

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 8

REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY, PART 2

The only real brake on the movement of supersessionism in this age is dispensational theology. Dispensationalism is the only theological system that is completely dedicated to understanding what the Bible has to say about the nation of Israel. Understanding the Bible leads to understanding that God still has a program for Israel as a nation.

One of the claims made by progressive dispensationalists that allows them to claim they remain dispensationalists is their insistence they maintain the distinction between the church and Israel. But do they really, consistently affirm that distinction? I would maintain they do not. For example, Robert Saucy, one of the earliest progressive dispensational theologians along with Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, maintains the distinction but then, in a chapter entitled "The People of God, Israel and the Church," he spends a lot of ink blurring the distinction he made in the beginning of the chapter. It is also interesting to note the primary motivation behind the move from dispensational theology to progressive dispensationalism is as an effort to get along with theologians who espouse other theological systems all of whom are Replacement theologians. That's reflected in the title of Saucy's book, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology*. The primary means by which progressive dispensationalists accomplish this is by abandoning literal hermeneutics for what they call complementary hermeneutics which uses the New Testament to add information back into the Old Testament and this allows them to blur the distinction between Israel and the church. They embrace Kingdom now precepts and they apply the covenants to the church. They believe the New Covenant belongs to the church as well as to Israel and they believe the Davidic Covenant has been inaugurated with Christ sitting on the Davidic throne now. They subscribe to an already/not yet view of prophecy and Kingdom. To some extent they place some priority on historical theology which we know very quickly departed from sound biblical exegesis. While they do not claim the church has replaced Israel, they do blur the distinctions between the two by considering both entities together as one people of God.

"The crucial distinction between dispensational and non-dispensational interpretations of Scripture centers on the meaning of Israel and the church. As indicated in chapter 1, dispensationalism has undergone considerable modification recently, moving toward greater harmony with non-dispensationalism in some areas. Even on the crucial issue, many dispensationalists see much greater unity than that taught by their forerunners. Instead of asserting a radical dichotomy of purpose and destiny, they see both Israel and the church as belonging to the one people of God and serving one historical purpose. Nevertheless, a clear distinction between dispensationalists and non-

dispensationalists remains.... Dispensationalists traditionally have distinguished the church from Israel by many spiritual realities that were claimed to belong exclusively to the believers of the present church age. These centered on the body nature of the church and the related doctrines of the baptism with the Spirit and the indwelling Christ. We have argued in previous chapters that these spiritual realities are essentially the fulfillment of the promised new covenant salvation. Since this salvation was promised to both Israel and the nations, these realities that are new with the coming of Christ and the Spirit are not unique to the church. They belong to all God's people and are, in fact, that which finally binds them together as the people of God.... if the church and Israel—indeed, all the people of God of all ages—have these definitive spiritual realities in common, then we must ask whether Israel is included in the church. As we have seen, the 'body of Christ' metaphor applies to all who share in Christ's life, including future Israel. Does the fact that the body of Christ is expressly identified as 'the church' mean that the salvation of Israel involves incorporation into the church as the body of Christ? ... Believing Israel and the members of the church are one in their participation in the eschatological salvation of the new covenant. Because of the relationship to God that this entails, they are equally and together 'the people of God.'... [I]t should be noted that both the church and Israel are serving one, unified historical kingdom salvation. The emphasis in Scripture is thus on that which unifies rather than separates Israel and the church. They share in one salvation of God and participate in the one historical plan of the kingdom to bring it to fruition. But each does so in her own way." [Robert L Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology*, pp. 187, 208, 218].

The first thing to note in what Saucy had to say, is the bragging he did in establishing progressive dispensational theology as a modification of revised dispensationalism as developed by Walvoord, Ryrie, Pentecost and others in order to move closer to Reformed theology which embraces Replacement Theology. He specifically boasts of the unity developed in progressive dispensationalism; he is saying an enhancement in dispensational theology has replaced the old understanding. Under the "one people of God" rubric they bring together Israel and the church as one people serving one historical purpose. The church and Israel become one people of God in this system and that in some ways stretches back into the Old Testament, but it especially encompasses the eschatological future as well. He rather disingenuously says his system recognizes differences between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists and then, in other places in his book, he erases those differences. Which is it? This is the problem when literal hermeneutics are abandoned. It's hard to keep things straight when the theology is just being fabricated based on theological presuppositions rather than being based in the Bible. They assume that the New Covenant is being fulfilled now and since Jewish believers are baptized in the Spirit and indwelt by Christ, that must also reach into the eschatological future. In fact, he says this applies to all the people of God of all ages. Apparently, he believes Old Testament believers were permanently baptized in the Spirit and indwelt by Christ just as believers in the age of grace are baptized and indwelt. He even questions whether or not Israel is included in the church and his

answer is, "Yes." But Israel is not in the church; individual Jews may be in the church but that doesn't negate God's program for the nation in total. He is a Kingdom now advocate; he says both Israel and the church are serving one historical kingdom.

The point is, if progressive dispensationalists are not Replacement theologians, they couldn't say it any better to make it appear as though they do embrace that heresy. All of the books they have written were published about twenty years ago, so my assumption is in that time, they have moved even closer to Reformed theology and replacing Israel with the church.

One other important issue concerning progressive dispensational theology concerns the NET Bible. You know I use it for the notes in it concerning the reasons for translating it the way they did it. You need to be aware that the majority of the translators are progressive dispensationalists and at times that theology has an impact on their translation decisions. Be discerning and exercise caution when using the NET Bible but it is good for the most part in terms of understanding why they translated something the way they did it.

The basic hermeneutic used by progressive dispensationalists was defined by Bock as "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". They have given it the name complementary hermeneutics. This is in contrast to what he calls the "traditional dispensational view" which is "the OT revelation determines the meaning and defines the limits of the concept and thereby fixes the meaning." He also seems to refer to this as an "historical-exegetical" hermeneutic that is "primarily concerned with discerning the original author's message to his immediate audience in its specific, historical situation." Progressive dispensationalist also use a variety of other hermeneutical concepts to justify their theology. For example, "A theological-canonical reading views the text in light of subsequent revelation.... [T]he progress of revelation may 'refract' on an earlier passage so that the force of the earlier passage is clarified or developed beyond what the original author could have grasped." The word refract refers to a ray of light changing direction; therefore, the implication is New Testament revelation changes the meaning of the Old Testament in light of the New. [Darrell L. Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents: The New Testament's Legitimate, Accurate, and Multifaceted Use of the Old" in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, p. 116]. They use what they call a redemptive-historical hermeneutic to prove that the church and Israel have combined to form the one new man Paul identified in Ephesians 2. God's plan for a future Kingdom with Israel is no more and the church is not an accident of the failure of the Kingdom to begin but that simply made the way for God's plan and purpose that has always been centered in Christ. "Through the covenants, Messiah, and promises of Israel, they [the believing remnant of Israel] experience promised blessings in which Gentiles also participate. Their new relationship resides in the new man, 'the new temple' where God resides in a community of Jew-Gentile renewed by the Spirit and reconciled by Christ." [Carl B. Hoch, Jr., "The New

Man of Ephesians 2" in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 126]. In other words, national Israel is no more and Israel exists only as a believing remnant within the church. That's Replacement Theology. The emphasis on redemption is in conformity with the Reformed doctrine that the primary purpose of God is redemption.

Progressive dispensationalists claim they don't change the Old Testament meaning but just from this little bit we've examined here, they obviously do change it to suit their theology.

This is important because progressive dispensationalists have abandoned literal hermeneutics and the complete distinction between Israel and the church. Their purpose is to become more acceptable to Calvinist/Reformed/Covenant theological systems. If this new system continues to take over the revised dispensational system of Ryrie, Pentecost, and Walvoord, dispensationalism will cease to exist and it will become absorbed into Reformed theology. Progressive dispensational theology has, for the most part, taken over Dallas Seminary. If dispensational theology is lost, the back to the Bible movement dispensational theology brought into the church will be lost and Israel will be abandoned as Reformed theology has already abandoned them today. Don't think for a minute this move towards Reformed theology hasn't been noticed by Reformed opponents of dispensationalism either. They've noticed it and they like it.

Vern Poythress, a very vocal critic of dispensationalism, even claims he can envision progressive dispensationalists becoming amillennial in their theology because of their partial view of the Kingdom now. He speaks very favorably of progressive dispensationalism and very disparagingly of traditional dispensational doctrine. [Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, pp. 30-38]. It is interesting to note that Craig Blaising, provost of Southwest Baptist Seminary and a progressive dispensationalist, refers favorably to Poythress in the definitive progressive dispensational theology primer. [Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition" in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 32, n 60]. Actually, it seems more likely progressive dispensationalists will become, if they are not already, postmillennialists but the point they are abandoning premillennial Eschatology seems to be accurate.

A Reformed postmillennial theologian named Keith Mathison also recognizes that progressive dispensational theology is no longer normative dispensationalism. "The past fifteen years have witnessed some significant developments within the ranks of dispensationalists. Some dispensationalists have questioned and even discarded many of the traditionally distinctive teachings of dispensationalism. They have even gone so far as to reject the essential doctrine of dispensationalism—its radical church-Israel distinction.... Progressive dispensationalism is not dispensationalism. But neither is it Reformed. Still unchanged are a number of its doctrines of salvation. For now, 'progressive dispensationalism' is a generic form of premillennial, modified Arminianism. Its proponents are moving in the right direction in regard to the church and the end times. But honesty calls for us all to recognize that while they are not yet Reformed,

neither can they any longer be rightly called 'dispensational.'" [Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* pp. 135, 137].

Mathison goes on to absolutely scorch Dallas Seminary, which he once attended and does not mention by name but that's what he is talking about, for calling their seminary dispensational when they have clearly departed from it. He left DTS to go to Reformed Theological Seminary; he is closely associated with R. C. Sproul and Ligonier Ministries. "The church suffers far too much damage when people do not identify what they really believe. For the sake of accuracy, honesty, and understanding, 'progressive dispensationalists' should no longer claim to be dispensational. Traditional dispensationalists would likely concur. Do most dispensational laymen realize that the 'dispensationalism' now taught in their seminaries is not the dispensationalism they know? As much as I prefer to see Reformed theology taught in these seminaries, if someone is going to teach nondispensationalism in a dispensational seminary, students and donors should at least be aware of the fact. It is not enough to redefine the essential doctrines out of a system and call the resulting opposite teaching 'progressive.'" [Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* p. 137]. This is one thing I can agree with Mathison on; he is totally correct. Progressive dispensationalism is not dispensational and these men should not be teaching in a dispensational seminary. Mathison is alleging they are committing a fraud on the students and donors and he is completely correct. These men are not wolves in sheep's clothing in the sense of being unbelievers but they are being unfaithful to their calling. As Mathison put it so well, if they are going to abandon the basic tenets of dispensational theology and call it progressive to justify it, they are being dishonest. The larger share of the blame for all this is the men who were running DTS when all this started and they let it go on. They should have removed these men and DTS would likely still be what Chafer founded it to be.

The few seminaries I know of that are maintaining traditional dispensational doctrines are Tyndale Theological Seminary in Hurst, Texas, Chafer Theological Seminary in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Grace Biblical Seminary in McDonough, Georgia, Louisiana Baptist Theological Seminary in Shreveport, Louisiana, Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and the Grace School of Theology in The Woodlands, Texas. There are probably other solid dispensational seminaries I don't know about and this is not an exhaustive list but most seminaries are not solidly dispensational. I would no longer categorize Dallas Theological Seminary as dispensational because they have been coopted by progressive dispensational theologians.

One of the primary Scriptures Replacement theologians seem to use as justification for calling the church the true Israel is Galatians 6:16.

Galatians 6:16 ¹⁶And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and [καί] upon the Israel of God.

Replacement theologians uniformly claim Galatians 6:16 says the church is the Israel of God and therefore the church replaces Israel in God's plan for history. "Old Covenant Israel—the theocracy—has found its historical culmination and successor in the living community of Hebrew men and women who recognized in Jesus of Nazareth their long promised Messiah. This community of pious Jews forms the nucleus of the new theocracy—the new and true 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16)." [Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, p. 56]. That sounds no different than what progressive dispensationalist are saying about the one people of God or the one new man.

Michael Horton claims that Israel has not been replaced by the church but the church is the culmination of the Abrahamic Covenant because Jew and Gentile are both in the church in this age. "Thus it becomes clearer that we are dealing not with two peoples but with one, and not with a displacement of Israel but with its enlargement. While the national covenant (i.e., the theocracy) has come to an end, the Abrahamic covenant, according to which all nations will be blessed in Abraham and his seed, has reached its appointed goal. Jew and Gentile in Christ form one flock with one shepherd, not a replacement for the ancient people of God, but 'the Israel of God' indeed (Gal. 6:16). The inclusion of believing Gentiles is simply the realization of the promise made to the patriarchs and prophets: a promise to the Jews that is realized as blessing for the whole world." [Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way*, p. 719]. This is double-speak and I don't think progressive dispensationalists would be all that uncomfortable with it. Whether or not Horton wants to say the church has replaced Israel, the end result is the same and that is Israel is gone and absorbed into the church and there is no Kingdom program fulfilled in and with Israel. "Israel was the church of the old covenant; the NT church is the Israel of the new covenant, what Paul calls 'the Israel of God' in Galatians 6:16." [John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, p. 1018].

Replacement theologians try to make this verse conform to their theology by changing the word "and," *καί*, to "even." This is an attempt to equate the two clauses in the sentence and this is not the normal way to translate the word. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. pointed out that "in the absence of compelling exegetical and theological considerations, we should avoid the rarer grammatical usages when the common ones make good sense." [S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Paul and "The Israel of God": An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study" in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, p. 187]. Only one major translation uses "even" instead of "and" that being the NIV. A few other paraphrases are in agreement in various ways but they make no pretense of trying to be a more literal translation. They are clearly using their theology to translate the verse.

Galatians 6:16 ¹⁶Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God [NIV].

Galatians 6:16 ¹⁶Peace and mercy to those who follow this rule—and to all of God's people [NCV].

Galatians 6:16 ¹⁶May God's mercy and peace be upon all those who live by this principle. They are the new people of God [NLT].

All who walk by this standard are the true Israel of God—his chosen people. Peace and mercy on them! [The Message].

The NCV, the NLT, and The Message all make no pretense about imposing their theology into the text. The text comes nowhere near to saying these things. The NIV is subtler about it by imposing their theology only onto one word in the text.

"The phrase the Israel of God is found only here in the NT and probably refers to those ethnic Israelites who will come to believe in Messiah throughout the Church Age. The phrase is almost universally viewed as proving that the Church replaces Israel in God's program, or that the Church is the New Israel. But the statement is brief enough that it is unlikely to be able to bear this much theological freight." [Gerald Peterman, "Galatians" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, p. 1842]. The word "Israel" is used 73 times in 71 verses in the NASB and every time it refers to Israel as a national entity, that is, to the physical descendants of Abraham; it never means the church. Never!

"If we see the message of Galatians as a defense not only of justification by faith alone, but also of Paul's ministry of salvation to Gentiles as Gentiles, it becomes extremely unlikely that Paul would conclude his argument by calling Gentiles 'the Israel of God.' It is much more probable, in view of his strong condemnation of the Judaizers who sought to enslave the Gentile converts, that Paul sought to recognize also the validity of a true Israel. As Peter Richardson says, '... to prevent the Galatians from moving ... to a new Christian exclusiveness and sectarianism, he adds his prayer for mercy on God's faithful people.' Thus, whether the reference is to Jews in the church who were presently walking according to Paul's rule or to the 'all Israel' destined for eschatological salvation (Ro 11:26), it is more in line with the apostle's language, his overall theology, and the message of Galatians to view 'the Israel of God' as a reference to Jewish people." [Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology*, p. 201]. If Saucy is correct, and he is, Replacement theologians have interpreted this Scripture exactly backwards! That's what happens when theology is imposed on the text. Paul was referring to Jewish believers. This blessing is pronounced on believing Gentiles and on believing Jews. "Lest it be thought that Paul is anti-Semitic [and many theologians make that claim], he demonstrated by means of this benediction his deep love and concern for true Israel, that is, Jews who had come to Christ." [Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 611].

Notice here that I used the progressive dispensationalist Saucy for his view on this verse because it is correct. Where they are correct, I'll use them. But this also points out just how confused they are. In this case, he seems to be affirming a future for Israel and we know that in many other ways he believes Israel only has a future as part of the church.

This confusion wouldn't exist if he consistently used literal hermeneutics and if he correctly understood God's Kingdom program.

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