Dispensationalism – A Reformed Evaluation

by Ligon Duncan

https://www.the-highway.com/dispensationalism_Duncan.html

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 2. I want to point your attention to two verses. We are going to begin today by making some observations about Dispensationalism and then we are going to give a rapid overview to the Davidic Covenant and especially the establishment of the house of David in II Samuel 7. But first I want you to concentrate on two verses here at the end of Romans 2, 2:28-29. Hear God's Word.

> *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.*

Thus ends this reading of God's Holy Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's look to Him in prayer…

"Father, we thank you again for the opportunity to meet together as we study the history of theology, as we study your Word. We pray that both of those exercises would refresh us with the truth as well as brace us against error. And we pray that you would help us to embed the truth of your word in such a way as to live it out and to be competent to proclaim it to others for the sake of Christ and for His glory. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen."

You will see the logic of my reading that passage in a few moments as we discuss our topic today. I want to make a few comments to you today about the Theology of Dispensationalism. Those of you who have been reading Vern Poythress' book, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, have already gotten some idea of the intricacies of the dispensational system and why Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology are so diametrically opposed. I want to make a few historical comments about Dispensationalism and then I want to make a few theological comments about Dispensationalism with regard to different types of Dispensationalism, and then I want to draw some contrasts between Covenant Theology and the more classic forms of Dispensationalism. Let me start off with just some, some basic historical, theological comments.

A Brief Background to Dispensationalism

The dispensational system of theology, if we are honest, is actually a Nineteenth Century phenomenon. Now I don't want to get into an argument about these things. I know many good dispensationalists like to trace elements of dispensational teaching and belief way back into the history of the church. But as a historical theologian, and that is what I am by profession, I can pretty confidentially tell you that the system of dispensational theology is a Nineteenth Century phenomenon in the history of the church. It is particularly associated with John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren movement in Britain in the Nineteenth Century, and in America, with the name C.I. Scofield; Cyrus Ingersoll Scofield.

The dispensational movement created its own seminary in Dallas. And has for many years had control of a very theological journal, called, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, that has been sort of the official journal for Dispensationalism. And many of you are aware of Dallas Seminary and of Bib Sac and of folks in the Bible Church movement, who would be very much indebted to the dispensationalist tradition.

Dispensationalism is not necessary committed in and of itself, for or against Calvinism and Arminianism. Earlier this century, for instance, you would have found many people who would have identified themselves as Calvinists and dispensationalists. And you would have found some who would have held basically to an Arminian theological framework been dispensationalist. On my best information, Dallas today would officially have sort of an ambiguous approach towards Calvinism. In other words, there wouldn't be an out and out denial of Calvinism. Yet in fact, I am told that there is still a great deal of fear and discomfort with Calvinism at Dallas Theological Seminary. There are reasons for that which I won't go into right now. They will become clear later on.

Dispensationalists, of course, see their theological system to be in opposition to Covenant Theology, or Federal Theology. All Federalists have been Calvinists, but not all Dispensationalists have been Calvinists. It is highly significant that a Dispensationalist may be either Calvinistic or Arminian. This is not comparing apples and oranges. There are several similarities between Dispensationalism and the Arminian alternative to Covenant Theology. Many dispensationalists, however, contend that their system is simply an alternative to Federalism; both may be Calvinistic. But of course, rare is the dispensationalist who would aver that the 16th and 17th century Calvinists were dispensational. Most were Federalists.

Historically, they are separate systems. One began in the 16th century, the other in the 19th Dispensationalists would see their theological system to be more biblical than Covenant Theology, and they should be seen as rivals. There is no one on either side of the Dispensational/Covenant Theology Debate who would say, "Well, both of these sides are half right, we just sort of need to combine the two of them." They are diametrically opposed at so many points that it would be hopeless to attempt to come up with sort of a hybrid of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.

Differences - Eschatological

Now, the differences between Dipensationalism and Covenant Theology are not mainly in the area of Eschatology. When we say Eschatology, we are talking about usually the end time and especially the time of the coming of Christ. Dispensationalists are premillenial, because it is essential to their theological system, it is perhaps the fundamental point of Dispensationalism that Israel and the Church are distinct, and the Law-Gospel distinction must be preserved at all costs. That is the very heart and core of classic Dispensationalism. You should never, ever mix up Law and Gospel, and you should never ever mix up Israel and the Church

Classic dispensational, in addition to being premillenial, is also pretribulational. Essentially, to say that one is premillinaial means that one believes that Christ returns prior to the biblical millenium described in the book of Revelation chapter 20 and according to dispensationalists also mentioned elsewhere in the Scripture. To be pretribulational, means that you believe in a rapture of the church that occurs prior to the

great Tribulation mentioned in the book of Revelation, and again hinted at in other places in the Old and the New Testaments. So classic Dispensationalism has been both premillenial and it has been pretribulational.

For those of you who are familiar with eschatological views, for those who believe in a rapture, there are three views of a rapture. There is the pre tribulational view. That is the belief that Christians are raptured, or taken out of the world prior to the Great Tribulation.

There is the mid tribulational view. Believers are raptured out of the world in the midst of the Great Tribulation. And there is the post tribulational view, which says that believers are raptured out of the world, or Christians are raptured out of the world, after the Great Tribulation. All classic Dispensationalism, however, is premillenial and pretribulational. And I will explain why that is in just a few moments.

On the other hand, most Covenant Theologians have been either post— or amillenial. That is, they interpret the millennium described in Revelation 20 to be something that occurs prior to the return of Christ. Simply defined, postmillenial means that the coming of Christ is post, that is after the millenium, and amillenialism is just a sub category of post millenialism. You can only have two views at the time of the millenium. Christ is either coming before or after the millenium. Those are the only two possible views. So, amillenialism is a sub category of postmillenialism. All believers are either premillenialists or postmillenialists.

Amillenialists tend to stress the heavenly character of that millennium. They will, for instance, stress that the millenial reign is going on now, in heaven. It is a spiritual millenium. Whereas postmillenialists tend to stress a more earthly character to that millennium, and often times project it as a golden age which is yet to be experienced, but which will occur before the time of Christ. This is how many postmillenialists viewed it last century, B.B. Warfield, being a great example of that. If you want an example of Puritan postmillenialism, Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, describes the Puritans' view of the millenium and it was a post millenium view.

Now, there have been however, some who fall into the category of being Covenant Theologians who are premillenial. Horatius Bonar, Robert Murry McCheyne and some of the other great Scottish Calvinists last century. However, their type of premillenialism differs from dispensational premillenialism. For one thing, they were almost always not pre tribulational in their view of their rapture teaching.

Differences - Literal Israel and the Church

Now, as we have said, eschatology is not the fundamental difference between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism, but eschatology is simply an implication of the fundamental difference. The fundamental difference is actually seen in the difference between Israel and the church.

Dispensationalism, and again, allow me to speak in generalities, if you have read books like *Progressive Dispensationalism*, by Darrell L. Bock, and Craig A. Blaising, who are professors at Dallas, or have been professors at Dallas. You will know that Dispensationalists themselves acknowledge that there are multiple systems of Dispensational Theology, and Blaising and Bock come up with three basic categories of Dispensationalism. They say there is classic or historical Dispensationalism. There is revised or modified Dispensationalism. And there is progressive Dispensationalism. And

each of those different forms of Dispensationalism have a slightly different twist on how Israel and church relate.

Now, allow me to paint in broad brush, right now, not for the sake of tarring and feathering someone, but at least trying to get us to the nub of the issue. The fundamental difference between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism is this issue of Israel and the church. Dispensationalism stresses the literal fulfillment of prophecy about Israel and posits an essential difference between physical Israel and the church. If you have Dipensational friends who are discussing with you how you interpret Old Testament passages, and their fulfillment is seen in the New Covenant, almost always they will tell you something like this, "Well, I take the Bible literally and you are spiritualizing away these passages." Now what they really mean by that is they take the term Israel, literally. Now, everybody has to acknowledge symbolic elements in prophecy. Anybody who has read dispensational interpretations of the book of Revelation will see that it is very clear that dispensationalists also have a very symbolic approach to the meaning of Scripture, but what they mean , whereas you think that these prophesies about Israel and Judah in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the church and in the coming in of the Gentiles into the church, we dispensationalists do not believe that the Church is prophesied about in the Old Testament. And we believe that the prophesies about Israel and Judah in the Old Testament are to be literally fulfilled in Israel in Judah in the New Covenant.

Now, again, allow me to overstate it like that for emphasis. Because as you have already learned from Poythress, there are some dispensationalists who would want to say it differently than that. But we can't say everything at once, and we have got to start somewhere. So let me generalize like that. I don't think that it is an unfair characterization.

Now, Covenant Theology on the other hand, sees the Church as the fulfillment of Israel in New Covenant prophecy. Covenant Theology is happy to acknowledge the uniqueness of the Church, especially in its post-Pentecost phase. But Covenant Theology sees all believers in essential continuity. There are not two peoples of God. There is one people of God.

Covenant Theologians would agree that the forms, and especially the institutional forms of those people of God, was different under the Old and under the New Covenant. The form of the people of God under the Old Covenant was expressed primarily in Israel, which was an ethnic, ecclesiastical and national community, whereas in the New Covenant, the form of the people of God is, the institutional form of the people of God, is the Church. And the Church in the New Testament is trans ethnic and trans-national and purely ecclesiastical as opposed to ecclesiastical and civil. There is no question that there was a blending of matters civil and ecclesiastical in the Old Covenant for the people of God, but hat is not the case in the New Covenant.

Dispensationalism, however, contends that God has two peoples with two destinies. And again, I am speaking of a classic form of Dispensationalism. The two peoples of God, Israel and the Church, have two separate destinies. They see Israel, with the earthly millennial reign of David in the land of Israel restored to its Davidic and Solomonic boundaries. For the Church, there is heaven. So, for the dispensationalist, there are two peoples and two separate destinies, whereas Covenant Theology going back to its concept of the Church

and God's sovereign election from before the Creation, strenuously argues that there is only one people of God in all ages and there is only one destiny for all the people of God.

Now, you are beginning to see why I read Paul's words in Romans 2:28-29, because Paul obviously had a great concern to address precisely these kinds of issues. And in that passage, Paul makes it clear that not all Israel is Israel, cf. Romans 9:6. Okay. So he makes it clear that Israel was from the very beginning a spiritual entity, even though there was an external aspect to Israel; that circumcision was not simply a matter of an outward form and sign, but that there was an inward spiritual reality which was necessary for fellowship with God.

And that is one of the disputed points between the Covenant Theology perspective and the Dispensationsalists. The Covenant Theologian wants us to understand that Israel from the very beginning, had within her bounds, both the elect and the reprobate. And that God's promises were not made, as it were, as a shell simply to the external Israel, but to those who had indeed embraced and appropriated the promises of the Covenant with Abraham. God's plan is the same in the New Covenant as it was in the Old. And that is a disputed point between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.

Differences - Only One Plan From Eternity for All of God's People

Probably the greatest problem then, between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology concerns God's saving purposes in the Old Testament. Some of the older Dispensationalists used to actually even argue that salvation was by works in the Old Testament and by faith in the New Testament. Now, Poythress is very careful to note that most Dispensationalists today don't argue that particular point of view. But that was a very common point of view in some of the older Dispensational writings. And of course, Covenant Theologians point out that that would contradict the essential Reformation doctrine of sola gratia, or salvation by grace alone, if that were the case. Salvation is not only now, by grace alone, the Reformers argued, it has always been by grace alone since the Fall.

Now, more mainstream Dispensationalism has suggested that Old Testament believers were not saved by works, but by faith, but they differ from Covenant Theologians in their description of the nature of that faith. Some modern dispensationalists generally argue that the saving faith of the Old Testament was substantially and materially different from the saving faith of the New Testament. They tend to argue that sinners in the Old Testament were not justified by faith in the Gospel of the Messiah as sin-bearer (Christ crucified), but rather their faith was in promises that were peculiar to their individual era in redemptive history. So they may have received occasional messianic prophecy, but that was not essential to their saving faith, per se.

Now, this isn't just out of accord with Covenant Theology, but this is the area where Dispensationalism has been most out of accord with Protestant theology. This is out of accord with all Calvinism, all Lutheranism, and even mainstream Anabaptist thought at the Reformation, who all taught that Old Testament believers were justified by faith in the coming Messiah as sin-bearer. These Old Testament believers all heard the Gospel, the Reformers argued. How? Through the prophecies and types. Therefore, the essential content of their faith was materially the same in all ages, including the NT. So though the New Covenant believer may have a firmer grasp on the Gospel, because the events of the

Gospel are now retrospective for the New Covenant, yet the Gospel was set forth in shadows and in types to the Old Covenant believer. So that justifying faith in the Old Testament was in Messiah, was in Christ as sin bearer, and they were expecting His coming, whereas the New Covenant, looks back upon the finished work of Christ, the Messiah. That is a fundamentally Protestant point of view about saving faith in the Old Testament. And Dispensationalism tends to take issue with it.

So, the historic Protestant view is that the essential content of faith has been materially the same in all ages. Historical Protestant teaching is that no one has ever been justified except by faith in Christ crucified. That is the essence of the Reformation doctrine of sola fide, or salvation by faith alone. And so when classic forms of Dispensationalism disagree with that point, they are not just disagreeing with Covenant Theology, they are also disagreeing with Protestantism as a whole. And in that light, you see why it is impossible to harmonize the two systems. That fundamental difference is at the core. Calvinism has always held that the saints in both Old and in New Testament are all in Christ. They are part of the body of Christ, part of the bride of Christ, because of God's election.

Major distinctions between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism

Now, let's look then systematically at some differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. And if you can picture two columns, with Dispensationalism on one side and Covenant Theology on the other side. What I am going to try and do is give you a contrast between classic Dispensationalism and classic Covenant Theology. And again, I do it, having already told you that you will find variations on these views in Dispensationalism and you may even find some variation on some of these views by Covenant Theologians, but I am trying to generalize in order to help you see the distinction. Many times I will have people say, "I have a hard time explaining the differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology." I am giving these to help you understand.

1. First of all, Dispensationalists may be an Arminian or four point Calvinists, but Dispensationalists are almost never five point Calvinists. The point that they drop out, of course, is limited atonement. Covenant Theologians are, of course Calvinists by definition, of the five point variety. Covenant Theology, if it enforces anything, it enforces the Calvinistic doctrine of Limited Atonement. If Covenant Theology does anything, it sets in context a full orbed Calvinist doctrine of Particular Redemption.

2. Dispensationalists speak in terms of a literal interpretation of the Bible. This is a major rhetorical thing that you hear in discussion with Dispensationalist friends. "We interpret the Bible literally." Of course, the implication being that you don't. We interpret the Bible literally, you don't. You do something else to it. Whereas Covenant Theologians would argue, "We interpret the Bible literally, but, we believe that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament." We believe that the New Testament is the hermeneutical manual for the Old Testament. And Dispensationalists are suspicious of that. When you say that the New Testament must interpret the Old Testament, Dispensationalists get a little bit edgy, because they feel you are about to spiritualize something that the Old Testament has said for them very clearly. So that is a fundamental difference. The Covenant Theologian believes the New Testament has the final word as the meaning of that passage, whereas the Dispensationalists tends to want to interpret the Old Testament and then go to the New Testament and attempt to harmonize the particular teaching of the New Testament

with their previous interpretation of that Old Testament passage, rather than allowing the New Testament fundamental hermeneutical control.

In a classic example of this, Scoffield himself tells you that the most important passage in the Bible, from a Dispensational perspective is Amos chapter 9. Well, of course, Amos chapter 9 is interpreted in Acts chapter 15, but the interpretation of Amos chapter 9, that is given in Acts chapter 15 is diametrically opposed to the central principle of Dispensationalism. So how does the Dispensationalist deal with that? Well, he gives you his "literal interpretation" of Amos 9 and then simply attempts to harmonize the teaching of Acts 15 with his previous literal interpretation of Amos 9. Whereas the Covenant Theologian says no, "James tells you what Amos 9 means in Acts chapter 15, and therefore, James' interpretation must exercise all hermeneutical control even when you are doing your own original exegesis of Amos 9." Because if James says that is what Amos 9 means, and James is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts chapter 15, then that is what Amos 9 means. So you see a fundamentally different approach to Old Testament and New Testament interpretation.

3. Dispensationalists do not accept the Protestant idea of the analogy of faith., that "Scripture interprets Scripture." We find it in The Westminster Confession, you will find it in all of the Protestant confessions, and again, it gets back to that previous point that I was making. Dispensationalists are dubious about that principle, because they think that it is a way to spiritualize away literal prophecies in the Old Testament. And, very frankly, if you have classic Dispensational friends, they will suspect you as being just a little bit liberal, because you spiritualize away literal prophecies. Even if you say you believe in inerrancy, in authority, and inspiration, there will be a concern that you are hermeneutically actually spiritualizing away the meaning of Scripture. So they do not accept the analogy of faith.

On the Covenant Theology side, of course, we accept the analogy of faith. Scripture interprets Scripture. And for the Covenant Theologian, the New Covenant always has the final word as to the meaning of the Old Covenant passage. It doesn't mean that you don't start with the original context, and that you don't bother yourself about original intent, it just means that you recognize from a biblical theological standpoint that later revelation, by definition, controls the final Systematic Theological understanding of earlier revelation.

4. For the Classic Dispensationalist, Israel always means the literal physical descendants of Jacob. For the Covenant Theologian, Israel may mean the literal physical descendants of Jacob, or it may mean spiritual Israel which may be a subset of literal physical Israel, or it may actually be larger than the subset of literal physical Israel. It could refer to Gentiles as well. And that, is of course, is precisely the point that Dispensationalists must argue against

5. Dispensationalists say that Galatians 6:16, where Paul uses the phrase the Israel of God actually means physical Israel alone. However, Covenant Theologians tend to argue that Israel of God in Galatians 6:16 is a reference to spiritual Israel, paralleling it with Paul's other statements, for instance, in Galatians 3:29, Romans 2:20-28, which we read today, Romans 9:6 and Philippians 3:3.

6. For Dispensationalists, God has two peoples with two separate destinies; Israel with an earthly destiny, and the Church with a heavenly destiny. The Covenant Theologian, God has always had only one people. And though there is a sense in, however, views the church as a post Pentecost phenomenon, understands there is also a sense in which the Church is simply the people of God in all ages.

7. For the Dispensationalists, the Church began at Pentecost, not before. The people of God in the Old Testament were Israel, while the people of God in the New Testament are the church. Seventh on the Covenant Theology side, the church began with Adam, and of course, reaches its fulfillment and culmination in the New Testament. Covenant Theologians would point to the passages like Acts 7:38 where Stephen speaks about what? He is speaking of the Church in the wilderness, when he is actually speaking of Israel in the wilderness. .

8. According to classic Dispensationalism, the Church was not prophesied about in the Old Testament. There is no mention of the church in the Old Testament. It was a mystery until the New Testament. For Covenant Theologians, there are many Old Testament prophecies that speak of the Church.

9. All Old Testament prophesies about Israel are for the literal Israel, not for the Church. For the Dispensationalists, all Old Testament prophecies are for Israel, for physical Israel or for the literal Israel, but not for the church. For a Covenant Theologian, some Old Testament prophecies pertain to literal Israel, and some pertain to a spiritual Israel.

10. THE CHURCH. For the Dispensational side, the Church is a parenthesis in God's program for the ages. It is a temporary thing in the flow of history. You have heard the phrase "The Great Parenthesis", which is used for the time when Messiah came and the Jews shockingly rejected Him. This actually thwarted God's plan, because the original plan was for Messiah to come and set up a kingdom in Israel, but oops, the Jews rejected Him. At that point the prophetic clock stopped and we entered into the period of the Gentiles, the Great Parenthesis. That is a period about which there was no prophecy in the Old Testament. At the end of the period of the Great Parenthesis, the end of the time of the Gentiles, as the Dispensationalists interpret that section in Romans chapter 11, the Church is removed. That is the rapture. Then the prophetic clock starts ticking again, and God's dealings with Israel resume.

And by the way, that gives you a clue as to why a pre tribulation rapture is so important for consistent classical Dispensationalism, because you have to get rid of Gentile believers in the program of God, before you can get on with the work that God is doing with literal physical earthly Israel. And that is why mid-trib and post-trib Dispensationalism does not work; because you are mixing up God's dealings with the church and through earthly Israel. So, pre tribulational rapturist functions in Dispensationalist eschatology to remove the Church so that God's program for Israel can resume. You get the Church out of the way before the tribulation, and then things start happening amongst the Jews. By the way, this stuff is hot on the market again. The Tim LaHaye, *Left Behind* novels are out, and I guarantee people in your congregations are reading them. I don't care where you are going, where you are attending, I guarantee you there are some people there that are reading those novels and they are really old, classic Dispensationalism where some people disappear one day and others are left behind.

On the other hand, for Covenant Theologians, the Church is the culmination of God's saving purposes for the ages. The Church is God's great masterpiece. It is the bride of Christ, the body of Christ.

11. For Dispensationalism in its classic form, the main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel. The Covenant Theologian understands that the main heir to Abraham's covenant was Christ and spiritual Israel; and spiritual Israel is all who have faith in Him.

12. For Dispensationalism, of course, there is no covenant of redemption within the Trinity. There is no inter-trinitarian covenant. For Covenant Theology, however, there is an inter-trinitarian covenant which effects election.

13. For Dispensationalists, there was no Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden. Whereas, Covenant Theology believes that God made a conditional covenant of works with Adam as representative for all his posterity.

14. Furthermore, for Dispensationalism, there was no Covenant of Grace with Adam. Whereas for Covenant Theology, God made a Covenant of Grace with Christ and His people including Adam.

15. For Dispensationalism, Israel was rash to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai. You remember we read that Scoffield said, "That was a big mistake. The children of Israel should have said, 'We don't want law, we want grace.'" For Covenant Theology, Israel didn't have a choice as to whether to accept the covenant arrangement at Sinai. It wasn't an option.

16. For Dispensationalism, the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is for literal Israel. The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 was for literal Israel and is not fulfilled in Luke 22:20. For the Covenant Theologian, the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is the same as the New Covenant spoken of by the Lord Jesus in Luke 22. And both are for spiritual Israel.

17. For classic Dispensationalists, God's program in history is mainly through separate dispensations. And for Covenant Theologians, God's program in history is mainly through related and progressive covenants. So naturally you would expect Dispensationalism to stress what? Discontinuity in redemptive history, while Covenant Theology stresses continuity, although that is not an absolute for either.

18. As we have mentioned before, some Dispensationalists have argued that salvation was by works in the Old Testament, whereas Covenant Theology argues that no man has been saved by works since the fall. Salvation is by grace. Also,

19. Many Dispensationalists teach that the nature of Old Testament faith is different from the nature of New Testament faith. The nature of Old Testament and New Testament faith is different. Whereas, Covenant Theologians argue that all those who have ever been saved, have been saved by faith in Christ as their sin bearer, though that has been progressively revealed with greater fullness as God unfolded His plan of redemption.

20. Classic Dispensationalists will argue that the Old Testament sacrifices were not recognized by the Old Testament saints as Gospel types. They were only seen as such in retrospect. Whereas Covenant Theologians will argue that the Old Testament believers believed in the Gospel of the Messiah as sin bearer through the sacrifices their types and prophecies.

21. Dispensationalists argue that the Holy Spirit only indwells New Testament believers; He did not indwell Old Testament believers. And He will not indwell believers after the rapture. And of course, the Covenant Theologian argues that there is no such thing as a believer who is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

22. Dispensationalists teach that Jesus made an offer of the kingdom to literal Israel, but Israel rejected it and so the kingdom was postponed. Covenant Theologians teach that Jesus of course proclaimed the kingdom of heaven, which from the outset was a spiritual kingdom, and though it was rejected by many Jews, it was also accepted by many Jews and Gentiles alike.

23. Dispensationalists teach that Old Testament believers are not in Christ. They are not part of the body or bride of Christ. That is the Dispensational view. On the Covenant Theology side, believers in all ages are in Christ.

24. Dispensationalists teach that the law has been abolished for believers in the New Covenant. Or, should I put it this way, for believers in the church age. And some will go as far as to argue that the Sermon on the Mount is not for Christians. The Sermon on the Mount is for the kingdom age, and so we can only indirectly learn from the Sermon on the Mount. In contrast, the Covenant Theology teaches that the law continues to have three uses in the New Covenant: to restrain sin, to lead to Christ, and to instruct Christians in godliness. Those are the three uses of the law.

25. Dispensationalists teach that Old Testament laws are not in effect unless they are repeated in the New Covenant or in the New Testament. And of course, Covenant Theologians teach that the Old Testament moral law remains in effect in the New Covenant, though the civil and ceremonial laws have been abrogated.

26. For the Dipsensationalists, the millennium is the kingdom of God. For Covenant Theologians, the kingdom of God is much broader than merely the millennium. The church is its institutional form, and Covenant Theologians are usually a millennial or post millennial.

27. Dispensationalists believe that Old Testament animal sacrifices will be restored in the millennium, whereas Covenant Theologians believe that the Old Testament sacrifices were fulfilled in Christ and have been abolished forever. And finally,

28. Classic Dispensationalists teach that David will reign on the millennial throne in Jerusalem in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. And Covenant Theologians teach that Christ is reigning on the throne and His saints will rule under Him and the new earth. That is a quick outline.

DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY	COVENANT THEOLOGY
1. May be Arminian or modified Calvinist. Almost never 5-point Calvinist.	1. Always Calvinist. Usually 5 point.
2. Stresses 'literal' interpretation of the Bible.	2. Accepts both literal and figurative interpretation of the Bible.
3. Usually does not accept the idea of the 'Analogy of Faith.'	3. Almost always accepts the idea of the 'Analogy of Faith.'
4. 'Israel' always means only the literal, physical descendants of Jacob.	4. 'Israel' may mean either literal, physical descendants of Jacob or the figurative, spiritual Israel, depending on context.
5. Israel of God' in Gal. 6:16 means physical Israel alone.	5. 'Israel of God' in Gal. 6:16 means spiritual Israel, parallel to Gal. 3:29, Rom. 2:28-29, 9:6, Phil. 3:3.
6. God has 2 peoples with 2 separate destinies: Israel (earthly) and the Church (heavenly).	6. God has always had only 1 people, the Church gradually developed.
7. The Church was born at Pentecost.	7. The Church began in the O.T. (Acts 7:38) and reached fulfillment in the N.T.
8. The Church was not prophesied as such in the O.T. but was a hidden mystery until the N.T.	8. There are many O.T. prophecies of the N.T. Church.
9. All O.T. prophecies for Israel are for literal Israel, not the Church.	9. Some O.T. prophecies are for literal Israel, others are for spiritual Israel.
10. God's main purpose in history is literal Israel.	10. God's main purpose in history is Christ and secondarily the Church.
11. The Church is a parenthesis in God's program for the ages.	11. The Church is the culmination of God's saying purpose for the ages.
12. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel.	12. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Christ and spiritual Israel.
13. There was no eternal Covenant of Redemption within the Trinity.	13. The eternal Covenant of Redemption was within the Trinity to effect election.
14. There was no Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden of Eden.	14. God made a conditional Covenant of Works with Adam as representative for all his posterity.

15. There was no Covenant of Grace concerning Adam.	15. God made a Covenant of Grace with Christ and His people, including Adam
16. Israel was rash to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai.	16. Israel was right to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai.
17. The 'New Covenant' of Jer. 31:31- 34 is only for literal Israel and is not the New Covenant of Lk. 22:20	17. The 'New Covenant' of Jer. 31 is the same as in Lk. 22; both are for spiritual Israel according to Heb. 8.
18. God's program in history is mainly through separate dispensations.	18. God's program in history is mainly through related covenants.
19. Some Dispensationalists have said that O.T. sinners were saved by works.	19. No man has ever been saved by works, but only by grace.
20. Most Dispensationalists teach that men in the O.T. were saved by faith in a revelation peculiar to their Dispensation, but this did not include faith in the Messiah as their sin-bearer.	20. All men who have ever been saved have been saved by faith in Christ as their sin-bearer, which has been progressively revealed in every age.
21. The O.T. sacrifices were not recognized as the Gospel or types of the Messiah as sin-bearer, but only seen as such in retrospect.	21. O.T. believers believed in the Gospel of Messiah as sin-bearer mainly by the sacrifices as types and prophecies.
22. The Holy Spirit indwells only believers in the Dispensation of Grace, not O.T. and not after the Rapture.	22. The Holy Spirit has indwelt believers in all ages, especially in the present N.T. era, and will not be withdrawn.
23. Jesus made an offer of the literal Kingdom to Israel; since Israel rejected it, it is postponed.	23. Jesus made only an offer of the spiritual Kingdom, which was rejected by literal Israel but has gradually been accepted by spiritual Israel.
24. O.T. believers were not 'in Christ,' nor part of the Body or Bride of Christ	24. Believers in all ages are all 'in Christ' and part of the Body and Bride of Christ.
25. The Law has been abolished.	25. The Law has 3 uses: (1) to restrain sin in society, (2) to lead to Christ, (3) to instruct Christians in godliness. The ceremonial laws have been abolished; the civil laws have been abolished except for their general equity; the moral laws continue.
26. O.T. laws are no longer in effect unless repeated in the N.T.	26. O.T. laws are still in effect unless abrogated in the N.T.

27. The Millennium is the Kingdom of God. Dispensationalists are always Pre-Millennial and usually Pre-Tribulational.	27. The Church is the Kingdom of God. Covenanters are usually Amillennial , sometimes Pre-Millennial or Post-Millennial, rarely Pre-Tribulational.
28. The O.T. animal sacrifices will be restored in the Millennium.	28. The O.T. sacrifices were fulfilled and forever abolished in Christ.
29. The Millennium will fulfill the Covenant to Abraham. Israel has a future.	29. Christ fulfilled the Covenant to Abraham. Some Covenanters believe in a future for literal Israel, most don't.
30. David will sit on the Millennial throne in Jerusalem.	30. Christ alone sits on the throne. Saints rule under Him.

Author

Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III, a native of Greenville, South Carolina, was born and reared in the home of an eighth generation Southern Presbyteria Ruling Elder. A 1983 graduate of Furman University, he received an MDiv from Covenant Theological Seminary and studied Systematic Theology at the Free Church of Scotland College under Professor Donald Macleod. He earned the PhD from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1995.

He served on the staff of The Covenant Presbyterian Church of St. Louis from 1984-1987, and supplied pulpits in churches of the Presbyterian Association of England, Church of Scotland, and Free Church of Scotland while in Britain from 1987-1990. In 1990 he was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and joined the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), Jackson, Mississippi where he was Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology, and the John R. Richardson Professor of Theology. At RTS he was responsible for teaching courses such as Systematic Theology, Ethics, Apologetics, History of Philosophy and Christian Thought, Covenant Theology, Patristics, Evangelism, and Theology of the Westminster Standards. He became the Senior Minister of First Presbyterian, Jackson in 1996.