commences the eternal state.

As has been made clear above, the everlasting consummation of progressive dispensationalism is a multi-national kingdom order ruled by Christ. Among the nations of the kingdom is the nation of Israel, which in keeping with biblical prophecy, will eternally possess a land from which Christ will reign. In light of Israel's presence as well as gentile nations, it appears that this newly renovated (and perfected) kingdom will have geographical particularity (not unlike the current creation) that is consistent with corporate, national aspects of human existence.

Finally, for PD, there is one, unified sphere of everlasting life. Unlike CD or some versions of RD, that understand there to be an earthly realm for earthly people

¹³⁷ Craig A. Blaising, "God's Plan for History: The Consummation," in *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition*, ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R. Kreider (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 210.

¹³⁸ Blaising, "God's Plan for History," 210.

(Israel and gentiles) and a heavenly realm for heavenly people (the church), in PD, there is one integrated, domain of everlasting kingdom life on the new earth.

The nature of the eschatological people. The multi-national character of human life in the consummation is a consistent expectation in biblical eschatology from Genesis to Revelation, as Blaising notes: “[This multi-national structure] is specifically covenanted to the house of David and it became an explicit feature of messianic prophecy. It informs Jesus’ proclamation of the eschatological kingdom and is the basis for the mission He gave to the church.”¹³⁹ What is not made explicit until the NT is what will cause the kingdom to cohere and be characterized by everlasting shalom.¹⁴⁰ This is revealed after Christ’s ascension when salvific and pneumatological blessings, promised to Israel in the OT, are given in an inaugurated fashion to the newly formed sociological manifestation of the kingdom—the church (composed of Jews and gentiles).¹⁴¹ Blaising adeptly explains how the pneumadynamic¹⁴² aspects of the church function as a progressive revelation of the fullness that will come in the consummated kingdom:

The church, which came into being for the first time on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), reveals the key relational structure that unites the peoples of the eschatological kingdom to Christ and to each other. That structure is the indwelling Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit unites all believers directly to Jesus Christ for the blessings of salvation that come through His cross and resurrection. That same Spirit also unites them to each other (whether Jews or Gentiles) in the bond of peace.

¹³⁹ Blaising, “God’s Plan for History,” 210.

¹⁴⁰ Blaising, “God’s Plan for History,” 210.

¹⁴¹ Blaising, “God’s Plan for History,” 210.

¹⁴² I believe I first encountered the word *pneumadynamic* in a handout for a class with John Coe, a professor I enjoyed in my MDiv program at Talbot School of Theology. Apparently, this was an early version of what would become the following article: John H. Coe, “Beyond Relationality to Union: Musings toward a Pneumadynamic Approach to Personality and Psychopathology,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 109–28. Gregg Allison borrows “pneumadynamic” from Coe to describe the church in his book on ecclesiology. Allison notes that Coe intends by its use to mean “the dynamics between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit . . . and how these dynamics interface with our human relationships.” Coe, “Beyond Relationality to Union,” 110, quoted in Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 117n39. I am using it in a manner similar to Coe, but in a much broader sense.

Thus the whole kingdom order is rendered a holy communion fit to be the dwelling place of God. It is this reality that stabilizes, pacifies, and sanctifies the whole multinational worldwide messianic kingdom that is consistently revealed in Scripture to be the consummation of the divine plan.¹⁴³

Among the people of God in the everlasting kingdom, there is no class distinction which was clearly the case in older forms of dispensationalism, like CD, in which the heavenly people (the church), lived in a higher realm and, e.g., exclusively enjoyed the baptism of the Spirit, which uniquely united them to Christ. In PD, all the redeemed are united to Christ, and thus to each other, so that each has equal standing in Christ.¹⁴⁴ However, as there is tremendous diversity in creation, there is also beautiful diversity in redemption; thus, the people of God in the kingdom will retain personal/corporate identity features like ethnicity, as well as nationality. There will also be differences in reward and, obviously, locations of existence in the new earth.¹⁴⁵ As Blaising notes, “Some may have their primary location in the city, whereas others may be located elsewhere in the new creation. But this is not seen as a difference in the quality of salvific experience.”¹⁴⁶

Bringing all of these features of the PD understanding of the eschatological kingdom together, it can be described as a unified and holistic redemption that is a multinational, multi-particular, multi-territorial, new creation kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ forever. Blaising paints the picture with even more detail:

When Christ has subjected all things to Himself and has destroyed sin and death, the eschatological kingdom of God in all its fullness will be manifest . . . on a renewed earth. This kingdom is the goal of redemption, the culmination of all previous revelations of God’s kingdom. It is the rule of God . . . over the earth with all its inhabitants and over the heavens. . . . This kingdom is earthly. . . . Death, disease, and demonism will be eliminated and the City of God will be established. . . . The kingdom is also spiritual, as redemption is extended in full in both individual and

¹⁴³ Blaising, “God’s Plan for History,” 210–11.

¹⁴⁴ Blaising, “God’s Plan for History,” 212.

¹⁴⁵ Blaising, “God’s Plan for History,” 212.

¹⁴⁶ Blaising, “God’s Plan for History,” 212.

social aspects of human existence. . . . The kingdom will be characterized by peace, holiness, godliness, . . . and the indwelling Holy Spirit. . . . The kingdom is also national and political in that it involves the establishment and administration of all nations through the Messiah of Israel, Jesus, Son of David. God will reign over the nations in glory, power, and majesty, blessed, honored and worshiped by all forever.¹⁴⁷

Assessment of Progressive Dispensationalism Using Wolfe's Criteria for Strong Interpretive Systems

Is It Comprehensive?

In chapters 2 and 3, it was argued that model 1 biblical theologies struggle to integrate whole categories of OT passages into their systems. These prophetic texts, involving Israel and gentile nations in the coming eschatological kingdom, are repeated below to demonstrate how naturally and lucidly they are accounted for by PD.

Old Testament prophecies foreseeing a Davidic king who will rule Israel and the gentile nations in righteousness and peace forever.¹⁴⁸ Isaiah 9:6–7 describes one who will sit on David's throne and head a government characterized by peace forever. Isaiah 11:1–12 depicts a time in which the root of Jesse will oversee a kingdom order in which knowledge of the Lord extends over the earth, there is peace among humans and the animal kingdom, and conditions are such that the nations inquire of this king. Amos 9:11–15 speaks of a reunited Northern and Southern Kingdom of Israel under the Davidic son and Israel back in her land never to be uprooted again. Finally, Zechariah 9:9–10 describes a king coming to Zion who holds the keys to salvation as well as proclaims peace to the nations, and who will rule from sea to sea. All of these passages are easily integrated by PD, because progressive dispensationalists understand the eschatological kingdom to be ruled over by a Son of David (Jesus Christ) in a multi-national everlasting kingdom.

¹⁴⁷ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 283.

¹⁴⁸ Blaising, "Theology of Israel and Church," 92.

Old Testament prophecies predicting that ENT Israel will be central to this kingdom and that the gentiles will join themselves to the Lord forming one, diverse people of God (differentiated both individually and corporately as nations).¹⁴⁹ Isaiah 11:10–12 speaks of a re-gathering of Israel to her land and also refers to a plethora of diverse people from gentile nations as God’s people: “In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” Similar themes are also observable in Isaiah 49:14–52:10. Isaiah 54:1–17 indicates that the Holy One of Israel is the God of the whole earth who will possess both Israel and the gentile nations. Isaiah 60:1–62:12 describes “the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (60:14) and depicts the nations bringing their wealth into the city that seems to be the center of the kingdom with its gates always open indicating constant access to the Lord. Jeremiah 30:1–31:37 describes the return of the Jews to their land and guarantees that the nation of Israel will be a nation before him forever (Jer 31:36). Zechariah 2:11 indicates that the Lord will dwell in the midst of the Jews and that many nations will be his people: “And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.” Zechariah 8:20–23 explains that many nations will come to Jerusalem to entreat the Lord who is located there. Zechariah 14:9, 16–19 describes the millennial order in which nations annually go to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Booths and to worship the Lord who is king.¹⁵⁰ Zechariah’s writings

¹⁴⁹ Blaising, “Theology of Israel and Church,” 92.

¹⁵⁰ Advocates of PD understand the millennial period to resemble the consummation in many aspects with Christ reigning from Jerusalem over Israel and gentile nations, however, sin has still not been eradicated as it will be in the final state.

cited above (c. 520–518 BC) are particularly important because they are post-exilic. This precludes the idea that the returns from exile represent the fulfillment of God’s promises to ENT Israel.¹⁵¹ Rather, they are finally fulfilled in the eternal multinational kingdom, where the incarnate Christ, will reign from Israel.

New Testament evidence for the comprehensiveness of progressive dispensationalism. If model 1 views are correct, then the NT should not speak of a future for national Israel after Jesus comes on the scene; but it does, and this reality is wholly consistent with PD.¹⁵²

For example, consider the following passage that was raised as problematic for model 1 views. Peter inquires about future rewards in Matthew 19:28, and Jesus predicts a coming time when he will sit on the Davidic throne and the twelve apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Under supersessionist views in which promises to Israel are fulfilled by Christification, or by being absorbed into the person of Jesus, Jesus’s words would make little sense as he would be affirming that the twelve apostles would have authority over, and sit in judgement of, Jesus.¹⁵³

Another important example is seen in Acts 1:3–8. Acts 1:3 states explicitly that Jesus appeared to the disciples for forty days during which he instructed them in the kingdom. When the disciples ask Jesus if he will now restore the kingdom to Israel (1:6), which indicates how they understood his teaching on the kingdom, he does not correct

¹⁵¹ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 238.

¹⁵² 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): 13.

¹⁵³ Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 13.

their understanding and tell them that he is the true Israel.”¹⁵⁴ Rather, he tells them that the timing of this event is not for them to know, which affirms that there is future prophetic significance for Israel which is precisely what is argued for by progressive dispensationalists.

Romans 9–11 also teaches a future significance for Israel which is readily understood by PD. Vlach’s observation is worth repeating, “Even in a state of unbelief after the era of the church has begun, Paul explicitly affirms that the ‘covenants,’ ‘temple service,’ and ‘promises’ still ‘belong(s)’ (present tense) to Israel (Rom 9:4–5). Romans 11 affirms a future for Israel by declaring that after the time of the fullness of the Gentiles, ‘All Israel will be saved’ (see Rom 11:25–26).”¹⁵⁵

Is It Congruent?

A strong system of interpretation, according to Wolfe, must also be congruent. Applied to biblical theologies, a reliable system’s interpretations must “fit” the text, i.e., accord with it and account for it in a clear, natural way. A system’s congruence, or lack thereof, is best evaluated in a text-by-text manner.¹⁵⁶

Revelation 20:1–6. There is no doubt that Revelation 20 is the epicenter of much theological debate, and how this passage is interpreted invariably reveals one’s larger theological commitments. In fact, many interpreters seem to become hermeneutical contortionists to make this text fit their system, but for PD this is not the case at all. PD understands Revelation 20 to give more specific content about the intermediate phase of the eschatological kingdom (namely, its duration) that has been revealed earlier in Scripture. For PD, how the millennial kingdom is revealed progressively is analogous to

¹⁵⁴ Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 14.

¹⁵⁵ Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 14.

¹⁵⁶ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 159.

how this is true with aspects of the person of Christ. As Blaising points out, “It was not entirely clear that Isaiah’s predictions of a glorious Messiah (Isa. 11) and a Suffering Servant (Isa. 53) would be the same person, nor even how they *could* be so, until revelation was given of a progressive, sequential fulfillment of these prophecies in Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁷

In addition, PD’s understanding of the canonical narrative that includes an intermediate phase of the eschatological kingdom is able to easily explain texts that are problematic for other systems. For example, Isaiah 65:17–25 describes conditions of joy and blessing which some biblical theologies understand to be describing the final consummation, but curiously, death still persists as a reality (65:20).¹⁵⁸ PD understands the millennial era to be a time of incredible blessing with Christ reigning politically and the nations of the world under his authority, but it is understood to be prior to the eternal state and so mortal conditions still obtain. This understanding is consistent with what John describes in Revelation 20 which features some of the dead raised to reign with Christ at his coming, and yet death is not done away with entirely until after the millennium (Rev. 20:12–21:4).¹⁵⁹ Thus, death occurring during the thousand-year period prior to the final consummation fits with PD, but texts like Isaiah 65:20 are incongruent with systems that deny an intermediate state.

Another passage that is congruent with PD, but problematic for other systems, is Zechariah 14. In this text, the Lord is described as reigning from Jerusalem (after descending in judgement as part of the Day of the Lord) and requiring the nations to come up to Jerusalem to worship as part of the Feast of Booths. Nations who do not participate are said to be punished—no doubt for their sinful neglect. PD understands this

¹⁵⁷ Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 200.

¹⁵⁸ Blaising, “Premillennialism,” 202.

¹⁵⁹ Blaising, “Premillennialism,” 202.

to take place in the intermediate phase of the eschatological kingdom prior to the Final Judgement on sin. However, for systems that deny a millennial era, this passage seems to describe sin occurring in the final state which is deeply problematic.

Revelation 21:24–22:2. This passage comes at the very end of the canonical narrative and is widely understood to describe the eternal state. In this section of Scripture, “nations” are referenced three times in six verses. It is noteworthy how non-PD commentators wrestle with understanding these verses.¹⁶⁰ For example, in his weighty volume of over one thousand pages on the book of Revelation, Beale interprets this passage in such a way as *not* to envision literal nations in the eschaton. Referring to John’s allusions to the prophet Isaiah, Beale understands Revelation 21:24–26 to focus

not on the literal wealth of nations from Isaiah but on Isaiah’s correlative notion of ‘glory’ in the form of praise ‘arising from the nations,’ which results in Israel’s peace with the nations. Presumably, this refers to those formerly antagonistic but subsequently redeemed from among the nations who will submit to God, praise him, and so become unified with redeemed Israel (e.g., Isa 11:6–12).¹⁶¹

Beale goes on to argue that “‘Nations’ is sometimes used of the company of the redeemed, and those mentioned here are presumably the same group (see 5:9; 7:9). They are best identified with those in 5:9–10 who were ‘bought. . . . from every tribe and

¹⁶⁰ Grant Osborne understands the “nations” references to relate to the mission of the church which is here pictured as fulfilled. The relation is one of source, i.e., the redeemed have come from various nations, and God has even redeemed “kings” of those nations, but for Osborne, national identity appears to fall away in the eternal state. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 761–72; David Aune affirms that literal nations exist, but sees this as a tension that he does not resolve: “The pilgrimage of the kings of the earth to the New Jerusalem presupposes the existence of the nations of the world and their rulers as well as the location of the eschatological Jerusalem on the earth. . . . There is, then, an apparently striking inconsistency in the eschatological scenario of Revelation introduced by this verse (and v 26) since 19:17–21 and 20:7–9 narrate the destruction of the kings of the earth and their armies and 21:1 records the destruction of the first heaven and the first earth, and yet here in vv 24–27, nations and kings of the earth still exist.” David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52c (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 1171. Other commentators who give much emphasis to the tension in Revelation between the destruction and salvation of the nations include: Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 104; David Mathewson, “The Destiny of the Nations in Revelation 21:1–22:5: A Reconsideration,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (2002): 121–42.

¹⁶¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1095.

tongue and people and nation,’ were made a ‘kingdom,’ and reigned as kings through the church age.”¹⁶² It is clear in this context, that “kingdom” for Beale is a kind of multi-ethnic, mono-nation which was manifested in an inaugurated form in the church age and is pictured in its consummate form here. In addition, Beale’s interpretation of the tree of life that provides “healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2), further undergirds a picture of the redeemed that lacks any national or territorial identity in the consummation:

The one tree of life in the first garden has become many trees of life in the escalated paradisaical state of the second garden. . . . Another feature of escalation is that, whereas the original paradise was only a small geographical part of the early creation, now it would appear that the paradisaical temple encompasses the entire geography of the new creation.¹⁶³

So, for Beale, it appears there is no geographical particularity in the eternal state—the entire new earth is now the temple of God.

A progressive dispensational reading of Revelation 21:24–22:2 seems considerably less strained than the above. Discussing these verses, Vlach writes, “Nations have been important in God’s plans since Genesis 10–11. So, it is no surprise that nations are important in the eternal kingdom and show a point of continuity with conditions in this present age.”¹⁶⁴ Vlach observes that many interpreters understand redeemed humanity to exist in the eternal state without national identity, but this is incorrect:

After mentioning ‘nations’ in Revelation 21:24, John also mentions ‘kings of the earth.’ These nations have leaders—kings who represent their nations as they bring their glory into the new Jerusalem. The language here is similar to Isaiah 60: ‘nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising’ (Isa

¹⁶² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1097.

¹⁶³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1106. Although Beale affirms traditional covenant theology, Progressive Covenantalists seem to understand this text in a similar way. Brent Parker writes, “Although the language of ‘nations’ is employed in Revelation 21–22, such does not establish that separate national identities or entities will continue throughout the consummated eternal state. The people of God are depicted as coming from all nations and people groups who persevere and overcome through Christ (Rev 21: 7; cf. 5: 9; 7: 9) in contrast to the faithless who are designated for eternal destruction (Rev 21: 8; 20: 15).” Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 66–67.

¹⁶⁴ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 520.

60:3). And, ‘The wealth of the nations will come to you’ (Isa 60:5). Such a picture is consistent with OT passages such as Isaiah 19:24–25 that foretold nations in the future alongside Israel.¹⁶⁵

Advocates of PD, affirm that the enriching contributions of the nations brought into the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21:24 and Isaiah 60:5 probably refer to the best of their unique cultural contributions of art, music, architecture, agriculture, etc.¹⁶⁶

Above, I have argued that PD understands God’s plan for redemptive history to climax in a holistic, multi-national, multi-particular kingdom consummation. This seems to be what is described in Revelation 21:24–22:2 as Vlach effectively summarizes: “The presence of multiple nations making unique contributions to the new earth shows that the coming eternal kingdom evidences wonderful diversity among those unified in their worship of the one true God. Altogether, the people(s) of God evidence both unity and diversity. Nations, therefore, are an important part of eternal kingdom conditions.”¹⁶⁷

Passages commonly alleged to be incongruent with progressive dispensationalism. The passages below are commonly cited as problematic for views like PD. However, in what follows, PD interpretations of these texts are shown to be congruent with the overall system.

Matthew 21:43. Supersessionist understandings of this text maintain that it is teaching two things: (1) Jesus is permanently removing the kingdom from national Israel; and (2) the church is the new people that will be given the kingdom, thus excluding any role for national Israel in the consummation.¹⁶⁸ There are two common responses to the

¹⁶⁵ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 520–21.

¹⁶⁶ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 521. Anthony Hoekema’s view is very similar to Vlach’s: “Is it too much to say that, according to these verses, the unique contribution of each nation to the life of the present earth will enrich the life of the new earth? Shall we then perhaps inherit the best products of culture and art which this earth has produced?” Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 286.

¹⁶⁷ Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 522.

¹⁶⁸ Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 141; for a supersessionist perspective see G. K. Beale, “The Church as the

supersessionist reading. Some have argued that the “you” in Matthew 21:43 is only referring to the current leaders of Israel and not to the entire nation.¹⁶⁹ A stronger response is argued by Vlach: “It is not correct to claim that Jesus rejected Israel’s religious leaders but not the people of Israel as a whole. Passages such as Matt 23:37–38 and Luke 19:41–44 indicate that Jesus’ rejection applies to the whole Jewish nation.”¹⁷⁰ Thus, the kingdom is taken from the current unbelieving nation, but will be given to a future Jewish nation that will believe—the “all Israel” who “will be saved” according to Romans 11:26.¹⁷¹ This is an Israel that will “mourn” for the one “whom they have pierced” according to Zechariah 12:10.¹⁷²

1 Peter 2:9–10. This text applies a cluster of Israelite terms to Peter’s readers which some interpreters take to mean that the church is the new Israel.¹⁷³ Currently the majority view is that Peter is addressing Jews and gentiles in this letter.¹⁷⁴ However, most ancient interpreters and some other noteworthy exegetes such as Calvin, Bengel, Weiss, Alford, English, and Wuest believe that Peter’s recipients were Jewish believers.¹⁷⁵

Transformed and Restored Eschatological Israel,” *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 673–74; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1992 1976), 454; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids : William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 816–817.

¹⁶⁹ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 141.

¹⁷⁰ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 142.

¹⁷¹ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 142.

¹⁷² Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 143.

¹⁷³ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 147.

¹⁷⁴ See Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 7–9; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, *New American Commentary*, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 41–47.

¹⁷⁵ Although Hiebert concludes that Peter’s audience is mixed (Jewish and gentile believers), he lists the above interpreters who affirm a Jewish audience: D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Chicago : Moody, 1992), 31n79; Jobes seems to believe the audience is ambiguous and somewhat inconsequential when one understands, “Whether Peter’s readers were formerly Jews or Gentiles, Peter addresses them indiscriminately from within the traditions of biblical Israel, in which the author was thoroughly steeped.” Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker

However, even if 1 Peter was written with gentiles in mind, it is not at all clear that this means he is identifying believing gentiles as “Israel.”¹⁷⁶ As Glennly elucidates, “Many of the arguments used to suggest the church is a new Israel replacing the nation are based on parallels and correspondences between the two; the obvious error is the belief that such a correspondence or parallel proves identity.”¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the application of Israel terminology to gentiles is inconclusive on this point because there are other places in Scripture where this happens without the non-Israelites becoming Israel (e.g., Isa 19:24–25).¹⁷⁸ Glennly offers additional insight on this passage and others like it. He understands there to be “a divinely ordained pattern between Israel and the church (as the people of God),”¹⁷⁹ but does so in a way that does not identify the church with Israel:

Peter is teaching that the church represents a pattern and thus is a fulfillment of the promises made to Israel in these Old Testament passages. He is not saying the church equals Israel; instead he is saying that as Israel in the Old Testament was the people of God by virtue of its relationship with Yahweh, so the church is the present people of God by virtue of its relationship with Jesus, the elect Messiah of God. . . . Peter uses Israel’s historical situation as the people of God as a pattern of his recipients’ relationship with God; he is not saying that the church is a new Israel replacing the nation.¹⁸⁰

Ephesians 2:11–22. Some interpreters understand this passage to contradict PD’s multi-national understanding of the consummation. Oren Martin argues that by affirming a land inheritance for Israel in the millennium, dispensationalists have misunderstood the implications of Ephesians 2:11–22: “[Dispensationalists] want to

Academic, 2005), 23–24.

¹⁷⁶ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 148.

¹⁷⁷ W. Edward Glennly, “The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Craig A. Blaising (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 183n126.

¹⁷⁸ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 149.

¹⁷⁹ Glennly, “Israelite Imagery of 1 Pet 2,” 180.

¹⁸⁰ Glennly, “Israelite Imagery of 1 Pet 2,” 183.

maintain that the literal (literalistic) fulfillment requires that Israel's land be given to believing national Israel separate from Gentile Christians in the millennial age. But this is incorrect . . . [because] all of God's promises are fulfilled in relation to Christ and given to believing Jews and Gentiles *equally* as the church (Eph 2: 11– 22)."¹⁸¹ This kind of interpretation seems to understand passages in which gentile inclusion in the people of God and participation in promises made to Israel entails that "Israel" has been transformed and that believing gentiles are integrated into a new Israel (the church) in which distinctions fall away.¹⁸² But, the OT prophets foresaw a day when believing gentiles would become the people of God as gentiles alongside believing Israel (Amos 9:11– 15).¹⁸³ Vlach persuasively argues, "This truth is affirmed in Eph 3:6 in which believing Jews and believing Gentiles are 'fellow heirs,' 'fellow members of the body,' and 'fellow partakers of the promise.' Believing Gentiles participate with believing Jews as the people of God but are not incorporated into Israel. . . . It is not: Israel expands to include Gentiles. Instead: The people of God expands to include Gentiles alongside Israel."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Oren R. Martin, "The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood," in Wellum and Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism*, 273.

¹⁸² Vlach, "Have They Found a Better Way?," 18–19; F. F. Bruce describes the unity that takes place as one in which "the old distinction between Jew and Gentile has been transcended." F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 295. Harold Hoehner speaks of a whole new race that is formed—"A race that is raceless!" Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 379. Hodge describes coming into the body of Christ as entering a gospel "system that ignored the distinction between Jews and Gentiles." Charles Hodge, introduction to *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), xvii.

¹⁸³ Vlach, "Have They Found a Better Way?," 19.

¹⁸⁴ Vlach, "Have They Found a Better Way?," 19. Hoch captures the essence of Paul's thought: "Paul's theology is not Gentile incorporation into Israel but a new sharing with Israel in Israel's prior covenants and promise." Carl B. Hoch, "The New Man of Ephesians 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Craig A. Blaising (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 108; see also Hoch, "The Significance of the Syn-Compounds for Jew-Gentile Relationships in the Body of Christ," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 2 (June 1982): 175–83.

In addition, Ephesians 2:11–22 is affirming salvific equality among Jews and gentiles, but this does not rule out functional distinctions in the church age or in the consummation. Vlach cites several examples in which this truth is borne out:

According to Gal 3:29 men and women share equally in salvation blessings, but the Bible still teaches that men and women have different roles. Thus, in the case of men and women, salvific unity does not nullify functional distinctions. The same is true for elders and nonelders in a church. Both are equal and share the same spiritual blessings, but elders have a distinct role in the plan of God. The same distinction could be made between parents and children. Even within the Trinity, there is an equality of essence yet different roles between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Equality in essence and spiritual blessings does not nullify functional distinctions.¹⁸⁵

Israel-centric or Christocentric? Some have charged that PD is not a Christocentric biblical theology—if this were true, PD would be incongruent with Luke 24:25–27, in which Jesus declares himself to be the focal point of the biblical narrative. PD emphasizes the progressive revelation of the eschatological kingdom, but a kingdom is meaningless without a king! Thus, in PD, everything is subordinate to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the King of the kingdom and the hero of the story of Scripture. This is borne out in each of the phases of the eschatological kingdom: the first manifestation of the eschatological kingdom is tied to the appearance of the king in the gospels, entrance to the kingdom is secured by the cross work of the one who is both suffering servant and king, in his ascension to the right hand of God all authority is given to Jesus Christ when he is seated in his heavenly throne even as he draws people into his kingdom from all nations and peoples, in his perfect timing he returns and exercises his authority through an earthly kingdom (in the very realm in which he was originally rejected), and finally he will reign forever over his inheritance (his people: both individually and corporately expressed, and his place: the renovated new creation) in the everlasting kingdom.

As for Israel, it plays an important part in the canonical narrative, and indeed,

¹⁸⁵ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 154.

functions as a main character in the story as the divine plan is revealed.¹⁸⁶ Israel's special glory is that God the Son is incarnate as a Davidide, Messiah of Israel, and Lord of the nations.¹⁸⁷ But, like every other nation, and the individuals who make up the various people-groups of the world, Israel is dependent on the God-man for reconciliation to the father and entrance into the kingdom of his beloved son.

The Christocentric nature of PD is captured well by Blaising as he describes the king and the eschatological kingdom as the telos of the biblical narrative: “[The kingdom] is a multi-personal, multi-ethnic, multi-national, multi-territorial, multi-particular, supra-administrative order *encompassed by, oriented to, and unified under Christ. It is through Christ* [emphasis added] that the presence and rule of the Triune God with and over the creation comes to its full and everlasting expression.”¹⁸⁸

Is It Consistent?

Another aspect of a reliable interpretive system is that it is consistent. That is, the interpretations that the system renders at one point are not in conflict with those it produces at another point.

New creation eschatology. As was made clear above, PD affirms a new creation eschatology. In the last twenty or so years, this view has been embraced by many theologians including some prominent supersessionists.¹⁸⁹ Rather than envisioning a non-material, timeless, eternity, new creation eschatology envisions eternal life on a redeemed, cleansed, and renewed earth.¹⁹⁰ As such, this new earth is in continuity with

¹⁸⁶ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 8.

¹⁸⁷ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 8.

¹⁸⁸ Blaising, “Progressive Dispensationalism as Kingdom Theology,” 8.

¹⁸⁹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 163.

¹⁹⁰ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 163.

the current earth and is characterized by geographical particularity. Thus, PD's understanding of the nature of the redeemed new earth is perfectly consistent with the territorial promises given to Israel many of which were said to be everlasting. That is, Israel will persist in the consummation alongside other nations in the new earth. It is in this sense, that PD does not suffer from the inconsistency that can be charged of theologians like N. T. Wright who simultaneously affirm supersessionism and a new creation eschatology. For Wright and others like him, new creation eschatology can be applied to issues like environmentalism and creation-care, but Wright does not envision any place for national and territorial Israel in his eschatology.¹⁹¹ But, how is this possible given a new earth in continuity with the current earth and eternal promises given to ENT Israel that are present in Scripture? Blaising quips, "Imagine traversing the new earth, crossing its various and particular geographical features, and coming to the Middle East. What do we find there? A void? A spatial anomaly? But then, where would the New Jerusalem be? In Ohio?"¹⁹² Thus, new creation eschatology is consistent with PD, but it is problematic for supersessionist views (model 1).

Interconnection of covenant promises in the book of Hebrews. PD

understands the Abrahamic covenant to be an enduring covenant that stretches into eternity future and promises blessing to the nation of Israel and gentile nations. In the progress of revelation, the Mosaic covenant comes in under the Abrahamic covenant constituting Israel as a nation and stipulating how covenant blessing can be experienced, namely, through obedience. Since Israel's unfaithfulness was so rampant, the nation's experience of blessing was rare. Thus, in God's plan for redemptive history, he replaces the old covenant with the new covenant which secures the blessing because covenant

¹⁹¹ Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 163.

¹⁹² Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," 163.

partners are provided forgiveness of sin and access to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant based on the obedience of their substitute: Jesus Christ. This is why the writer of the book of Hebrews calls the new covenant a “better” covenant (8:6).

Additionally, the writer of the book of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant which explicitly states that the new covenant is given to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (8:8).¹⁹³ Consistent with the inter-covenantal relationships described above, advocates of PD believe that the people of God expands as you move across the canon to include gentiles alongside Israel, and that gentiles benefit derivatively from Israel’s promises consistent with the Abrahamic covenant (“and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” Gen 12:3). Embedded in the Abrahamic Covenant as it is reaffirmed and expanded upon in Genesis (cf. Gen 15:18–21; 26:3; 28:13) are particular territorial promises. In the same Jeremiah prophecy from which the writer to the Hebrews quotes, the perpetuity of Israel as well as Israel’s land promise is made clear (cf. Jer 31:35–37).¹⁹⁴ It is impossible to separate the promise of forgiveness of sin from God’s pledge that Israel will forever be a nation before him. Because progressive dispensationalists affirm a multi-national eschatological kingdom inclusive of Israel and gentile nations, there is no problem with affirming the abiding nature of both aspects of the promise.¹⁹⁵

However, where PD is strong in its consistent handling of the promise of land for Israel and forgiveness of sin, supersessionist views suffer from inconsistency at this point. Supersessionists understand the covenantal progression described in Hebrews, and in the whole Bible, to involve the removal of territorial promises to Israel.¹⁹⁶ But as

¹⁹³ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164.

¹⁹⁴ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164.

¹⁹⁵ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164.

¹⁹⁶ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164.

Blaising points out,

The national and territorial promise to Israel is a constituent feature of covenant promise from Abraham to the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. There is no reason to exclude it from “the world to come” expected by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 2:5). To include it would be the most consistent and coherent reading of that book together with the rest of the canon of Scripture.¹⁹⁷

Is It Coherent?

Finally, a reliable interpretive system must be coherent. That is, it must be logically tight, and hang together, as an entire system.

Speech-act theory as applied to divine promise in progressive

dispensationalism. In chapter 2, speech-act theory was invoked to critique the coherence of model 1 systems in their treatment of divine promise. It was noted that the central insight of speech-act theory is that when a person speaks, he is not just saying something, he is doing something, and that when a person makes a promise to another person, a relationship entailing expectations and moral obligation is put in place.¹⁹⁸ To violate a promise, is to violate one’s word and constitutes a breach of personal integrity.

Scripture contains numerous speech-acts that come in the form of divine promise. Chapter 2 noted that this is clearly seen in promises God makes to Abraham and his descendants. In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham land, people, a nation, and that he will be the source of divine blessing to all nations. In Genesis 15, to assure Abraham of his promise, God participates in an ancient covenant ceremony involving passing through the remains of the covenant sacrifice and taking obligation on himself alone.¹⁹⁹ Genesis 22:15–18 describes God reaffirming his promise with a solemn oath.²⁰⁰ God’s

¹⁹⁷ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164.

¹⁹⁸ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 160.

¹⁹⁹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 160.

²⁰⁰ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 161.

sworn allegiance to these promises, and their fulfillment, is central to the storyline of the Bible.²⁰¹ Thus, the manner in which different biblical theologies understand the fulfillment of these promises sheds light on the overall coherence and stability of that system.

Advocates of PD believe the promises to Abraham cited above will be literally, finally, and fully fulfilled in the eternal consummation. This fulfillment will be consistent with how the promises were understood by the original recipients (Abraham and his descendants) and will involve no ontological shift in the nature of the recipients of the promise (e.g., from Israel to a “new Israel”) as redemptive history unfolds. Thus, application of speech-act theory to PD’s understanding of divine promises counts as evidence for the strength of the system in contrast to the weakness it reveals in model 1 systems.

Luke-Acts taken as a plot vector. A possible way to test the veracity of a biblical theology’s understanding of the canonical narrative would be to take a smaller sampling of the overall narrative as a test case. Rather than working with a set of prooftexts, Blaising proposes examining a whole section of the NT (what he calls a “plot vector”) to see the direction of the narrative, and texts that relate promises to Israel to the central narrative of the NT are an apt place to start.²⁰² Luke-Acts presents a helpful test case because it clearly presents itself as a continuation of the OT narrative.

Luke opens his Gospel with the angel Gabriel revealing to Mary that she will have a Son of the Most High who will occupy the throne of her ancestor David and “he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end”

²⁰¹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 161.

²⁰² Craig A. Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 90.

(Luke 1:32–33).²⁰³ This same Gabriel who is linking Jesus’s coming in the NT to the Davidic covenant, had told Daniel about the future of Israel and the city of Jerusalem in the OT (Dan 9:20–27).²⁰⁴ It is clear that Luke sees his Gospel as the continuation of the storyline of the Tanak.²⁰⁵

Toward the end of Luke 1, the reader encounters Mary and Zechariah’s hymns which affirm that this coming son of David will be for Israel and in keeping with “his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:54–55, 72–73).²⁰⁶ In Luke 2, this coming one is said to be for the “consolation of Israel,” and “a light for revelation for the Gentiles” (Luke 2:25, 31–32).²⁰⁷ Luke’s allusion to Isaiah 49:6–7 is apparent. In addition, at the baptism of Jesus described in Luke 3:31–22, there is an inter-textual linkage to Psalm 2 in which Jesus is in view as the Lord’s “anointed” (Ps 2:2), declared to be “my son” (Ps 2:6), and the one to whom the nations are given as an inheritance (Ps 2:8).²⁰⁸ All of this is consistent with the theme of good news for the nations at the end of Luke which is continued in the book of Acts.²⁰⁹

The rest of the Gospel of Luke describes Jesus’s ministry, teaching, miracle-working, death, and resurrection all centered around the theme of the kingdom of God.²¹⁰ At the end of the book, the issue of what all this means for Israel and the nations resurfaces on the road to Emmaus. Blaising summarizes well the significance of the Emmaus dialogue:

²⁰³ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 90.

²⁰⁴ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 90.

²⁰⁵ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 90.

²⁰⁶ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 90.

²⁰⁷ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 90.

²⁰⁸ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 90.

²⁰⁹ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 90–91.

²¹⁰ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 91.

They lament to him, “But we had hoped that he [Jesus who was crucified] was the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21). Jesus responds, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Lk 24:25 ESV). The point that these disciples, and subsequent readers of the Gospel needed to understand was that the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ did not stand contrary to the previously revealed consummate plan and purpose of God for Israel and the nations. It does not signal a redefinition or metaphysical shift in the story line. It is itself part, in fact *the crucial part*, of that same plan. What the disciples needed was a more comprehensive understanding of the Tanak (Lk 24:27 ESV: “all the prophets have spoken”; Lk 24:44 ESV: “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled”), not a resignification of a part of it. This fuller understanding would link the death and resurrection of the Christ to the future worldwide kingdom of nations expected in the Tanak (which included Israel and Jerusalem) through an intervening history of gospel proclamation of forgiveness (the means of everlasting shalom) to those nations beginning in Jerusalem (Lk 24:44–49).²¹¹

The book of Acts begins with Jesus’s ascension to the right hand of the Father from where he oversees the mission to the nations.²¹² Ostensibly referring to the time after the gospel mission to the nations, Peter declares in Acts 3:21 that Jesus’s return will be connected to the restoration of all things promised by the holy prophets.²¹³ This restoration is none other than the restoration of ENT Israel and blessing to the nations which is evidenced by Peter’s referencing of the Abrahamic promise (Acts 3:25).²¹⁴ What has now been revealed is the means by which the OT expectation of the restoration of Israel and gentile nations will be fulfilled, namely, that the sins of Jews can be “blotted out” (Acts 3:19) as well as those of gentiles as the rest of the book of Acts makes clear.²¹⁵

The narrative of Luke-Acts describes Jesus’s ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the expanding gospel mission of his church beginning with Jews and extending to gentiles. A PD understanding of Luke-Acts elucidates progression in the storyline, as the narrative outlines the means of forgiveness and reconciliation provided

²¹¹ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 91.

²¹² Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 91.

²¹³ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 91.

²¹⁴ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 92.

²¹⁵ Blaising, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 92.

by Jesus and the unity of Jew and gentile accomplished by the Spirit—both of which form the backbone of the consummated kingdom plan.²¹⁶ In this way, PD's understanding of Luke-Acts places Luke's work in continuation with the prophetic anticipation of the Tanak of a multi-national kingdom consummation including Israel and the reign of a messiah, a Christ, from the line of David.²¹⁷ Thus, the plot-vector of Luke-Acts as a constituent part of Scripture is seen to be moving in the same direction as PD's understanding of the whole canonical narrative, and therefore counts as evidence of the coherence of PD.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described PD, and its unique features, as a redemptive-historical biblical theology. In addition, I have endeavored to show that it emerges as the strongest of the models examined in this dissertation when assessed according to David Wolfe's criteria for strong interpretive systems. PD accomplishes this as an anti-supersessionist biblical theology that seamlessly interprets yet to be fulfilled OT promises to national Israel. In addition, the PD storyline features a unified redemption that is revealed through the biblical covenants as well as through the progressively revealed phases of the eschatological kingdom of God. The everlasting kingdom consummation of PD is a multi-national, multi-territorial, kingdom on a renovated new earth ruled by Jesus Christ forever. This consummation picture resolves all the different themes and lines of revelation in the biblical narrative. It is holistic in that it pictures redemption of man in his individual (Jew and gentile) and collective sociologies (Israel and gentile nations). Finally, PD most clearly accounts for and synthesizes the biblical data regarding the anthropology of the eternal consummation in the book of Revelation and the rest of the

²¹⁶ Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 93.

²¹⁷ Blaising, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 93.

canon of Scripture. What a glorious picture of Christ the king and a hopeful conception of what is yet to come!

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

In the preceding chapters, I have sought to explicate three models of eternal anthropology which has entailed looking at the broader features of the biblical theologies rendering these views. Wolfe's criteria for strong interpretive systems (comprehensiveness, congruence, consistency, and coherence) have functioned as a way of testing these models as to their relative strength as interpretive systems.

In chapter 2, classic covenantalism (CC) was described and evaluated as a model 1 view (individual ethnic identity, but no corporate ethnic identity expressed in the consummation due to Israel's replacement by the church). First, the hermeneutical commitments of CC were discussed and analyzed. CC theologians believe that to understand the whole canon, preference is given to the NT as the key to interpreting the OT. In fact, classic covenantalists believe that, at times, the NT reinterprets the OT. In addition, classic covenantalists believe that to accurately interpret the Scripture, the interpreter should understand that OT promises to national Israel are fulfilled in the church. Finally, a hermeneutical principle of classic covenantalists, related to the other two, is that proper biblical typology will conceive of Israel as a type of the church.

Next, the structure of the canonical narrative as understood by classic covenantalists was outlined. Most advocates of CC understand redemptive history to fall under three theological covenants: the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. A distinction was drawn between classic covenantalists who emphasize the unity of the Covenant of Grace (e.g., Hodge and Berkhof) and those who

emphasize the diversity of the biblical covenants that fit under the Covenant of Grace (e.g., O. Palmer Robertson and William Dumbrell).

Third, the consummate anthropology of classic covenantalists was discussed noting some diversity of views, although all fit under model 1. All who affirm CC would agree with the more general descriptions given by Hodge and Berkhof which emphasize the proximity of the divine presence, the absence of sorrow and sin, and perfect love and fellowship among the redeemed of all epochs of redemptive history. Dumbrell understands the anthropology of the eschaton to be the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham of a "great nation." Thus, he envisions a political unity of the saints from all different ethnic backgrounds that are united as one mono-nation of the redeemed—for Dumbrell, this unity has to be divinely given rather than humanly constructed as was attempted at Babel.¹ Beale's view involves seeing the eternal state as the culmination of the temple theme that has been developed throughout the biblical narrative. For Beale, the eschatological temple extends to the whole new creation which is now the dwelling place of God with his people. Herman Bavinck's emphasis on the renewal of creation in the eschaton was described. Lastly, I considered Hoekema's approach of understanding certain passages, that some theologians believe to be millennial descriptions, as biblical pictures of the eschatological new earth. Finally, by utilizing Wolfe's criteria to assess chapter 2, several areas of weakness in CC as an interpretive system were exposed.

As a supersessionist model, CC falters in the area of comprehensiveness in its handling of OT promises to national Israel. Specifically, passages that foresee a Davidic king ruling Israel and gentile nations in righteousness forever, OT prophecies that predict that ENT Israel will be central in the eschatological kingdom along with gentile nations forming one, diverse people of God (differentiated individually and corporately as

¹ William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 34.

nations), and NT passages that indicate an eschatological future for ENT Israel.

In the area of congruence, classic covenantalists were criticized for bringing an extrabiblical system of theological covenants to bear on the biblical narrative instead of working with covenants that are imbedded in the text. Other problems of congruence for CC include reading the storyline across the canon as a movement from the particular in the OT to the universal in the NT; but it was argued that Scripture keeps the particular and universal promises of blessing together throughout the canonical narrative in a complementary way. In addition, the individualistic redemption of CC, is incongruent with the rich, holistic redemption described in Scripture that includes the renewal of humankind in its corporate aspects (like nations and governments).

Next problems of consistency for CC were examined. Classic covenantalists understand the church to replace Israel in the storyline, but then some advocates of CC have Israel re-appearing in some form in the eschaton, which is inconsistent. In addition, as amillennialists, classic covenantalists struggle to understand biblical descriptions of what must be the eternal state in CC's rendering of the biblical storyline, and yet these descriptions include the presence of sin and death creating issues of inconsistency.

Finally, problems of coherence in CC were pointed out—the most significant of which has to do with divine promise. It was argued that in the canonical reading of classic covenantalists, divine promises to Israel in the OT are altered as fulfillment occurs in the NT. The seriousness of this problem was highlighted by invoking Speech-act theory which helped elucidate that the classic covenantal rendering of the biblical storyline leaves God open to the charge of lacking integrity.

In Chapter 3, progressive covenantalism (PC) was taken up. Like CC, PC is a model 1 view (individual ethnic identity, but no corporate ethnic identity expressed in the consummation due to Israel's fulfillment in Christ). There are also some similarities between the hermeneutics of CC and PC. One such similarity is the NT being prioritized over the OT in canonical interpretation. Another important hermeneutical principle of PC

is an emphasis on understanding Scripture as a progressive revelation. For PC, ultimately, the progressive nature of Scripture is Christological.² That is, when Christ comes on the scene, all of the OT revelation finds its fulfillment in him, which in turn causes major changes in the storyline, as the new covenant era begins. Another important hermeneutical commitment of progressive covenantalists is their conception of biblical typology. Progressive covenantalists understand typology to be a literary feature of the canonical narrative that helps the storyline to cohere, as well as to transition from the era of promise to the age of fulfillment. Crucial to the progressive covenantal understanding of typology is that there is escalation as one moves from type to fulfillment in the antitype. This, *a fortiori*, aspect of typology, as understood by progressive covenantalists, is the mechanism by which OT types are seen as shadows that fade away when the NT antitype (which is almost always understood to be Jesus) arrives.

Next the nature of the canonical narrative as understood by progressive covenantalists was analyzed. For progressive covenantalists, there are six biblical covenants: the Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant. For progressive covenantalists, the Adamic covenant is the prototypical covenant (even though the word *covenant* is not found in the creation context). Adam (who is head of the Adamic covenant) is the archetypal covenant partner who is to be the mediator between God and creation; he is to exercise dominion over the creation expanding the sacred space of Eden to the ends of the earth.³ However, Adam fails. This pattern repeats itself through the successive covenants of the OT, as God re-starts his plan featuring a new covenant head who inevitably fails as a covenant partner. Finally, Jesus arrives as a “new Adam” who

² Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 116.

³ 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): 7–8.

succeeds as a faithful covenant head (unlike, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David). Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, he inaugurates the new covenant and the kingdom of God fulfilling all of the old covenant promises. Beginning with the twelve, Jesus re-constitutes them as the new Israel which will eventually include the entire church, as the people of God, who now receive all of the covenant blessings due to their union with Christ.⁴

After considering the broader canonical narrative as understood by PC, the consummate anthropology of PC was described. Wellum understands the eschatological place (or land) as a theme that develops through the biblical narrative. When Christ comes, Wellum believes that he receives the land promise and fulfills it by the inauguration of a new creation. The consummation of the new creation is described in Revelation 21–22, indicating that Eden—now greater—has been renovated, renewed, and expanded to the ends of the earth. The imagery of a city that is a perfect cube reflects the Holy of Holies of the OT temple and conveys that now the entire new creation is a holy temple with the Lord at its center⁵ (in this way Wellum’s view resembles Beale’s discussed above). The eschatological people are God’s new humanity fit for the new creation. What is the organization of consummate anthropology for PC? This aspect of their view resembles Dumbrell, as can be seen in Parker’s description: “It is important to observe that Peter identifies the church as a holy (singular) nation (1 Pet 2:9). The old covenant nation of Israel pointed forward to a singular, multiethnic nation of the redeemed—the church.”⁶ Parker goes on to convey that national distinctions will

⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 746–48.

⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 838.

⁶ Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 66.

disappear in the eschaton, but it is possible that ethnic differences will remain.⁷

Lastly, Wolfe's criteria were used to assess PC revealing a number of deficiencies in PC as an interpretive system. Like CC, PC is shown to struggle with comprehensiveness in its handling of OT promises to national Israel. The same sets of passages are problematic: those that foresee a Davidic king ruling Israel and gentile nations in righteousness forever, OT prophecies that predict that ENT Israel will be central in the eschatological kingdom along with gentile nations forming one, diverse people of God (differentiated individually and corporately as nations), and NT passages that indicate an eschatological future for ENT Israel.

Additionally, in the area of congruence, progressive covenantalists are to be commended for tracing the biblical narrative through the biblical covenants as opposed to using, e.g., the theological covenants of CC. However, problems of congruence are raised in their interpretations of passages that connect Israel to the kingdom in the book of Acts. In addition, the congruence of the progressive covenantal understanding of Romans 11, and the nature of the future for Israel taught there, is questioned.

Furthermore, problems of consistency for PC were examined. PC affirms a new creation eschatology, but there are aspects of their view that seem in tension with new creationism. For instance, it makes sense that a renovated earth would resemble the old earth, but perfected. Consistent with this would be continued geographical particularity reflecting the old earth which makes sense of passages that promise an eternal inheritance of land to ENT Israel. However, progressive covenantalists deny an everlasting inheritance of a particular land for national Israel.

Finally, problems of coherence in PC were articulated. It was argued that progressive covenantal notions of fulfillment that involve a kind of Christification, i.e.,

⁷ Parker, "Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," 66n66.

biblical promises are fulfilled in the person of Christ, suffer from problems of coherence. In addition, it was maintained that the progressive covenantal understanding of typology, and its application to understanding the biblical narrative, suffer from problems of a circularity of approach, as well as typology functioning to change the meaning of OT promises. Both issues surface areas of incoherence.

In chapter 4, model 2 views were described and assessed. In this dissertation, model 2 views were generally referred to as traditional dispensationalism (TD)—a category that includes classic dispensationalism (CD) and revised dispensationalism (RD).

First the hermeneutics of the two views were considered. Advocates of CD maintain a central dualism throughout the canonical narrative tied to two different plans of redemption in the Bible: one for Israel as earthly people, and one for the church as heavenly people. In a similar way, revised dispensationalists maintain a rigid distinction between Israel and the church that they believe is sustained in the biblical storyline until the eternal state is reached when both groups of people will exist in the same sphere—though some distinction continues even in the everlasting kingdom. In addition, CD uses both a literal and symbolic hermeneutic (the literal to reveal truth applicable to Israel, the earthly people, and the symbolic approach used to elucidate truths pertaining to the spiritual people—the church). As for RD, any spiritual kind of interpretation was rejected in favor of what they ardently claimed was a consistent, literal hermeneutic.

Second the canonical narrative as understood by traditional dispensationalists was analyzed. Both advocates of CD as well as RD divide redemptive history into seven dispensations along these lines: “1. Innocency [(Gen 1:28–3:6) Creation → Fall], 2. Conscience [(Gen 4:1–8:14) Fall → Flood], 3. Human Government [(Gen 8:15–11:9) Flood → Babel], 4. Promise [(Gen 11:10–Exod 18:27) Abraham → Exodus], 5. Law [(Exod 18:27–Acts 1:26) Moses → John the Baptist], 6. Grace [(Acts 2:1–Rev 19:21)

Pentecost → Rapture], 7. Kingdom [(Rev 20–21) Millennium → Great White Throne].”⁸

Third, the consummate anthropologies of CD and RD were described. Classic dispensationalists believe that Israel, as well as gentile nations, will inhabit the new earth forever. The church, made up of individual Jews and gentiles—although these identity features have disappeared and are meaningless in light of the “one new man” (cf. Eph 2:15) that is the church—inhabit heaven for eternity. For revised dispensationalists, although there is quite a variety of nuanced differences in their views, two schools of thought emerge: those who understand God’s eternal purposes for Israel and the church to be fulfilled forever in heaven, and those who think God’s eternal purposes for Israel and the Church are fulfilled forever on a new earth.

Finally, Wolfe’s criteria were used to assess traditional dispensationalism and expose a number of weaknesses in the interpretive systems of both CD and RD. In the area of comprehensiveness, advocates of TD were commended, as the dispensational tradition has manifested an enduring desire to understand and account for Scripture in all of its detail. However, CD was critiqued for maintaining a “kingdom of heaven”/“kingdom of God” distinction that can be shown, exegetically, to be a distinction without a difference. In addition, both CD and RD have very little to say about Colossians 1:13 which is a watershed text that makes clear that in the church age there is a present form of the kingdom that was inaugurated by Jesus. Therefore, the kingdom is not entirely future.

In addition, problems of congruence were tied to the central dualism of

⁸ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 5. Note: the information in the brackets following each dispensation (excerpts from Merkle) is an attempt to divide Scripture sequentially into each dispensation consistent with Scofield. See Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 36. Chafer identifies seven dispensations by the same names other than the sixth dispensation which he calls “The Dispensation of the Church.” See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes: Presenting Forty-Nine Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures, Abbreviated and Simplified for Popular Use, Including Suggestive Questions on Each Chapter, with Topical and Textual Indices* (Chicago: Moody, 1926), esp. chap. 18; see also Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 7:40–41.

TD. One such problem is the anthropology of traditional dispensationalists (dividing mankind into three exhaustive categories: Jews, gentiles, and church). Particularly, treating the church as its own separate anthropological category, produces an incongruent understanding of Ephesians 2–3 of two humanities that will exist forever instead of one, albeit diverse, people of God. In addition, other issues of congruence emerge from traditional dispensationalists’ denial of inaugurated eschatology, and their failure to perceive the presence of the current phase of the eschatological kingdom were discussed.

Consistency problems were also raised in the numerous and disparate understandings of “kingdom” in the writings of proponents of RD in particular. Finally, traditional dispensationalists affirm a biblical storyline that is discontinuous, essentially containing two narratives (one for Jews and gentiles, and one for the church), and consequently struggles with coherence.

In chapter 5, I described and assessed model 3: progressive dispensationalism (or kingdom theology). First, the hermeneutics of progressive dispensationalism (PD) were explained as out of the dispensational tradition, but integrating more sophisticated hermeneutical tools than that of CD and RD. Examples include greater sensitivity to genre analysis, to the situatedness of the interpreter, to intertextual development, and to narratological canonical interpretation. Advocates of PD like Darrell Bock, utilize a “complementary hermeneutic” which maintains that, e.g., NT interpretation of an OT text can develop or complement the OT meaning, but not in such a way that denies what the OT originally affirmed.⁹ Another important feature of the hermeneutics of PD is the integration of inaugurated eschatology into the progressive dispensational understanding of the NT, yielding a robust understanding of the current presence of the kingdom manifested in the church. In addition, progressive dispensationalists affirm the

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, “Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents,” in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde, Counterpoints: Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 116.

phenomena of biblical typology, but unlike progressive covenantalists, they deny that typology must contain escalation; rather, they understand the typological relationship to be grounded in correspondence signaling God's sovereignty and providence as his plan for redemptive history is worked out.

Second the canonical narrative as understood by progressive dispensationalists was analyzed. Rather than affirming seven dispensations, Blaising articulates four primary dispensations to describe salvation history: "Patriarchal (to Sinai), Mosaic (to Messiah's ascension), Ecclesial (to Messiah's return), Zionic (with a millennial phase and an eternal phase)."¹⁰ The most significant difference between how advocates of model 2 and model 3 conceptualize the dispensations has to do with how they function in the canonical narrative. For model 2, the dispensations are *different* arrangements between God and man (often serving as tests of man's obedience), whereas in PD, the dispensations are *successive* arrangements that progress towards the consummation goal.¹¹

Third, the consummate anthropology of PD was described. The eschatological place for PD is a renovated, new earth which is part of a new creation. God will cleanse and renew this world and the entire cosmos (cf. Isa 65:17). The people of God will inhabit the new earth, fully redeemed individually, but also in terms of corporate features of human anthropology like nations and polities. At the center of this new earth will be the new Jerusalem, from which Christ the king of the everlasting kingdom will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords! The citizens of the kingdom can rightly be described as the church which is now inclusive of all believers of all ages, and all the promises of Scripture to individuals, as well as Israel and gentile nations, find their full and complete

¹⁰ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 123.

¹¹ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48.

fulfillment in the eternal kingdom on the new earth.

Lastly, Wolfe's criteria were used to assess PD, and it was shown to be a strong interpretive system in all four areas: comprehensiveness, congruence, consistency, and coherence. First, in the area of comprehensiveness, model 3 was shown to lucidly account for the passages (cited above) that were problematic for model 1: passages that foresee a Davidic king ruling Israel and gentile nations in righteousness forever, OT prophecies that predict that ENT Israel will be central in the eschatological kingdom along with gentile nations forming one, diverse people of God (differentiated individually and corporately as nations), and NT passages that indicate an eschatological future for ENT Israel. In PD, these prophecies are fully realized in the eschatological kingdom which exists forever on the new earth!

Second, PD is shown to have a congruent explanation for the thousand-year period described in Revelation 20:1–6 as well as Revelation 21:24–22:2 which affirms the presence of “nations” in the everlasting kingdom three times. In addition, several passages alleged to be incongruent with PD (Matt 21:43; 1 Pet 2:9–10; Eph 2:11–22), were explicated and shown to be compatible with PD.

Third, PD was affirmed in the area of consistency. Because of how the new creation is conceptualized to include territorial particularity, PD does not fall prey to the consistency charge that can be brought against supersessionists like N. T. Wright who appeal to certain passages to affirm new creationism, but deny eternal, territorial promises to Israel, embedded in those same passages!¹² Progressive dispensationalists are also commended for their consistent treatment of covenant promises as presented in the book of Hebrews. For example, regarding the reference to the new covenant in Jeremiah

¹² Wright is critiqued, along with other new creationists who are inconsistent on this point, by Steven James. See Steven L. James, “New Creation Eschatology and the Land” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 132–35.

to which the author of Hebrews refers, Blaising writes, “The implication of the last declaration quoted in Hebrews 8:12: ‘I will forgive their [Israel and Judah in context] iniquity and remember their sin no more’ is explained in Jeremiah 31:35–37: Israel will be a nation forever before the Lord!”¹³ It is impossible to separate the promise of forgiveness of sin from the promise of the eternal nature of Israel as a nation before God. Thus, PD consistently understands the abiding nature of both aspects of the promise: the forgiveness of sin that is predicted as well as the ongoing nature of Israel.¹⁴

Finally, PD is affirmed as a coherent interpretive system. This is demonstrated by re-visiting the speech-act objections raised against model 1 views, and by showing how these objections do not apply to model 3. In PD, promises to ENT Israel that were problematic for the coherence of model 1, are fulfilled in a manner consistent with how the promises were understood by the original recipients. Lastly, Luke-Acts was used as a test case of the explanatory power of PD. It was demonstrated that Luke-Acts, as a major portion of Scripture (what Blaising calls a “plot vector”), is seen to be moving in the same direction as PD’s understanding of the whole canonical narrative, and therefore counts as evidence of the coherence of PD.

In summary, a way of describing model 3’s strength, is that it affirms aspects of the other two models that are strengths while avoiding their areas of weakness. For instance, like model 1, model 3 understands Scripture to reveal a unified storyline as well as a unified redemption. But, unlike model 1, model 3 is anti-supersessionist, i.e., it affirms a place for ENT Israel in the eschatological kingdom that seamlessly fits with numerous OT prophecies including those that promise Israel possession of a specific land forever. In this way, PD is like model 2; but, unlike model 2, which posits two tracks of

¹³ Craig A. Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*, ed. Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 164.

¹⁴ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 164.

redemption throughout the Bible, model 3 affirms one, unified kingdom plan that incorporates Jews and gentiles (Israel and gentile nations) together as one people of God that is progressively revealed in phases until they reach the consummated, holistic, multi-national, multi-territorial eschatological kingdom ruled forever by Jesus Christ. For these reasons, and many others articulated above, model 3 shows itself to be strong in all four of Wolfe’s criteria and to be the strongest of the three models considered in this dissertation.

Areas for Further Research

There is a group of scholars that I have termed “neo-beatific visionists”¹⁵ that are advocating for a view that could be considered a fourth model of eternal anthropology. An overview of their view is below, but space constraints prevented me from doing further analysis.

Neo-beatific visionists (model 4) seem to minimize ethnic and national identity in their understanding of the anthropology of the eternal state because its adherents seek to retrieve the classic doctrine of the “beatific vision,” as the central aspect of consummate existence. Indeed, for model 4 advocates, exploring a question like the nature of anthropology in the everlasting order likely indicates a wrong-headed, man-centered pre-understanding of the eternal state.

A central concern of neo-beatific visionists is that many evangelicals so emphasize the earthly nature of heaven, that they fall into what Michael Allen terms,

¹⁵ See Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Christian Hope and Life on God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018); Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Hans Boersma and Andrew Louth, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018); Kenneth E. Kirk, *The Vision of God the Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1950); Charles T. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139167208>; Matthew Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), ProQuest.

“eschatological naturalism.”¹⁶ The chief error of eschatological naturalists is that they make God an instrumental end instead of a final end¹⁷, i.e., the *renewal* of all things is focused upon instead of the *Renewer*. Allen compares this to focusing on the rays of the sun instead of beholding the radiance of the sun itself.¹⁸

For advocates of model 4, more emphasis is given to the spiritual nature of heaven and its other worldliness. Boersma writes, “I am fairly confident that the extent of our eschatological transfiguration will be much more thoroughgoing than many of us suspect and that even our biblical language will literally prove infinitely inadequate to the task of describing the earthly reality that will have been transformed or divinized into our heavenly home.”¹⁹

Moreover, neo-beatific visionists appeal to patristic and medieval theologians who emphasized the knowledge of God as crucial, and the beatific vision as the ultimate form of human knowledge of God.²⁰ In this way, the Christian’s journey and final eschatological hope is captured in the biblical theme of moving from faith to sight culminating in the beatific vision.²¹

Finally, neo-beatific visionists call for heavenly participation as a much greater

¹⁶ See Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 39–47. Allen goes so far as to say that for *eschatological naturalists*, God sovereignly realizes the kingdom, “but then seemingly slides off stage-right upon its culmination” (47); Allen is especially critical of Richard Middleton and N. T. Wright. See J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014); N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

¹⁷ Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 39.

¹⁸ Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 40.

¹⁹ Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 4. As with any heuristic device, characterizing the viewpoints of individual theologians as fitting into models requires nuancing. For example, Allen is more restrained in his vision of heaven. He desires a more spiritual focus and critiques those he understands to be too physicalist in their understanding. Boersma goes further and understands heaven to be much more other-worldly. See also Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*.

²⁰ Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 40. Allen calls for the retrieval of the eschatological wisdom of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Gregory of Nyssa (47). Boersma appeals especially to Gregory of Nyssa. Levering leans heavily upon Aquinas.

²¹ Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 40.

preoccupation than earthly enjoyment.²² This leads to ethical teaching that features asceticism and sacramentalism.²³

It would be a worthwhile study to consider hermeneutical presuppositions for model 4, as well as how its advocates understand the canonical narrative, and render the eternal consummation. Moreover, evaluating model 4 using Wolfe's criteria would be fruitful.

Another interesting area for further study is the ecclesiological implications of PD. Particularly in missiological circles, the issue of homogeneous versus heterogeneous church is debated. Interestingly, PD affirms both as apt expressions of the coming eschatological kingdom of God. A heterogeneous local gathering of believers reflects the spirit-wrought unity that exists now among individual believers despite, ethnic, national, cultural, etc., differences—a unity that will be perfect in the everlasting kingdom. In addition, homogeneous churches reflect that humankind will be redeemed and perfected in its corporate socialities in the eschaton.²⁴ Thus, harmonious and cooperative relationships among homogeneous churches reflects the multi-national aspects of the eternal kingdom and the eternal stability and *shalom* that will be guaranteed by the spirit

²² Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 7.

²³ Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, esp. chap. 3, “Heavenly-Mindedness: Retrieving the Ascetical Way of Life with God,” and chap. 4, “Self-Denial: Reforming the Practices of Renunciation”; Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, esp. chap. 1, “The Shape of the Tapestry: A Sacramental Ontology.”

²⁴ Blaising summarizes the basic contours of a PD ecclesiology in the following way: “It is entirely right and consistent with the overall plan of God for these congregations to exhibit a majority ethnic or national character or to manifest a multi-ethnic or multi-national character both being reflective of actual human social compositions. What is not permissible is either the exclusion of believers from a congregation’s fellowship on ethnic, national, or social grounds or an enforced multi-culturalism on a freely gathering predominately mono-ethnic or national congregation. Both of those moves oppose the work of the Spirit which has its telos in a multi-national (in the sense of whole nations), multi-ethnic (in the sense of extended ethnic societies) kingdom order in which all persons, of whatever nation or ethnicity, are directly united to Christ and to each other by the Holy Spirit, the whole multi-national, multi-ethnic order constituted as a dwelling place for God.” Craig A. Blaising, “Typology and the Nature of the Church” (paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society National Conference, San Diego, November 2014), 15–16.

in the everlasting kingdom.

Concluding Reflections

What a privilege it has been to study the material necessary to complete this dissertation. Studying biblical theology is a thrilling endeavor, as one seeks to think God's thoughts after him, and to trace the coherence of an inerrant Bible and God-ordained plan for redemptive history.

Unfortunately, it is my belief that PD, as a redemptive historical biblical theology, has not been given its due consideration. Perhaps this is because its formulation and dissemination came in the wake of some traditional dispensationalists faltering by an over-emphasis on rapture and tribulation debates, and even succumbing to eschatological date-setting in the 1980s. In addition, for an extended period, PD was dogged by excessive internal debate and criticism in the dispensational camp of evangelicalism, diverting progressive dispensationalists from engaging in dialogue with the broader evangelical world.

Fortunately, it seems that with the advent of PC and the book *Kingdom through Covenant* in 2012, more dialogue has been sparked between progressive dispensationalists and progressive covenantalists. The very existence of PD and PC exemplify that a degree of *rapprochement* has already taken place between dispensationalists and covenantalists. Perhaps an even greater degree can be attained as advocates of PD and PC continue in constructive dialogue. There is much agreement between these two views, but there remain significant gaps in understandings of typology and the nature of inter-textual development resulting in different understandings of the biblical storyline and its consummation.

It is my sincere hope that this dissertation has involved a fair treatment of all the views that have been articulated. In addition, it is my desire that this work will encourage continued dialogue among advocates of different whole Bible theologies

towards the end that all would continue to test and refine their views in the light of Scripture. Lastly, I hope that more study and dialogue about the nature of the everlasting consummation will be stimulated by this dissertation. Certainly, the clarity I have gained from this study has filled me with hope and longing for the glorious eternity that God has planned for the redeemed!

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ABSTRACT

ETERNAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN EVANGELICAL ESCHATOLOGY: AN ASSESSMENT OF THREE MODELS AND AN ARGUMENT FOR KINGDOM THEOLOGY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
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By examining three models of the anthropology of the everlasting kingdom and the biblical and theological arguments that underlie them, I argue that the Kingdom Theology (referred to as Progressive Dispensationalism for the majority of the dissertation in keeping with the history of the view) understanding of consummate anthropology, in which ethnicity is individually and corporately expressed, is based on stronger interpretive foundations than the other two models. I demonstrate this by assessing all three models according to David Wolfe's criteria for evaluating interpretive systems taken from *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief*. What emerges as progressive dispensationalism is evaluated through Wolfe's criteria and compared and contrasted to the other models, is nothing less than an understanding of the storyline of the Bible and its culmination that is straightforwardly biblical, lucid, compelling, and deeply hope-engendering for the church!

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of the dissertation and its importance, followed by its purpose, thesis, and method. Chapter 2 explicates and assesses model 1A: individual ethnic identity expressed, but no national territoriality in the consummation due to Israel's replacement by the church (classic covenantalism). Chapter 3 explicates and assesses another model 1 view (progressive covenantalism). Chapter 4 explicates and assesses model 2: classic dispensationalism and revised dispensationalism. Chapter 5

explicates and assesses model 3: individual ethnic identity and national territoriality present in a unified manner in the consummation (progressive dispensationalism). Finally, chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by offering a summary, areas for further research, and concluding reflections.

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