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Introduction

Background and Reason for Writing

This book originated as a short presentation for public discussion. A group of Amils and Premils got together (along with some of us who are not convinced of any prophetic position) and discussed each other's view in the same session. Three different men spoke on the subject "Who is Abraham's Seed?" This was followed by a long and profitable discussion period. I was one of the three speakers and having been assigned the *middle* position my preparation became the foundation for this book.

Several years later, I presented a twenty page paper entitled *Abraham's Four Seeds* at a 'reformed' pastors' meeting in Toronto, Canada. I was encouraged to enlarge it and develop some of the applications to 'Dispensationalism' and 'Covenant Theology'. The result is as much a study of the basic presuppositions of these two systems of theology as it is a clear-cut study of Abraham's seed. Thus, the lack of logical flow and the long digressions at times. However, since the real purpose of the book is not Abraham's seed for its own sake, but rather to demonstrate how a correct understanding of that subject is a key to harmonizing Scripture, it seemed wise to digress as far as was necessary when either Dispensationalism or Covenant Theology was directly involved. There is, therefore, at times the necessity for a lengthy discussion of the basic position of either, or both, of these systems of theology. Some of these digressions appear as an appendix.

Appendix 1 is a brief outline of Covenant Theology using the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as a source. Appendix 2 does the same with Dispensationalism using the *Scofield Reference Bible* and *Major Bible Themes* by Lewis Sperry Chafer, as revised by John F. Walvoord. If the reader is not familiar with those systems, it might be well to read these two appendices before reading the book itself.

Appendix 3 deals with Covenant Theology's insistence on using theological terms instead of Scripture texts, and repeats some of the material in the main text. I am not suggesting that we must never use

theological terms, but I am urging that we not use them as the foundational blocks of our system, as both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism do. The basic presuppositions of any system of theology must be established with specific texts of Scripture and not with theological terms. Otherwise, our basic building blocks will be the product of logic and not of the Word of God itself. We must not produce a theological lingo derived only by “good and necessary consequences” deduced from our system, and then force those theological terms into the Scripture, refusing to allow the words used by the Holy Spirit to mean what they actually say. Human logic must never become a tool more valuable than texts of Scripture in either establishing or teaching truth. Logic is a good mistress, but a bad master.

Appendix 4 is a short exposition of Acts 2:39, showing how it cannot be used as a proof text for infant baptism.

As New Covenant Theologians, we believe that historic Dispensationalism, as a system, is not biblical (even though it contains truth and is held by many godly men) simply because its basic presuppositions are either assumed or wrongly deduced from their theological system. We are also convinced that Covenant Theology, as a system, is just as unscriptural for the same reasons (even though it also has truth and many godly exponents). Until recently most people felt that one had to believe one or the other of these two systems.

Many people today, especially young pastors from various backgrounds, are exegeting the Word of God and discovering that one does not have to be locked into either Dispensationalism or Covenant Theology. They are also discovering that the Reformation, great as it was, never totally got rid of all of Rome's errors. Some great men brought some ‘priestcraft’ over into their basic presuppositions at the time of the Reformation. Their view of the relationship between church and State (the doctrine of Sacralism) is the logical conclusion and application of their Covenant Theology. It was this view that kept the Puritans from establishing churches that could live and worship consistently in the spirit of the New Covenant. Their view of the ordained ministry (‘holy orders’) made any practical use of the “priesthood of believers” impossible. This is also the reason that present day Presbyterian groups, such as the P.C.A., cannot effectively deal with the issue of Theonomy within their ranks. The Theonomists have both the Westminster Confession and Puritan history on their side.

Reformed Baptists are among the leaders in the present day revival of Calvinistic literature. On the one hand, we gladly acknowledge our debt to the Reformers and Puritans and do not hesitate to own them as our forefathers in certain aspects of our faith. On the other hand, we also know that those same men, almost without exception, bitterly persecuted, and in some instances, actually killed some of our other forefathers among the early Baptists. We find ourselves in the odd position of being stepchildren of both the Reformers and the Anabaptists, but the true heirs of neither.

Our clear-cut view of the Doctrines of Grace and the unity of the Scriptures aligns us with the Reformers and the Puritans. The Anabaptists will never teach anyone the Doctrines of Grace. Our view of the unity of the Scriptures makes it impossible for us to accept the Dispensationalism set forth in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. On the other hand, our Baptist view that the New Covenant in Jesus Christ has replaced the Old Covenant at Sinai makes it just as impossible for us to accept the Covenant Theology set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. It was that very Covenant view of Scripture that was used by the Puritans to justify the use of the steel sword against our Baptist forefathers. The true heirs of the Puritan view of Covenant Theology are those who, today, espouse what is called Theonomy. Some people feel that if the Theonomists were to gain control, Baptist blood—along with other kinds—would once more be shed in the name of ‘God’s holy truth.’

Increasing numbers of writers and preachers are demonstrating that both historic Dispensationalism and classic Covenant Theology are bankrupt as far as being complete systems. Both systems are being greatly modified today, and there is a move toward seeing some truth in both systems. In no sense does this mean there is an attempt to synthesize the two systems. It means that people in both camps are starting with the Scriptures and discovering two things. They are seeing that (1) their own system is not totally consistent with many texts of Scripture, and (2) those same texts are forcing them to accept some things held by the other system. This is happening simply because honest men are admitting that they simply cannot prove some of their basic presuppositions with actual texts of Scripture. They realize that they assume the basic system before they ever get to the Word of God

itself. Many young men are seeing that both of these systems *assume as facts* their basic presuppositions without any clear biblical proof.

The Word of God itself is once more becoming the final authority in the conscience of Christians. The footnotes in Bibles, the pronouncements of men with papal personalities, and the creeds of our fathers no longer exercise unqualified control over the minds and hearts of many sheep. The cry, "What saith the Scriptures themselves?" is being heard in the land as it has not been since the days of the Reformation. Some of us dare to believe that this may be the generation that shall see the remaining vestments of Rome removed from our Calvinistic churches.

There is no question that we are seeing a reformation of the church. It is the prayer of many that our generation will emulate the great accomplishments of the Puritans and Reformers and also avoid the tragic mistakes they made. We need a 'reformed' reformation and not just a repeat of the sixteenth century. I repeat here what I wrote in my booklet *When Should A Christian Leave A Church?*:

Let us not make the same mistakes that the Reformers made. They thoroughly reformed the gospel message of justification by faith but failed to reform some other doctrines. They threw out *justification* by the works of the law, but held on to *sanctification by the law*. They rejected the church's authority over your *soul*, but hung on to the church's authority over your *conscience*. They discarded *priestcraft* and substituted *clericalism*. They rejected the authority of church *tradition* (which taught Papal infallibility) but replaced it with *man-made creeds* that soon became as authoritative as Scripture. In reality they replaced a two-legged Pope with a paper Pope. They cried "Sola Scriptura," while waving a creed in one hand and a sword in the other.

Chapter One

The Importance of Abraham's Seed

Abraham is one of the most important men in all history; and, next to our Savior himself, he is one of the most significant individuals in all the Scripture. The following will serve to demonstrate Abraham's importance.

1. Abraham is the only man who was ever called "the friend of God" (Isa. 41:8; James 2:23) by any writer of Scripture. Abraham's friendship with God, or "justification by grace through faith," is used by Paul to prove the single pattern of "salvation by grace through faith" for all believers of all ages (Rom. 4).
2. All of Scripture from Genesis 12 to the end of the book of Revelation is the story of Abraham and his 'seed' as that seed relates to the rest of mankind.
3. No two men (apart from Adam) in all of Scripture or history are related to each other as Abraham and Christ as it concerns their seed.
4. Every blessing of God experienced by the nation of Israel was only because of God's promise to Abraham. In fact, they were delivered from Egypt and formed into a nation at Sinai only because of their physical relationship to Abraham.

... and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered **his covenant with Abraham**, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto *them* (Ex. 2:23–25).

5. Christ came into this world "To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:72, 73).
6. The apostles preached the gospel as the fulfillment of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, **saying unto Abraham**, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities (Acts 3:25–26).

7. It is impossible to even begin to understand the book of Galatians without grasping the significance of Abraham and his relationship to believers today. All who are “of faith” are “Abraham’s children” (Gal. 3:7), and are “blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal. 3:9). Christ died on the cross so that “the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles” (Gal. 3:14).

8. Abraham enjoyed God’s inheritance of justification by faith in the gospel promise concerning Christ (Gal. 3:6–9, 18), and you and I, who believe the same gospel message today, enjoy the same inheritance of justification because by faith, we are “Abraham’s true seed,” and the true “heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

I repeat my original statement. Next to Christ himself, Abraham is one of the most significant men in all the Scriptures. No two people are related to each other as it concerns their ‘seed’ as are Abraham and Christ. The whole of the history of redemption revolves around “Abraham and his seed.” There is no information that will help us to see the one unifying message of redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ in both the OT and NT Scriptures as much as knowing exactly what was promised to Abraham and his seed and who that seed is to whom those promises were made. This is a significant difference that separates Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology at their basic starting points.

Up to this point our study has been easy. Everyone will agree with the biblical texts and the one major conclusion concerning the importance of Abraham. There are many questions that should be raised and discussed. The answers to the following questions are not only basic to an understanding of Abraham and the promises made to his seed; they also form the foundation of our approach to the whole Scripture. Our view of history, prophecy, the future of the Jews, the nature of the church, baptism, the kingdom of God, the relationship of the law and the gospel and many other things are radically affected by how we answer these questions.

Basic Questions about Abraham and His Seed

1. Exactly *to whom* is Scripture referring in the various passages that speak of Abraham’s seed? It is obvious that all the natural children of Abraham are not ‘reckoned’ as his seed as it applies to God’s Covenant.
 - a. Does Abraham’s seed always mean the same people?

- b. How many different meanings can it have?
- c. How do we know for sure which particular meaning, or people, is meant in a specific passage? When does Abraham's seed include the following:
 - (1) Isaac but not Ishmael,
 - (2) Jacob but not Esau or
 - (3) a Christian Gentile but not a Jew?
- 2. Exactly what specific blessing, or blessings, were promised to Abraham's seed in the different passages? Jacob was given promises that Esau his twin brother was not. How would Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, Jacob and a New Covenant Gentile believer fit into the answer to each of the following questions:
 - a. Is the 'blessing of Abraham' one thing, or is it more than one?
 - b. Are there different blessings for different seeds?
 - c. Do all of the different seeds of Abraham get some of the same blessings?
 - d. Are some blessings given only to one specific seed, or to several seeds?
 - e. How do we know for sure which particular blessing is meant in a specific passage?
- 3. What are the precise conditions upon which any specific blessing, or blessings, will be realized by a particular seed? The promises upon which the church, as Abraham's seed, is built are not the same as the promises upon which the nation of Israel, also Abraham's seed, was founded.
 - a. Are some of the promises to Abraham and his seed made with 'conditions' and others made 'unconditionally'? How do we differentiate?
 - b. Are some blessings automatically guaranteed by physical birth and other blessings obtained only by personal faith?
 - c. How do we know which particular condition applies to which blessing and which seed in a particular verse?
- 4. Are all of the promises made to Abraham unconditional; that is, once a promise is made, it cannot be revoked, or are some of the promises

so connected to other things that they are withdrawn under certain circumstances? For example, are they revocable because the condition under which the promises were made has been changed?

- a. Are the promises that were made to Abraham and repeated to the nation of Israel concerning the land of Palestine
 - (1) now ended,
 - (2) spiritually fulfilled in the church,
 - (3) or 'postponed' to be fulfilled in a future earthly millennium?
 - b. Which promises to Abraham's seed in the OT Scriptures do we 'spiritualize,' and which ones are to be understood in 'natural' or 'physical' language?
5. Exactly how do we apply the answers to these questions today regarding
- a. The nature of the church and its relationship to the nation of Israel in the past, present, and future?
 - b. The relationship of the Old Covenant to the New Covenant?
 - c. The purpose and function of the law at Sinai and in the church today?
 - d. The meaning and subjects of baptism and the relationship of baptism and circumcision?
 - e. The relationship between church and state?
 - f. Millennialism?

It will be impossible to answer all of these questions in this book. I would only hope to stimulate others to do some extensive work on each question. Every one of these questions is tied into our understanding of the blessings that were promised to Abraham and his seed. The really basic differences between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism are over these questions. The answers to these questions are also one of the basic reasons that I, as a Baptist who is basically Reformed in his theology, cannot accept the basic presuppositions of either Dispensationalism or Covenant Theology.

By the way, the term *Dispensationalism* in this book is referring to the system as defined and set forth in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. The phrase *Covenant Theology* refers to the system as defined and set forth

in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. I use those two sources only as points of reference. Readers must judge for themselves where they do, or do not, agree with either designation. I think we will all agree that these two sources give an accurate view of the basic presuppositions of these respective systems of theology as they have been defined and accepted historically. I am aware that many people have greatly modified both of these systems of theology. I question if some of the individuals are being intellectually honest when they continue to apply either of these labels to themselves. Some men have more than modified their positions; they have actually changed the basic presuppositions upon which their respective systems rest.

The real difference between a historic Baptist and a Paedobaptist (those who baptize babies) is not the mode of baptism, but rather “who is the true heir of God’s promise to Abraham and his seed?” The answer to that question is also my real difference with both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism. Both the Dispensationalist and the Covenant Theologian insist on making ‘physical children’ to be the objects of God’s promise to Abraham and his seed. It is rather amazing (and to a Reformed Baptist, amusing as well) to hear a Dispensationalist plead the *unconditional covenant made with Abraham and his seed* as the foundation of his belief in a separate and future purpose for the nation of Israel, and then hear a Paedobaptist plead the *very same unconditional covenant made with Abraham and his seed* as the foundation for his infant baptism. It is obvious that one, or both, of these theological camps is confused about *who* Abraham’s seed is and exactly *what* specific blessing was promised to that seed.

As you can see, we are asking some very important questions. We are dealing with some of the basic presuppositions upon which whole systems of theology are built. If the Dispensational view of Abraham and his seed can be proven from Scripture, then Covenant Theology cannot be a correct approach to understanding God’s Word. On the other hand, if Covenant Theology can exegetically establish its view of Abraham and his seed from the Scriptures, then not only is Dispensationalism nonsense, but the Baptist view of baptism is proven to be a denial of the major covenant promise given to Christian parents. Baptists are literally guilty of heresy if Covenant Theology is correct. If neither Dispensationalism nor Covenant Theology can prove from Scripture *alone* that they really understand Abraham and his seed (and

many Reformed Baptists are thoroughly convinced that neither of them can do so), then both of these systems may be wrong at their starting points.

I am sure we all realize that real agreement on the answers to the foregoing questions would eliminate many of the divisions among evangelical Christians. The questions about baptism, the church, prophecy, the Jews, law/gospel, etc., would all be resolved if we could agree on what God really promised Abraham and his seed. The rest of this book will attempt to address a few of the questions raised in the foregoing list.¹ However, I repeat that my main purpose is to deal with *basic presuppositions*. Our views on all of the subjects just mentioned are determined by our basic starting points. *If our starting points are wrong, then everything that totally depends on that foundation is also suspect.* It is my goal to clearly demonstrate that the starting points of *both* Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism, considered as complete 'Systems of Theology,' are not established with the Word of God but with logic applied to previously accepted theological concepts that may or may not be true. Both systems do exactly the same thing that evolution does. They *assume* the system is true without proving the basic assumptions and then establish specific doctrines by applying logic to the assumed 'facts' or system. Everything seems to fit as long as one does not try to prove the basic presuppositions. This is when the whole system is seen to rest on arbitrary assumptions.

SEED versus SEEDS

Several things will help us in looking for clear answers to our questions. First of all, we must realize that the Scriptures themselves make a clear distinction between Abraham's seed (singular) and seeds (plural), and that this distinction is vitally important. Paul argues that the real promise that God made was to Abraham and a specific *singular* seed and not *plural* seeds. The following text is crucial to a correct

¹ I should mention in the very beginning that this book assumes that the reader is familiar with theology and theological terms. Those who have been subjected to only one view of theology may find this paper tough going. It has been written primarily for those who are basically familiar with both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology but not totally committed to either. This material will be of especial interest to those involved with the present discussion of Law and Grace.

understanding of Paul's use of the OT promise of God to Abraham and *his seed*:

Now to Abraham and his **seed** [singular] were the promises made. He saith not, And to **seeds** [plural] as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, **which is Christ** (Gal. 3:16).

We may not agree on exactly what promises Paul was talking about in the above text, but one thing is certain: the seed to whom the true promises were made cannot involve the use of a plural to describe the *objects* of the promise. It must be a singular seed and not plural seeds. The importance of Paul's dogmatic argument is obvious. If our theological view holds that the "promise to Abraham and his seed" (singular) involves either the Jews and their physical children (plural) or Christian parents and their children (plural), then we are contradicting Paul's statement in Galatians 3:16. This clear fact cannot be denied.

Paul's whole argument, based on the Holy Spirit's use of the singular seed instead of plural seeds, is that the promises were made to Abraham and one particular seed, namely Christ. Any attempt to make Abraham's seed refer to either the Jews or to Christian parents in this passage is to destroy Paul's whole argument. We can assert with apostolic authority that the seed of Abraham to whom the promises were made has absolutely *nothing* to do with *physical birth*. It does not matter if the physical birth was into a Jewish or a Christian home.

The true promise that God made, and the real inheritance of that promise, are given to Abraham as the *father of Christ* and not to Abraham as the father of the Jews or the church. We, as believers, only inherit any blessing promised to Abraham because of our *spiritual* connection to Abraham, and it should go without saying that physical birth cannot relate either us or our children to Abraham *spiritually*.

Obviously this was just as true in the OT as it is in the NT. Theologians of all persuasions often lose sight of this clear biblical fact. This principle was true for a Jew, regardless of when he lived. Neither a Jew himself, nor his physical children, ever inherited a spiritual blessing just because he was born into a Jewish home and was circumcised. He had to have true faith.

This principle is also just as true for a Christian parent today and for the same reason. One must be spiritually related to Abraham in order to receive any spiritual blessing promised to Abraham, and neither physical

birth and circumcision nor physical birth and baptism can make one spiritually related to Abraham. Physical birth in a specific home cannot guarantee that a child is “under the covenant of grace” and therefore in a special spiritual category before God.²

Neither a Jewish birth certificate accompanied by circumcision nor a Christian birth certificate accompanied by baptism ever made anyone heir to a single spiritual promise made to Abraham. Union with Christ that is produced by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit because of electing grace is the only ground for any person being the object of any spiritual promise given to Abraham and his seed (Rom. 9:11, 23, 24). Both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology either deny or totally ignore this clear biblical fact.

The second thing that will help us is the clear two-fold meaning that the Scriptures themselves give to the *promises* made to Abraham. The writer of Hebrews sets forth this fact several times. In both of the following passages, we are urged to imitate Abraham's persevering faith if we expect to receive the blessing promised:

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had **patiently endured**, he **obtained the promise** (Heb. 6:13–15).

In Hebrews 11, the writer says the *exact opposite*. After mentioning Abraham specifically in verses 11 and 12, the writer makes this statement:

All these people [including Abraham] were still living by faith when they died. They *did not receive the things promised* ...These were all commended for their faith, yet *none of them* [including Abraham] received what had been promised (Heb. 11:13, 39 NIV).

Now it is obvious that the promise of a seed to Abraham was fulfilled when Isaac was born, and it is equally obvious that the real promise of a seed to Abraham was not fulfilled until Christ came. In other words, the promises to Abraham must have both a physical and a spiritual application. However, we must insist that there are not *two different*

² Baptists believe in baptizing every covenant child included in the promise made to Abraham and his seed. However, they insist that saving faith is the prerequisite and only proof that any given person is the seed of Abraham and an heir to that promise.

things promised, but rather, the physical aspect is the visible pledge and testimony to the spiritual or true promise. The spiritual aspect is the real thing promised and supersedes the physical aspect. The failure to see and keep remembering this clear biblical fact is one of the errors of any theology that does not see the church as the true Israel of God. The following chart shows how we hope to develop this truth in this book:

<i>Thing Promised</i>	<i>Physical Fulfillment</i>	<i>Spiritual Fulfillment</i>
Seed	Isaac	Christ, true Seed
Nation	Israel	Church, true nation
Land	Palestine	Salvation rest, true land

Chapter Two

Who is Abraham's Seed?

Exactly who is Abraham's seed? This is the key question. Which of the following is the seed "to whom the promises are made":

1. all of Abraham's physical children
2. the physical children of Jacob (nation of Israel)
3. Christian parents and their physical children
4. believers, period, in any age because of their relationship to Christ
5. Christ himself
6. a combination of the above?

On the surface the answer might appear simple. However, we have already quoted two verses that give us two different answers. Galatians 3:16 specifically argues that Abraham's seed is singular and refers to Christ alone. In Galatians 3:29, all believers (plural) are said to be Abraham's seed. Here we clearly have two different 'seeds' of Abraham. Actually, the Scripture teaches that Abraham has *four* different distinct seeds. The failure to clearly distinguish between these four seeds and what is, in each case, promised to a particular seed, that has created the problems and confusion. We will list the four seeds and then give the biblical proof for each one.

1. Abraham has a *natural* seed. This seed includes all of his physical progeny or every person who was in any way physically descended from him. The natural seed includes Ishmael as well as Isaac; Esau as well as Jacob; the Arabs as well as the Jews; and Judas as well as Paul. Some of the same promises were given to both Ishmael and Isaac because they were both Abraham's natural seed. The same is true of Jacob and Esau. Gentile believers, however, can never be Abraham's natural seed.

2. Abraham has a *special natural* seed. All of the natural children of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, became the 'nation of Israel.' This nation was a special or chosen nation before God. Most of the people in that nation perished because of unbelief, but they were still a special natural seed of Abraham with unique promises from God which no other nation, before or since, ever had. However, despite their special national status

before God as a physical nation, they were still only the *fleshly natural* seed of Abraham. An unregenerate Israelite had no more claim or right to *spiritual* blessing than did Ishmael or Esau, a fact which must be constantly remembered.

The unique blessings promised to Israel as a nation were not only because of its special relationship to Abraham, but also because of its relationship to Jacob. Jacob, as the father of the nation of Israel, was given unique promises that Esau his twin brother was not given, even though Esau was just as much the physical 'covenant seed of Abraham' as was Jacob.³ The difference between Jacob and Esau had nothing at all to do with physical birth. The difference was God's *sovereign electing grace* discriminating within the *same 'covenant family.'* Notice how Genesis 21:12 refers to a "called *spiritual* seed" in Isaac, but Genesis 21:13, refers to *natural* seed blessings to Ishmael.

But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son [Ishmael] of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring" (Gen. 21:12, 13 NIV).

It is in Isaac, the *spiritual seed*, that the "seed will be reckoned," but Ishmael, the *natural seed*, will still become a 'great nation' because he is the true offspring of Abraham. We must always remember that Esau and Jacob were the circumcised twin grandsons of Abraham. Again, theologians do not keep this fact in mind when they speak of the promises made to Abraham and his seed. The same is true in reference to Ishmael and Isaac. One need only compare Genesis 17:20 with verse 6 of the same chapter to see that Ishmael was promised nearly every blessing that was promised to Abraham himself.

Promise to Ishmael

And as for *Ishmael*,...I will surely *bless him*, I will *make him fruitful* and will *greatly increase his numbers*. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a *great nation* (Gen. 17:20 NIV).

³ However, God's dealings with the nation of Israel were on the basis of his own purposes of redemption that involved using that nation in those purposes. We must not imagine that all that was involved was the 'physical lineage' aspect (Deut. 7:6–12; 8:19; 9:3–6; 10:12–15), and fail to see the connection with God's overall goal of salvation for his elect.

Promise to Abraham

I will make you [Abraham] *very fruitful*; I will make *nations* of you, and *kings* will come from you (Gen. 17:6 NIV).

Ishmael became a great nation in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham simply because he was a true seed of Abraham. Genesis 21:13 explicitly proves that statement:

And also of the son [Ishmael] of the bondwoman will I make a **great nation**, because he is **thy seed**.

Ishmael was the true natural seed of Abraham, but God did not establish his covenant with Ishmael. Likewise, God did not include Esau in the covenant. Esau, like Ishmael, was 'signed and sealed' with the same covenant sign of circumcision as his twin brother Jacob. Both Dispensationalist and Covenant Theologians ignore these biblical facts when they speak loosely and in generalities about the promise of God to Abraham and his seed and make it mean the physical children of either Jews or Christian parents.

If the basic concept of 'covenant seed' in Covenant Theology is correct, then Esau must have had every promise that his twin brother Jacob had since they were both Abraham's physical seed and their father Isaac was a believer. However, both the OT and NT Scriptures make it clear that such is not the case. Covenant Theology ignores the obvious fact that God *hated* one 'covenant child' of believing Isaac. It is impossible to deny that God *loved* one covenant child (Jacob) in a way that he did not love the twin brother (Esau) even though both covenant children had the same believing parents and were signed and sealed with the same covenant sign (Rom. 9:13).

3. Abraham has a *spiritual* seed. Every true believer in every age since the time of Abraham is Abraham's spiritual seed. This seed is the true 'election of grace.' In this sense, Gentile believers are part of Abraham's seed and Jewish unbelievers are not. It is this seed alone, through Christ, that inherits the true promises made to Abraham and his seed.

4. Abraham has one *unique* seed. This Seed—Christ the Messiah—is the One who is the most important of all of Abraham's seeds. As mentioned earlier, any spiritual blessing that any of the other three seeds ever enjoyed, or ever will enjoy, is only because of their union with the true Seed, Christ, to whom the promises were made.

The following chart will help us to understand the seeds of Abraham.

The Four Different Seeds of Abraham			
1. Natural seed	2. Special natural seed	3. Spiritual seed	4. Unique seed
Includes all physical children, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Jews and Arabs.	The nation, or children, of Israel, all of the physical seed of Jacob and his twelve sons.	All believers of all ages, David and Paul, Jewish and Gentile believers, you and me.	Christ the Messiah.

It is essential that we see the first, the *natural* seed (Ishmael and Esau), as possessing many of the same promises as the second, the *special natural* seed (Jacob and the nation of Israel) even though they are two totally different seeds. We can say that the first is, because they are in a special covenant relationship with God, totally different from the second even though they are exactly alike in another sense, both being equally the natural and real seeds of Abraham.

Of equal importance, we should not confuse the second, the *special natural seed* or nation of Israel, with the third, the *spiritual* seed, the true redeemed people of God. This confusion is one of the basic mistakes often made by both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism. In no sense is the nation of Israel ever the spiritual seed of Abraham and 'heirs with him according to the promise.' Israel was, despite its special national status, still only Abraham's physical, or natural seed. That nation was given revelation and covenant promises (Rom. 9:4–6) that no other nation was ever granted. The heart of that revelation was the gospel of the promised Messiah. However, all of these things were *privileges* that promised spiritual blessings to *genuine faith* but never to *fleshly birth*. Most of the Israelites that came out of Egypt died and were lost because they rejected these gospel promises (Heb. 3:18–4:3). The nation of Israel was under great privileges, but it was not under grace unless the people believed the gospel. They had great advantages, but they were neither under a covenant of grace nor in a separate *spiritual*

category before God. Any theology that does not see those facts is simply not following Scripture.

All agree that Israel had the gospel promises preached to them as no other nation. However, that did not in itself give them any *spiritual status* before God. We must not confuse *privileges*, which Israel had as no other nation, with actual *possession* of the thing promised which most individual Israelites did not have. It was Israel's rejection of the gospel (Heb. 4:3) and trust in their privileges that will make them worse off than the Gentiles in eternity (Matt. 11:20–31) despite the fact they were Abraham's real (physical) seed and wore the covenant sign of circumcision. This is Paul's argument in Romans 2:17–3:3 when he deliberately uses the word *advantage* instead of a word denoting *status* to describe Israel's position before God. Paul shows that one could be a Jew, have the Law, and even wear the covenant sign of circumcision; but none, or all, of those things put one into a special spiritual status or category before God. One could still be as lost as an ignorant Gentile. Paul's detractors will ask the logical question, "What advantage then has a Jew?" (Rom. 3:1), and Paul's answer (Rom. 3:2) has nothing to do with status or special spiritual category, but only with privilege and opportunity.

What **advantage** then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1–2).

The Jew had much *advantage*, but he did not have a separate spiritual status before God. His position of much advantage was primarily because he had both the law covenant (to convict him of sin) and the gospel promise (to bring him to salvation) clearly preached to him. The Gentiles had neither (Eph. 2:11–13).

Likewise, a physical child of a believer today has the great privilege of being under the teaching of the gospel, but that does not make him a spiritual seed of Abraham and an heir with him according to the promise. A child of believing parents has no more special *spiritual* status than had circumcised Ishmael and Esau. There is no basic difference in the spiritual condition of the physical children of believers and the spiritual condition of children of unbelievers. Both are equally lost apart from the sovereign regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. There are both *Esaus* and *Jacobs* born into many 'covenant homes' today just as those twins were born into father Abraham's covenant home. As was the case

with Esau and Jacob, one 'covenant child' is loved and regenerated while the other 'covenant child' is hated and rejected. Esau, a non-elect 'covenant child' had great *privileges* that a 'non-covenant child' born in Ur of the Chaldees did not have. However, both children are by *nature* 'children of wrath' (Eph. 2:3), equally lost apart from sovereign electing grace. It is essential to see that when God wants to teach sovereign election, he does not compare covenant children (Jacob and Esau) with non-covenant children (pagans); he compares two blue-blooded covenant children named Jacob and Esau.

We must remember that Esau and Jacob were the twin sons of Isaac. They both had gospel privileges or opportunities (Rom. 3:1–3) that the Gentiles did not have. It is just as true that children whose parents are believers (as Esau's parents were) have privileges that those born in a non-Christian home do not have. However, Esau, like many children born in Christian homes today, was not numbered among the elect of God. God did not establish his covenant with Esau even though he did establish it with Jacob, his twin brother. Likewise, God does not establish his covenant of saving grace with any child just because he is born into a Christian home or because he is baptized. We cannot equate the sovereign election of God with physical birth into a Christian home without also denying God's sovereignty in electing grace. Paedobaptists are often guilty of this very error.

We simply must realize that physical birth can never, in any dispensation, make anyone a spiritual seed of Abraham or an *heir with him of the promise*. Every child born into this world is in the same spiritual status before God—*guilty*—and every one is under the wrath of God by birth (Eph. 2:3)⁴ and is in need of personal salvation. The same thing was true in Israel as it concerned a child's spiritual status before God.

Any kind of a one-on-one comparison, or equating, of Israel as a physical *nation* with the church as a physical *institution* will always be just as wrong as equating a physical Jew with a true believer. Israel, as a

⁴ This passage speaks of the wrath of God being on our nature. Paul is speaking of himself as well as elect Gentiles. The fact of God's eternal love in election did not in itself keep us from being under the wrath of God until the time we were brought to personally trust Christ. Unless infant baptism can give a child a new nature, he is still under the wrath of God until he believes the gospel.

nation, is a *type* of the New Covenant church in the same sense that every individual physical Israelite who left Egypt at the Exodus 'redemption' is a type of a saved believer; but in no sense whatever can either of these types be treated as the same thing or one-on-one with the reality of which they are a type. The *whole nation* of Israel was *physically* redeemed, but only a small handful of individuals was *spiritually* redeemed (cf. Heb. 3:16–4:3 and 1 Cor. 10:1–13 with Num. 14:22–35). If Israel was the church, then over 99% of the first 'church members' are in hell according to these verses.

The designation 'redeemed people of God' can only be used in a physical sense and never in any spiritual sense when we are referring to the nation of Israel. One cannot build NT doctrine and experience on the typology of the OT Scriptures. God could never say the following about anyone that had been spiritually redeemed:

Your eyes have seen all that the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the Lord has not given you a *mind that understands* or *eyes that see* or *ears that hear* (Deut. 29:2b–4 NIV).

Israel's becoming a distinct nation at Mount Sinai is in no sense whatever the forming of the 'Body of Christ.' God himself said that nation was an *evil* congregation (Num. 14:27, 35) that never did know him in the way of saving faith (Deut. 29:4). As we will discuss later, the Body of Christ is a new creation brought into being by the personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The church of Christ is not simply the adding of the Gentiles to the 'Jewish church'; it is the true 'new man' (Eph. 2:11–22) and the totally 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17). The church of Christ is also not a parenthesis between a supposed "temporary casting aside and future dealing of God with the nation of Israel." The church as the Body of Christ is the fulfillment of God's redemptive goal as prophesied in Genesis 3:15.

When a Covenant Theologian says, "The covenant at Sinai cannot possibly be a legal covenant since it was made with a *redeemed* people," he is mixing apples and oranges, and when a Dispensationalist treats Israel in the wilderness as 'saved but not victorious,' he is mixing oranges with lemons. Both systems are treating a *physical redemption* as being equal to *spiritual salvation*.

The law covenant at Sinai had a most gracious *purpose* but it was not a *gracious covenant*. We must remember that the legal covenant at Sinai was not given to regenerated and justified believers to ‘aid them in sanctification.’ Most of those people were not *regenerate*. The law covenant was laid on the conscience of a generation of blind rebellious sinners to convict them of their unbelief and to kill their hope in their own righteousness! That covenant only ministered grace as it effected the knowledge of sin and spiritual death in an Israelite’s heart and led him to faith in the gospel covenant given to Abraham.

Paul specifically says that the stated purpose of the law covenant at Sinai was a *ministration of death*. The covenant written on “tablets of stone” (the Ten Commandments) was deliberately designed by God to minister death (2 Cor. 3:6–9 and Rom. 7:9, 10) to the people described in Deut. 29:4 and Heb. 3:18–4:2. Those rebels did not need a rule of sanctification; they needed a law covenant to kill their conceit and pride—and God *graciously* gave them a *legal covenant* to do that very killing work. Do not confuse a gracious *purpose* (the giving of the legal covenant to convict lost sinners) with the *nature* of the law covenant that does the essential convicting work. Likewise, do not try to use the instrument that God specifically designed to administer death as the chief instrument in a believer’s conscience today to produce holy living.

A Covenant Theologian simply cannot make the clear biblical distinction concerning the difference between a gracious purpose and a gracious covenant and stay within the framework of his system of theology. In his theology, the law covenant at Sinai must be a ‘covenant of grace.’ This insistence is not because the Scriptures in any way state that Sinai was a covenant of grace, but is purely on the grounds that Covenant Theology’s system cannot have a legal covenant after Genesis 3:15. That destroys the whole ‘one covenant with two administrations’ theory.

We grant that the legal covenant at Sinai administered, or furthered, the single purpose of God’s plan of salvation by grace, but that in no way negates the clear fact that Sinai was a covenant of works. In reality, the covenant made at Sinai could not perform the ‘killing work’ that was the essential preparation for grace, if that covenant could not legally

administer death, and it could not legally administer death, if it did not have the status and authority of a true legal covenant.⁵

The following statement, if correctly understood, will help to clear up a lot of confusion: **The nation of Israel was not the 'Body of Christ,' even though the Body of Christ is indeed the true 'Israel of God.'**

Covenant Theology cannot accept the first part of that statement and Dispensationalism cannot accept the second part. The basic presuppositions of Covenant Theology make it mandatory that Israel be the church and be under the same covenant as the church, and the one thing a Dispensationalist must maintain is the church's present and future distinction from Israel which makes it mandatory that Israel and the church can never be under the same covenant or inherit the same blessings. What is essential to one system is anathema to the other system.

Dispensationalism cannot get Israel and the church together in any sense whatever, and Covenant Theology cannot get them apart. Dispensationalism cannot see that the church is the true Israel of God and the fulfillment of the promises that God made to Abraham and the fathers, and Covenant Theology cannot see that the church, *as the Body of Christ*, did not, and simply could not, exist in reality and experience until the personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Dispensationalism insists that Israel and the church have totally different promises and destinies (one earthly and the other heavenly), and Covenant Theology insists that Israel and the Body of Christ are equally the "same redeemed church under the same 'covenant of grace' and governed by the same identical 'canon of conduct.'"

Dispensationalism drives a wedge between the OT and the NT and never the twain shall meet as specific *promise* (OT) and identical *fulfillment* (NT); and Covenant Theology flattens the whole Bible out into one covenant where there is no real and vital distinction between either the Old and New Covenants or Israel and the church.

⁵ We agree with many of the Puritans who said, "The law was the handmaid of the gospel. It was the silver needle that opened the hole for the golden thread of the gospel to follow." However, we insist that the law could not perform that necessary work of conviction unless it functioned in the conscience with the full status of a legal covenant.

We will never understand either the biblical history of redemption or the relationship between the two major covenants in Scripture (Heb. 8:6–13; 2 Cor. 3:6–18; Gal. 4:21–31) until we grasp the truth and implications of the last paragraph. Few people realize that neither the supposed ‘covenant of works’ with Adam nor the supposed ‘covenant of grace’ with Adam after the fall are ever mentioned one time in a *single text of Scripture*. They are not *biblical* covenants⁶ that grow out of the Bible itself, but they are *theological* covenants that must be *logically deduced* from a theological system. Those who insist on using these two theological covenants must, to be consistent with their system, either ignore or deny the existence and theological implications of the two biblical covenants (the Old Covenant at Sinai and the New Covenant that replaces it) constantly contrasted in both the OT Scriptures and the NT Scriptures. Once we understand the biblical relationship of the nation of Israel and the Body of Christ, we will have trouble accepting either the system of Covenant Theology or the system of Dispensationalism.

Covenant Theology insists on equating Israel and the church, and totally loses the true *newness* of the New Covenant and its function in the conscience of a believer. On the other hand, Dispensationalism fails to see the church as the true fulfillment of God’s promise to the fathers, and it totally loses the unity of the Scriptures and God’s single goal in redemption. We reject both of these views as being based on an incomplete understanding of the true unity of Scripture pertaining to the true Seed of Abraham (Christ) and the eternal purposes of God in the redemption of his one elect people (believers of all ages).

The Four Different Seeds of Abraham

In the next few chapters we will give the textual evidence for the four different seeds of Abraham. There is a sense in which we should start with the fourth one, *Christ the unique seed*, since he is, beyond question, the most important of the four seeds. However, for the purpose of our study, I think the following order is best.

⁶ For a good outline of the major biblical covenants, see the chart on page 19 of *The NIV Study Bible. The NIV Study Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985).

We will look at the *natural seed* first. This one is simple and obvious, but usually it is completely overlooked. When the promises made to Ishmael are clearly identified and brought into the discussion of 'the promise made to Abraham and his seed,' it helps to clarify some questions and avoid some fuzzy thinking. The same is true of Esau.

We will then quickly cover the *spiritual seed*. There is very little disagreement in this particular area since the NT Scriptures are so clear.

We will next take Christ the *unique seed*. My Dispensational brethren will not agree with some of this section—especially the part on the 'Seed of David'—for obvious reasons. I believe the NT Scriptures clearly establish that the Davidic covenant was fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 2:22–36). The Davidic throne is not waiting to be set up in the future, but it is already established. My view denies one of the basic tenets of Dispensationalism. A quotation from John Walvoord will show this clearly:

The Davidic covenant is most important as assuring the millennial kingdom in which Christ will reign on earth. Resurrected David will reign under Christ as a prince over the house of Israel . . . The Davidic covenant is *not* fulfilled by Christ reigning on His throne in heaven . . . It is rather an *earthly* kingdom and an *earthly* throne (Matt. 25:31). The Davidic covenant is, accordingly, the *key* to God's prophetic program *yet to be fulfilled*[emphasis mine].⁷

I personally find that Walvoord's *key* locks up far more Scripture than it unlocks.

Lastly, we will look at Israel as the *special natural seed*. Very few people see the necessity of treating Israel under such a designation. Israel must be seen as the natural seed of Abraham despite the fact that *some* Israelites were true believers; and thus, through faith, they were also part of the spiritual seed. Israel, as a nation, must never, in any way except as a type, be mistaken for or confused with, the church as the *Body of Christ* even though Israel had special national covenantal privileges. My Covenant Theology brethren will find their widest disagreement with me in this section.

⁷ Lewis Sperry Chafer, revised by John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 145.

Covenant Theologians are just as convinced as Walvoord that their understanding of covenants is vital. Walter Chantry writes:

It would be nearly impossible to overstate the central importance of the biblical teaching on covenants...Covenant theology is at the heart of biblical truth. Those who are its enemies will do great harm to the church of Christ.⁸

As one can see, I have chosen to move from the easiest to the hardest, and from where we can all agree to where we must gird up the loins of our minds and pray for light and objectivity.

⁸ Walter Chantry, *The Two Covenants, Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace*, (Carlisle, PA, Published by Grace Baptist Church) pp. 1, 8.

Chapter Three

Abraham's Natural Seed

Abraham's *natural seed* – All of Abraham's physical descendants are the true 'seed of Abraham' in a natural sense. The following facts must be kept in mind throughout any discussion of 'Abraham's seed.' I think everyone knows these things are true, but we seem to forget their importance in our discussions. Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob were all equally the true physical seed of Abraham. We must remember that all of these seeds were given nearly every promise that Abraham himself was given.

Ishmael—A True Son of Abraham

Ishmael received the covenant sign of circumcision on the same day as his father Abraham because he was Abraham's true son.

In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and **Ishmael** his **son** (Gen. 17:26).

In Genesis 17:23, the Holy Spirit carefully distinguished between Ishmael as a true son and the slaves and servants in Abraham's household. As mentioned earlier, there is a marked similarity between the list of things promised to Ishmael in Genesis 17:20 and the list promised to Abraham in Genesis 17:6. The fulfillment of the promise that Ishmael would become a 'great nation' was rooted in the fact that Ishmael was truly 'Abraham's seed.'

And also of the son [Ishmael] of the bondwoman will I make a nation, **because he is thy seed** (Gen. 21:13).

Any view of 'the blessings promised to Abraham's seed,' especially the promise of becoming a great nation, that ignores the above facts concerning Ishmael being a true seed of Abraham must, of necessity, be very shallow. Ishmael was *blessed*, was made *fruitful*, became a *great nation*, begot *princes*, and wore the *sign of circumcision* because he was the seed of Abraham. However, in no sense whatever was he ever *under grace*. Ishmael would have been labeled a covenant child by Covenant Theology despite the fact that his circumcision did not put him under any covenant of grace whatever.

Esau—A True Son of Abraham

Esau received far more special blessings than Ishmael but Esau was still only one of Abraham's natural seeds. Esau wore the sign of the covenant of circumcision, but like Ishmael, Esau was never under a covenant of grace.

Esau was Abraham's grandson and Jacob's (Israel) twin brother. Esau was as much a true son of Abraham as Jacob. Again, according to Covenant Theology, Esau was signed and sealed in the covenant of grace because he was the physical seed of believing Isaac. As a true covenant child, Esau should have had every single covenant promise that his brother Jacob had, but Scripture specifically says otherwise (Rom. 9:13).

God gave Esau a land grant just as He did Jacob; and further, God later refused to allow the Israelites to meddle with Esau's land.

Meddle not with them; for I will not give you their (Esau's descendants) land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau *for* a possession (Deut. 2:5)

This land was given to Esau because he was Abraham's seed (Josh. 24:1–4). Both Jacob and Esau were 'blessed in faith' by their believing father, Isaac (Heb. 11:20).

All of the foregoing things were just as true of Esau as they were of Jacob simply because Esau was just as much a true seed of Abraham as was his twin brother Jacob. If theologians of all persuasions would just keep these clear facts in front of them, they would avoid unbiblical statements concerning the promise of God to Abraham and his seed.

Jacob (Israel)—A True Son of Abraham

We need not take time to show that Jacob (Israel) was also Abraham's natural seed. Jacob was indeed Abraham's natural seed, but he was a very *special* natural seed. In one sense all of the children of Israel are natural seeds of Abraham exactly like Esau, but in another sense they are '*special* natural seeds' because they are the sons of Jacob and therefore are under special covenantal promises. God made promises to Jacob that he did not make to Jacob's twin brother Esau, even though both are the natural grandsons of Abraham.

This would be the logical place to discuss the nation of Israel as Abraham's special natural seed. However, since the relationship of the

physical nation of Israel to the church is the heart of the problem in both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism and forms the bulk of this book, we will cover it last. We will now textually establish Abraham's spiritual seed.

Chapter Four

Abraham's Spiritual Seed

Abraham's spiritual seed is all *true believers of all ages*. We need not spend much time on this seed since there is basic agreement by nearly everyone that the believers of all ages are Abraham's true spiritual seed. The NT Scriptures make it almost impossible to miss this truth, especially when one realizes that the following words were spoken to Gentiles who in no sense whatever could be related to Abraham physically:

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye **Abraham's seed**, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

The *Scofield Reference Bible* gives the following as one of the fulfillments of the Abrahamic Covenant:

(I) ...Fulfilled ...(b) In a spiritual posterity—"Look now toward heaven...so shall thy seed be" (John viii:39; Rom. iv:16, 17; ix:7, 8; Gal. iii:6, 7, 29), viz. all men of faith, whether Jew or Gentile.⁹

I do not accept Scofield's typology of making 'heavenly = *spiritual* seed' (church) and 'sand = *earthly* seed' (Israel), but the above quote is correct in stating that 'all men of faith,' whether Jew or Gentile, are the spiritual seed of Abraham.

Abraham's spiritual seed is triune: the 'election of grace' (Rom. 9:23–26; 11:5), the 'saved' of all ages (Gal. 3:24–29), the 'Bride of Christ' (Rev. 21:1–3; 9–14).

Revelation 21:3 has been the spiritual goal of God from all eternity. This was the heart of God's promise in his dealings with Abraham and the nation of Israel as well as his dealing with the church. There is no question that the shout from heaven in the following verse is claiming the final fulfillment of God's eternal purpose of redeeming his one eternal elect people:

⁹ C.I. Scofield, ed., *The First Scofield Reference Bible*, (Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1986), p. 25.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, 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).

Covenant Theology sees the importance of this phrase as it is used in the OT Scriptures. There is no question that the promise stated in Revelation 21:3 is the heart of the gospel promise as the gospel is prophesied in the OT Scriptures. However, both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology misunderstand the implications of this phrase. The Dispensationalist does not see that the church is the true tabernacle, or 'dwelling place,' of God that was predicted and prophesied in the OT Scriptures. That system of theology cannot see the church as the true Israel of God that fulfills the covenant promises to Abraham. Their adamant 'naturalizing' of specific things that NT Apostles spiritualize make those NT passages impossible to understand.

However, the Covenant Theologian also misses the boat in the opposite direction. He fails to emphasize that the goal of God was never realized in any true spiritual sense by the nation of Israel. That nation never truly became God's people in any spiritual and eternal sense whatever. They were never a true '*holy nation*,' nor were they ever the *true* 'people of God.' If God was indeed Israel's God in the sense that he is the church's God, then why did he cast Israel off as a nation? Can God ever deal with the Body of Christ in the same manner that he dealt with the nation of Israel? This is the very question that Paul deals with in Romans 9–11.

It is true that God was Israel's God in a *national* sense, but that was purely a *conditional* relationship. God indeed dwelt among them in a way that he did not dwell among any other nation, but in no sense were they the temple of God as the church is today. Israel was his special nation among all the nations in the earth, but that relationship was not a saving spiritual relationship nor was it based on an 'eternal covenant of grace.' God dwelling *among* Israel in the tabernacle and *indwelling* the individual believer today as the *true tabernacle are two entirely different things*. The special national relationship between God and the nation of Israel was based on the legal covenant made at Sinai, and that special covenantal relationship was finally nullified by God because of Israel's continual failure to keep the covenant.

I repeat: God cannot—by his own sovereign purpose—say and do to the Body of Christ what he said and did to the nation of Israel. Could

that nation have been purchased by the death of Christ and put under the covenant that was ratified by his blood (1 Cor. 11:24–26), and then be cast off by God? If Israel was under the same covenant as the church, then how can we be sure that God will not cast off the church? Why is the church's eternal security guaranteed when Israel's was not if both the church and Israel are *redeemed* and under the same covenant? The biblical answer to these questions is simple. The Body of Christ can never be disowned by God because she is under a *new* and *better* covenant than the Old Covenant that Israel was under.

The New Covenant that established the church as the Body of Christ *guarantees* that every covenant obligation will be met in the Surety (Heb. 7:22), and the power of the promised Spirit will work obedience in the personal experience of every member of the true New Covenant community (Heb. 8:10, 11; Rom. 8:1–4). The nation of Israel was never promised such guarantees under the Old Covenant simply because it was a legal covenant based on works. The nation of Israel was not the 'redeemed church under the covenant of grace' and therefore cannot be the true spiritual seed of Abraham.

The Big *If*

Theologians ignore the big word *if* in Exodus 19:5 and then build their whole position on the 'gracious' statement in Exodus 19:4 and 20:2. Look at what the Word of God actually says:

And God spake all these words, saying, I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (Ex. 20:1, 2).

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself (Ex. 19:4)

Now therefore, **if** ye will obey my voice indeed, **and keep my covenant, then ye shall** be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine. And ye **shall** be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Ex. 19:5, 6a).

Why do Covenant Theologians ignore that big *if* in Exodus. 19:5 and run from the obvious fact that God made a legal and conditional covenant with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai? Doesn't God say what he really means?

Later in this book we will compare this passage with 1 Peter 2:5–11 and show that the true church is the 'holy nation, the kingdom of priests'

that Israel *never became* simply because she never *kept the legal covenant* upon which these blessings were promised. The blessings in Ex. 19:4, 5 are clearly contingent on Israel obeying or 'keeping the covenant,' which was the decalogue and all of the attending system of laws and ceremonies. The church inherits these very blessings because our Surety was born and lived under that covenant (Gal. 4:4, 5); he totally fulfilled its every demand and earned the righteousness that it promised (Heb. 7:22); and he then died under its curse (Gal. 3:13).

I repeat, there is no question that it was most *gracious* of God to *physically* redeem Israel and 'bring them to himself' in a special *national* relationship, but we must not confuse this with effectual calling and justification. We must remember that most of those 'redeemed' people went to hell because they rejected the gospel. America is a classic illustration of this same principle. No nation presently on the earth has enjoyed privileges and blessings from God as we have. However, we are not 'under a covenant of grace' nor are we exempt from either God's judgment or losing every single gospel privilege.

As mentioned earlier, God indeed 'dwelt among' the nation of Israel in a special way, but again, it was neither a *personal* nor *spiritual* indwelling as it is with every believer today. God did not 'dwell among' Israel in the same sense that he now dwells in the individual believer since the personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Israel was never the 'temple of God' in the sense that the church is specifically designated his temple. The goal of Revelation 21:3 was never realized by Israel and never could be as long as the veil stood in place in the temple.

We must see that every single word like *elect*, *chosen*, *loved*, *redeemed*, *son*, etc. that describes Israel's relationship to God as a *nation* has a totally different connotation when the identical words are used of the *church's* relationship to God. One cannot mix spiritual and natural. One cannot treat the *type* as the *reality*.

The failure to see this clear truth is one of the glaring self-contradictions in both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. The words 'God will be their God' can never be applied in a redemptive sense to any nation or individual that is cast off by God: and Israel, *as a nation* was cast off in respect to special national status (Matt. 21:33–

46),¹⁰ and many baptized children of godly parents have perished in hell. When the above words are taken in the spiritual sense of the New Testament, they mean absolute eternal security. Israel was indeed called out of Egypt by God's grace and power, but the word *called* does not mean the same thing here as it does in Romans 1:7. Every single Israelite was redeemed by blood out of bondage in Egypt, but most of them perished in unbelief. The redemption by blood in Exodus 12 is not the same redemption by blood as that in Ephesians 1:7. One is a type and the other is the reality even as physical Israel is a type and the church is the reality.

Both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism are constantly forgetting the above truth by mixing apples and oranges. They use typology as if it were the reality of the thing typified. Dispensationalism will build a doctrine of 'carnal believers' on the supposed fact that Israel in the wilderness was a redeemed people. Since they applied the blood to the door posts 'in faith,' they were truly 'saved.' In other words, they had enough faith to be 'redeemed,' but not enough faith to enjoy a 'victorious life.' Here is the Dispensational view:

Kadesh-barnea is, by the unbelief of Israel there, and the divine comment on that unbelief (Num. 14:22–38; Deut. 1:19–40; I Cor. 10:1–5), invested with immense spiritual significance. The people had faith to sprinkle the blood of atonement (Ex. 12:28) and to come out of Egypt (the world), but they had not faith to enter into their Canaan rest. Therefore, though redeemed, they were a forty-year grief to Jehovah.¹¹

Covenant Theology does exactly the same thing. Teachers of this system will vehemently reject the clear truth that Sinai was a legal covenant simply because it is impossible for God to put a *redeemed* people under a legal covenant, and Israel was truly redeemed—and by *redeemed*, the Covenant Theologian means *saved*. One group is just as bad as the other in their use of typology. The following quotation is from a widely used commentary on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 43, that is dealing with the preface to the Ten Commandments.

¹⁰ We must separate Israel as a physical nation with special national covenants from Israel as a people 'beloved for the fathers' [and the Father's] sake.' Romans seems to leave plenty of room for a revival of gospel faith among the Jewish people in the last days.

¹¹ *Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 185.

It amazes me that brilliant and godly men cannot see the implications of their theological system.

When God delivered His people out of slavery in Egypt, it was not because they had kept the ten commandments. No, He first delivered them, and then gave them the ten commandments. So they were not expected to try to keep the law in order to be saved. Rather they were expected to do this *because they already had been saved*. And this is exactly the way it is in the life of a Christian.¹²

I doubt that any Covenant Theologian would say, "I believe that every individual Israelite that left Egypt in the Exodus was a justified believer in Christ." However, their system of theology is forced to *treat* the nation of Israel as if that were the case. Williamson's statement is arguing a key theological point and he is treating typology as absolute fact. He totally equates Israel's *physical* salvation with the *spiritual* salvation of the church in his argument. Williamson would never say, "The Exodus experience was equal to true justification by faith for every individual Israelite that was involved." However, he must actually treat them that way in his theological system. This is the only ground upon which he can reject the Mosaic Covenant as a legal covenant of works.

As mentioned earlier, we will say more on this point when we discuss who is the true fulfillment of the 'great nation.' For the present, I am only trying to show that Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism both treat the nation of Israel and her position before God as if she were a nation of justified believers instead of merely a *type*. The result of using typology in this manner is confusion and contradiction.

The goal of God 'dwelling among his people' as expressed in Revelation 21:3 was never realized in all of God's dealings with the nation of Israel. The first expressions of God's immediate presence were experienced by individual true believers under the Old Covenant. More of its reality is being experienced by believers under the New Covenant because of the personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost when he came to indwell us individually. The total fulfillment of this goal will not be realized until the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹² G.I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism Volume II: Questions 39–107*, (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), p. 8.

There is a progressive revelation of the glory of God in Scripture that culminates in Revelation 21 with the glory of the Lord fully revealed in the city that has no need of the sun or the moon. The phrase 'the glory of God' denotes the immediate felt presence of God himself.

1. The first glimpse of the glory of God given to Israel was from a distance:

... they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the **glory of the LORD** appeared in a cloud (Ex. 16:10).

2. The glory of the Lord appeared on the mountain when the law covenant was given, but it made Israel tremble in fear:

And the **glory of the LORD** abode upon Mount Sinai,...And the sight of the **glory of the LORD** was like a devouring fire... (Ex. 24:16, 17).

3. God came closer to the nation of Israel in the tabernacle and "his glory dwelt there." However, it was behind the veil in the most Holy Place, and only one man, once a year, could enter God's presence and experience that glory:

Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and **the glory of the LORD** filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34).

4. The glory of the Lord left the temple because of Israel's abominations (Ezek. 8:6; 9:3; etc).

5. God came a lot closer in the incarnation and tabernacled *among* us in the person of his Son and we beheld his glory, but again his glory was veiled by flesh. The Mount of Transfiguration is an example of the glory of Christ's deity bursting through the veil of flesh. Wesley caught the wonder of this truth in his great Christmas hymn in the words "veiled in flesh, the Godhead see..." The Apostle John gives the classic statement of this truth:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld **his glory**, the **glory** as of the **only begotten** of the **Father**,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14)

6. God has now taken up his personal abode *in every believer* in the person of the Holy Spirit and we experience the glory of God in a way that supersedes the experience of those who actually saw Christ in the flesh. However, we still only "see through a glass darkly." Paul develops the implications of the *indwelling* Spirit:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the **glory** of the **Lord**... (2 Cor. 3:18 NKJV).

7. When God's goal of full redemption is reached in our final adoption, we shall see him face to face in all his glory, and wonder of wonders, we "shall be like him for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2 NIV). The Book of Revelation shows our real hope:

The city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for **the glory of the Lord** illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. (Rev. 21:23 NKJV).

Any view of the blessings promised to Abraham and his seed that does not begin in Revelation 13:8 with Christ as the Lamb slain eternally in God's purpose, and wind up in Revelation 21:3 uniting the redeemed of all ages before the Lamb's throne fully beholding his glory, has not really grasped the biblical history and goal of God's redemptive purpose and work. Likewise, any view that tries to push the *realization* of this goal back into the Old Testament as a means of preserving the so called unity of the one covenant of grace has totally destroyed the true unity of Scripture as that unity is built around Jesus Christ, the true Seed of Abraham.

Chapter Five

Abraham's Unique Seed–Christ

We will now give the textual proof for Abraham's *unique* Seed. Christ is not only the most important of the four seeds of Abraham, but understanding his place in Scripture is the key to the true unity of the Scriptures. Christ is the keystone of our salvation as well as being the key and keystone of all Scripture. I reject the idea that the key to Scripture is either dispensations or covenants, even though an understanding of both is necessary to a correct interpretation of God's Word. However, neither a 'dispensational' chart nor 'biblio-theological' covenants are of any real help if they cannot be established with specific texts of Scripture. These concepts may give unity to our system, but they will soon force us to twist or ignore some very clear texts of Scripture that don't fit the system.

The gospel promise of Christ himself is the heart of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. The advent and work of Christ is the fulfillment of that gospel promise, and the personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and his subsequent indwelling of every New Covenant believer are the absolute proofs that the gospel promise has been fulfilled. Understanding that the gospel of salvation by grace is what is being promised in all of Scripture, and further, that *Christ himself* is the 'Seed' who fulfills that gospel promise, is the only biblical way to see and consistently maintain the unity of God's purpose in redemption.

God's dealing with national Israel is the Dispensationalist's key to Scripture and his time clock for all of history. One all-embracing covenant of grace is the Covenant Theologian's key to Scripture and his framework for all of history. Under the pretense (quite sincerely) of bringing unity and clarity to the Bible, both systems muddy up the water and attempt to force the Bible to fit into their respective schemes. I shall never forget a note in the front of a lady's Bible that said, "Don't muddy up the Bible and then have the nerve to call it deep teaching."

As I mentioned earlier, at times I may seem to be digressing quite a bit, but I feel it is essential to do so, since the primary purpose of this book is an examination of the basic presuppositions of both

Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. We must remember that both of these systems use 'the unconditional promise that God made to Abraham and his seed' as a basic building block in their respective systems. If they do not understand either the promise itself or to whom the promise was actually given, then everything built on that misunderstanding is automatically in error to some degree. Neither of these theological systems can be helpful to a correct interpretation of Scripture, if their own understanding of such a fundamental concept as the 'promises made to Abraham and his seed' is wrong.

The following chart gives a quick overview of what the Scriptures say about Christ, the *unique Seed of Abraham*. It is also a biblical illustration of both progressive revelation and the true unity of Scriptures around the person and work of Christ.

1. Purposed	He is God's eternal Lamb.	Rev. 13:8
2. Predicted	He is the Seed of woman.	Gen. 3:15
3. Promised	He is the Seed of Abraham.	Gen. 12:3
4. Pledged	He is the Son of David.	2 Sam. 7:12
5. Pictured	He is the Subject of all Scripture.	Luke 24:44–45
6. Presented	He is the Fulfillment of every promise.	Luke 1:68–69
7. Positioned	He is the exalted Lord and King.	Acts 2:29–30
8. Proclaimed	The Sum and Substance of the gospel.	Acts 2:36

Let us examine each item in the above chart one at a time.

1. *The unique Seed purposed*—Christ is God's Lamb slain from eternity in the purposes of God.

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from **the foundation of the world** (Rev. 13:8 NKJV).

The death of Christ was according to the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Before time began, God decreed to send his Son to Calvary. Christ, in the purpose of God, was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Wherever we see the shed blood

of Christ, we see the church of Ephesians 5:25, and the 'election of grace' of Ephesians 1:4. Any study of Christ as the seed of Abraham that does not begin with the cross and God's eternal decree of election is, of necessity, very deficient.

2. The unique Seed predicted—Christ is *the Seed of woman*.

And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and **her Seed**;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise **His heel** (Gen. 3:15 NKJV).

I use the word *predicted* instead of *promised* because the words in this text of Scripture are not spoken to Adam but to Satan. The only thing promised in this verse is Satan's destruction. Theologians often call this verse the *protevangelium*.¹³ They are correct in that designation. However, they may, or may not, be right in their *application* of that designation. No one can deny that the verse predicts the coming of Christ to destroy the work of Satan. However, the verse nowhere suggests that God is making a covenant of grace with Adam.

Using Genesis 3:15 as a proof text for a covenant of grace with Adam demonstrates the obvious fact that men are talking about a theological invention rather than a truth established by biblical exegesis. God's revealing a specific purpose in a threat to Satan cannot be turned into his making a formal covenant with a man.¹⁴ God's speaking to Satan and informing him of his certain doom is a far cry from God's entering into a covenant of grace with Adam. If anyone insists on using Genesis

¹³ Protevangelium: literally, *the protogospel*; the first announcement of the redemption to be effected in and through Christ, given figuratively to Adam and Eve in the words of God to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15); in Reformed federalism, the inception of the covenant of grace. (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, Baker, p. 251)

¹⁴ For an example of Covenant Theologians confusing the covenant of redemption with the covenant of grace, see J. David Gilliland's *Jonathan Edwards on Biblical Hermeneutics and the "Covenant of Grace"*, published by New Covenant Media. In his battle with the 'half-way covenant,' Edwards insisted that a child could not be considered in the covenant of grace in any sense until they demonstrated a living repentance and faith.

3:15 to prove the establishment of a covenant, then we must insist that the covenant, according to the text, was made with Satan. If there is such a thing as an eternal covenant of grace between the members of the Trinity, then God's action in Genesis 3:15 is a definite step taken in time and history to bring his purpose in that covenant of grace to pass. However, even if such a covenant could be proven to exist, it still must not be equated with God putting either Adam or Abraham under a covenant of grace.

Why not just let the verse mean what it says? God told Satan his days were numbered and it would be the seed of the woman that would destroy him. If one is going to teach a covenant of grace made with Adam, then he should not try to 'proof text' it with Genesis 3:15.

3. The unique Seed promised—He is the Seed of Abraham.

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and **in thee** shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

Galatians 3:8 quotes this verse and tells us that God was preaching the *gospel* to Abraham when he spoke these words:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the **gospel** unto Abraham, *saying*, **In thee shall all nations be blessed.**

The phrase "in thee shall all nations be blessed" as given to Abraham is equivalent to "believe on the coming Christ" according to the Apostle Paul. As I mentioned above, it is the gospel promise of Christ himself that gives the Scripture its true unity. If one compares Paul's words used to describe God's dealing with Abraham with the terminology used by Covenant Theology to describe the same event, it becomes possible to see what I meant earlier. Paul said that God "preached the gospel to Abraham" and in essence told him to believe in a coming Messiah. It is impossible to read 'made a covenant' into those words as Covenant Theology does. God indeed made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 in very clear terms. However, those terms involve, among other things, Abraham's physical seed inheriting 'the land.'

Here is a clear textual example, including the terminology, of Covenant Theology's constant practice of using non-biblical terms to replace clear biblical language. Nowhere in all of the Word of God does the Holy Spirit call the *gospel* the *Covenant of Grace* nor does any verse remotely imply that when God graciously makes known the gospel

promise to an individual, or to a whole nation, that he is thereby putting that individual under a covenant of grace. If Covenant Theology is correct, then Paul should have said, “God made a covenant of grace with Abraham.”

I do not question that Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:3 emphatically prove that the one gospel of grace has always been, and will always be, God's only way of saving sinners. Likewise, I do not question that the one gospel of grace was preached from the dawn of sin. However, *proclaiming the gospel of grace to a person is not the same thing as putting that person under a covenant of grace*. Covenant Theology makes these two things synonymous and then draws all kinds of deductions from the non-biblical phrase ‘covenant of grace’ that could not possibly be drawn from the biblical phrase ‘preached the gospel.’ One can deduce sprinkling children as a sign of the covenant from the one phrase, but it would be impossible to do so from the other phrase.

The Apostle Peter is even more explicit concerning the identity of the ‘seed.’ He tells us that the words *in thee* in Genesis 12:3 mean *in thy seed*, and further, that the Seed spoken of is God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ye are the children of the **prophets** [Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.], and of the *covenant* which God made with **our fathers** [Abraham, Jacob, David, etc.], saying unto Abraham, And in **thy seed** shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his **Son Jesus**, sent him to **bless you** [with the blessing promised to the above fathers and told about in the above prophets], **in turning away everyone of you from his iniquities** (Acts 3:25, 26).

Peter makes several lucid points in these verses. The issues of primary importance to us are as follows:

A. The heart of the blessing promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 dealt with the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, or “turning away everyone of you from his iniquities.” The true blessing of Abraham is nothing less than justification by faith (Gal. 3; 4 and Rom. 4). The NT Scriptures never once interpret the covenant with Abraham to deal with the land of Palestine, let alone make the land the primary part of the promise. The exact opposite is true in the OT Scriptures. The land is the heart of the covenant promise to Abraham from Genesis 15 to the end of the OT Scriptures but stops at Malachi. The ‘land promise’ is

never repeated in the NT Scriptures. We will look at this more carefully in a later chapter.

B. Abraham's seed is *Christ himself*. Abraham's true seed is neither the Jewish nation and its physical children, nor the church and her physical children. True believers are Abraham's seed whether they are Jews or Gentiles and whether they lived before or after Christ. They inherit the Abrahamic blessing only because they believe the gospel and not because of any physical lineage. Many Israelites never believed the gospel that was preached to them, but instead, trusted their privileges. Despite their special covenant relationship, most of them never inherited a single spiritual promise that had been made to Abraham and his seed. All of the members of any institutional church, especially the *national* church as advocated by Covenant Theology, are likewise not all 'in Christ.' They, as individuals, have no separate spiritual promise apart from personal repentance and faith in the universal gospel of God's grace.

C. The blessing of Abraham was promised not only to the Jews, but to "all the kindreds of the earth." The Apostles proclaimed the fulfilled promises as being "...to the Jew *first*..." but never to the Jew *exclusively*. The Gentiles are promised the identical blessings as those promised to the Jews.

D. The fulfillment of the true blessing promised to Abraham *has already been realized* by everyone who *believes the gospel*. The proclamation of the gospel in the book of Acts is always in terms of the resurrection of Christ *having already* secured the promised Abrahamic blessing. There is not the slightest hint in these verses of any blessing promised to Abraham having been postponed until some later date.

E. The blessing promised to Abraham that was reaffirmed to all of the fathers and promised in all of the prophets is nothing less than the gospel promise of Christ himself. Peter is saying that he was sent by God to announce to the Jews that the promises made to their fathers in the writings of the prophets *have been fulfilled* in Christ. Nowhere is there any hint of a postponed blessing to be given in the future. According to Peter and Paul, the Old Testament prophets were talking about the gospel age in which we now live. The words in these verses cannot be made to mean anything else. It is probably significant that the *Scofield Reference Bible* does not cross reference Acts 3:24–26 back to Genesis 12:1–3, *or to anywhere else*. It ignores the fact that Peter is

quoting, interpreting, and applying the true meaning of God's covenant with Abraham. If ever there was an Old Testament text quoted by a New Testament Apostle that should be cross-referenced and explained, it is this one. This is doubly true if we are trying to understand what God meant in his covenant with Abraham and his seed concerning the promise to bless him and his seed by "turning away everyone of you from his iniquities." It seems obvious that Dispensationalism cannot fit Peter's *spiritualized* interpretation of the promises made to Abraham and his seed into their system.

Dispensationalism is forced to put into the future what Peter, in this text, specifically says has already been fulfilled. They must also *naturalize* the blessing promised to Abraham that Peter clearly *spiritualizes*. This may or may not be the reason the verse was not cross referenced by Scofield. Regardless, it is impossible to take Peter's words *literally* and then fit the 'postponed kingdom' view into this passage of Scripture. It has always amazed me that the people that insist on a literal interpretation of the *words of Scripture* will not do that very thing when a New Testament Apostle literally *spiritualizes* an Old Testament prophecy. Peter's natural language of "This is that which was spoken by the prophet" cannot be taken literally by a Dispensationalist.

F. The infallible proof of the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and his seed is the 'giving of the Spirit.' A comparison of Acts 2:18, 38 and Galatians 3:14 will show that this is the heart of Peter's explanation of the events that occurred on the day of Pentecost. It will also show that the giving of the Spirit is a new and unique experience not possible before Pentecost, even though it was the heart of the anticipated promise in the OT Scriptures.

Even on my servants, both men and women, I will *pour out my Spirit* in those days,... Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ ... And you will receive the *gift of the Holy Spirit*. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the *promise of the Spirit* (Acts 2:18, 38; Gal. 3:14 NIV).

The most important single question concerning Abraham and the promises made to him in Genesis 12:1–3 is very simple. Read the following question carefully and then see what I believe to be one of the basic errors of Dispensationalism expressed in the answer: "In choosing, calling, and entering into covenant with Abraham, is God":

* making an 'unconditional covenant' that begins a whole new program involving an earthly people (the nation of Israel) with a permanent and separate identity in a specific and clearly defined physical land (Palestine), in distinction to a heavenly people (the church) with its spiritual blessings in the heavenly places?

* or is God taking the first step to fulfill the prediction made in Genesis 3:15 concerning the *unique Seed* coming to die on the cross in fulfillment of the one eternal unchanging purpose of grace (Rev. 13:8) for his one, true, elect people?

Every Dispensationalist would agree with the first choice, but some of them would want to delete the word *permanent*, and then say, "I agree with both choices." The foundation of consistent Dispensationalism rests on God beginning, with Abraham, a new program with an 'earthly' people that must culminate in their inheriting and keeping the land of Palestine permanently. This purpose of God for Israel is totally separate from his program for the 'heavenly' people, the church. Israel will inherit physical Palestine and the church will inherit heaven. The second program of God, the church, is supposedly not 'made known' until Paul reveals it in the book of Ephesians.

In taking such a view of the Abrahamic covenant, Dispensationalism fails to see the totality of the continuity of the *single* goal of redemption in Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:1–3, as that goal is developed in the rest of Scripture, especially by the NT Apostles in their inspired interpretation of God's dealings with Abraham. That system also fails to appreciate how clearly Abraham himself saw that the physical land of Palestine was not the real and final fulfillment of God's promise to him and his seed (Gen. 22:18; John 8:56; Heb. 11:9–10).

The great importance of Abraham is *not* that he is the father of the *Jewish nation*, but that he is the father of the nation that will *bring forth the Messiah*. The fact that Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation has no more *spiritual* or *eternal* significance in and of itself for the Jewish nation than Ishmael becoming a great nation because he was Abraham's physical seed has eternal or spiritual significance for the Arab nations that descended from Ishmael. Every eternal promise of God is made to Christ and not to the Jewish nation. Every spiritual blessing to any person must grow out of Revelation 13:8.

God, in choosing and calling Abraham, is not starting a *second eternal purpose* and a *second perpetual program* involving an earthly and separate nation. He is merely choosing and designating the seed line that will bring to pass the promise of Genesis 3:15 and the goal of Revelation 13:8. Dispensationalism, at this point, introduces a disunity into the purposes of God that makes it impossible to see the events happening in the NT Scriptures to be the very things that were promised to the fathers throughout the OT Scriptures. The whole concept of the 'postponed kingdom' begins in misunderstanding 'the promise of God to Abraham' in Genesis 12. Once this is done, it is impossible to use the NT Scriptures to understand and interpret the kingdom prophecies in the OT Scriptures. This misunderstanding leads to forcing OT concepts into the NT Scriptures. We will say more about this later.

We simply must see the following facts:

* Everything that God did with Israel, or anyone else, is somehow related to his one single purpose of the redemption of Abraham's seed, the one true people of God (*cf.* Rev. 13:8 and passages like Eph. 1:10–12).

* Abraham's seed, the one true people of God, is the election of grace, or all those "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world."

It is interesting, and even a bit amusing, to see how far men will go in order to defend a position dear to their hearts. In 1972 the General Association of Regular Baptists had a heated discussion over the doctrine of God's sovereign election. An attempt was made to strengthen the article in the doctrinal statement that dealt with salvation and election. A group of strong Arminians not only managed to kill the amendment concerning the election of believers, but they also strengthened the article dealing with God's choice of the nation of Israel. I am sure they did not *intentionally* borrow the language of the Covenant Theologian, but all they managed to do was move the 'covenant of grace' concept from the church to the nation of Israel. I really smiled when I read the following Dispensational statement applying Covenant Theology terminology to Israel:

XVIII. ISRAEL

We believe in the *sovereign selection* of Israel as God's *eternal covenant* people, that she is now dispersed because of her disobedience and rejection of Christ, and that she will be regathered in the Holy Land and, after the

completion of the church, will be saved *as a nation* at the second advent of Christ. Gen. 13:14–17; Rom. 11:1–32; Ezek. 37.¹⁵

The Dispensationalism of the General Association of Regular Baptists adamantly maintains that there is an ‘everlasting Covenant (of grace)’ with *Israel*. They merely transfer the covenant of grace from the church to the nation of Israel and make inheriting the land of Palestine to be equivalent to eternal salvation rest. We could correctly call their system ‘Covenant (Israel) Theology.’

Militant Dispensationalists are usually, though not always, strongly Arminian in their view of freewill. It would be amusing to ask the following question: “How can we be sure that Israel will exercise their freewill in the future and let God save them?” The amazing answer would be hyper-Calvinism as it regards Israel. “God is going to make them believe!” Why is it so unfair for God to give faith to an individual elect Gentile today, but not only fair, but actually obligatory, that he give faith to the whole Jewish nation in the future? So much for consistency!

I personally believe that Israel, as a people, is still a unique people in God’s purposes. However, as a nation, they do not have any spiritual or eternal purposes independent of the church. God does not have two peoples, two programs, two eternal purposes, two gospels, and he most certainly does not have two separate brides for his Son (Eph. 2:11–22). This does not mean that Israel, *as a people*, is not still “beloved for the fathers’ sakes.” It is one thing to think of Israel as a physical nation with national and earthly distinctions and another to think of Israel as a people with God’s peculiar mark upon them. Romans 11 convinces me there will be many Jews saved in the future, but they will be part of the church.

Dispensationalism clearly acknowledges that the gospel is *one* of the things being promised in Genesis 12:3. In a footnote explaining the Abrahamic Covenant, Scofield says:

(7) “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” This is the great evangelic promise fulfilled in Abraham’s Seed, Christ (Gal. iii:16; John

¹⁵ From *The Constitution of the General Association of Regular Baptists Churches* as amended June 1972.

viii:56–58). It brings into greater definiteness the promise of the Adamic Covenant concerning the Seed of the woman (Gen. iii:15).¹⁶

We basically agree with this statement. However, Scofield then proceeds to make the rest of the things promised apply to the physical nation of Israel as the ‘seed of Abraham’ and these aspects of the promise soon overshadow everything else.

Covenant Theology, on the other hand, tries to establish continuity from Gen. 3:15 to Gen. 12:1–3, and the rest of Scripture, on the basis of a formal and definitive ‘covenant of grace’ that has no textual basis in Scripture. It is the product of theological deductionism. The concept of a covenant of grace may, or may not, be useful in some discussions, but using the term as a building block for understanding the foundation of all Scripture is to exalt terms developed by theologians above the actual words used by the Holy Spirit in the Bible itself. We should always be skeptical when people insist on using words and phrases to prove key points in their systems, especially when they have *no* texts of Scripture that utilize the same words or phrases. It always gives me the impression that someone is trying to teach us something that the Holy Ghost forgot to mention. The late Dr. Gordon Clark, a strong Covenant Theologian, has given some excellent advice to all theologians:

... A Christian theologian should use biblical terms in their biblical meaning ...¹⁷

I would change that into two statements. I would say, first a theologian should always use the actual terms that the Scriptures uses, and second he should use those terms only with the specific meaning given to them by Scripture. We should never substitute theological terms for biblical terms, and we should not load biblical words with theological meaning, unless that meaning can be clearly established by other texts of Scripture. Both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology constantly violate this principle and use theological terms to ‘prove’ their arguments instead of using biblical texts and terms. The words of the creeds and ‘church fathers’ have a distinct tendency to replace the words that were uttered by inspired prophets and apostles in the Bible.

¹⁶ C.I. Scofield, ed., *The First Scofield Reference Bible*, (Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1986), p. 25.

¹⁷ Gordon H. Clark, *First Principles of Theology*, unpublished manuscript, p. 402.

I recently discussed the material in this chapter with a group of Reformed ministers. Several of them insisted on using the phrase 'covenant of grace' as if it had the authority of a verse of Scripture. They made no attempt to prove their points from the Bible itself but kept using theological terms and logic (See Appendix 3 for a lengthy discussion of this point).

At times I wonder when the doctrine of verbal inspiration is in danger of being unconsciously denied by theologians who manufacture theological terms not found in Scripture, and then use those terms as the sole support of a given point in their system of theology. It is even worse when they absolutely refuse to accept and use the specific words and terms inspired by the Holy Spirit himself simply because those words or terms will not fit into their system.

Every time I see that recurring phrase *commonly called* in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* when it follows a key theological term, I want to say, "Commonly called that by whom? Clearly not by any apostle or prophet in Scripture." What the confession actually means by commonly called is this: "We do not have any specific biblical texts to support this term or phrase, but we know it is correct, because it is essential to our theological system and it is commonly used by theologians all the time."

When the Romanist quotes the church fathers for authority instead of appealing to a verse of Scripture (because they have none) we call it the 'tradition of the fathers' and reject their doctrine. When the Puritans, or their heirs, appeal to established creeds (for the same reason the Romanist appealed to the fathers) or to human logic, it is called the 'analogy of faith.' We would do well to believe that John Brown was right when he accused the Puritans of putting the Word of God back under the very fetters that Luther and Calvin had destroyed with true biblical exegesis. This is a most interesting quotation:

In the age that followed [that of Luther and Calvin], the fetters which had been shattered were *strangely repaired* by many of the second and third series of Protestant expositors; and, with some noble exceptions, *humanly constructed theories* for harmonizing the varied statements of Revelation, under the plausible name of "*The Analogy of Faith*," were by them not only used as a correct means of interpreting the Scriptures, but *so elevated above*

all other means as to control, and indeed, in a great degree, to *supersede them*.¹⁸

John Brown was talking about men like those who framed the *Westminster Confession of Faith* who had, with the 'Analogy of Faith,' made many of their dictums to be the 'truth of God' without any textual verification.¹⁹ God help us when men in power start using a creed over our conscience and refuse to discuss the actual Word of God itself. We are indeed back in Roman country when that happens.

Summary

Let me summarize what we have been saying. Dispensationalism cuts the Bible in half and never the twain shall meet. Covenant Theology does the exact opposite and merges two distinctly different covenants (the Old and the New) into one covenant with two administrations. Dispensationalism cannot get the OT into the NT in any sense, and Covenant Theology does not even have a really *New Covenant*. They have a *newer* and *older* version of the same covenant. Dispensationalism cannot get the two Testaments *together*, and Covenant Theology cannot get them *apart*!

The basic mistake of both of these theological systems lies in their misunderstanding the promises made to Abraham and his seed in Genesis. As we shall see later, this error is the result of failing to see that the true unity of the whole Scripture involves *both* a Dispensational and a covenantal change. We must see two distinct *covenants*, namely, the old legal covenant at Sinai and the new gracious covenant that replaces it, but at the same time we must also see one distinct and unchanging

¹⁸ John Brown, *An Exposition of Galatians*, Banner of Truth Trust, p. vii.

¹⁹ We must always remember that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is just as much a political document as it is a religious document. The framers of the confession were writing a document of law to govern society in the same sense that the Congress of the United States writes laws. The confession was religious in nature, but it was still a secular government document. The 'church' men (Westminster Assembly) who wrote the confession were commissioned by 'political men' (Parliament) to do so, and Parliament had to approve the confession before it could be used. Once approved by Parliament the document was part of the civil laws of the land. The confession was finished by the Westminster Assembly (the religious body) without any Scripture proof texts. The Scripture proof texts were added several months later.

purpose of God being worked out for his one election of grace. Neither Dispensationalism nor Covenant Theology can see *both* of these things at the same time simply because of their doctrine of the church.

Regardless of one's response to the foregoing evaluations of both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism, at the moment we are only insisting that God's dealing with Abraham is not, as Dispensationalism claims, a new 'purpose and program for Israel,' nor is God, as Covenant Theology insists, establishing a 'covenant of grace' with Abraham and his physical children. God is merely taking the first step in bringing Christ, the true Seed, into the world in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. He is announcing the gospel of grace, and it is this gospel promise of Christ that unifies all of Scripture around the person and work of Christ himself.

Let us continue our discussion of Christ the unique Seed. We have covered the unique Seed as follows: Christ is the Seed (1) 'Purposed—He is God's Lamb;' He is the Seed (2) 'Predicted—He is the Seed of Woman;' He is the Seed (3) 'Promised—He is the Son of Abraham;' and now we see him as the Seed (4) 'Pledged—He is the Seed of David.'

4. *The unique Seed pledged—Christ is the Seed of David.*

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt **sleep with thy fathers**, I will **set up thy seed** after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will **establish his kingdom** (2 Sam 7:12).

The true understanding of this covenant that God made with David is given to us by Peter in his famous sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter connects the Davidic Covenant to the prophecy of Joel and shows that both the prophecy made to David concerning a throne and a kingdom, and the prophecy made to Joel concerning the new age, have been fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Christ. The 'giving of the Spirit' proves both of these prophecies are fulfilled. It is clear from Peter's sermon that the 'new age' envisioned by Joel is the same thing as the 'kingdom age' promised to David.²⁰ The new age signs are the proof of some kind of a present Kingship of Christ.

Let us look briefly at this key passage in Acts 2. When the amazed people asked, "What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:12), Peter explained what

²⁰ Revelation 3:7 makes it plain that Christ right now has, and exercises, the 'key of David.'

was happening. He declared that what they were witnessing that very day established, in some sense and to some degree, the following two facts:

- Joel's prophecy concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit being 'poured on all flesh' (not just Jews) was being fulfilled (vv. 14–21), and
- the covenant that God made with David concerning a throne and a kingdom was also fulfilled (vv. 22–36).

Peter explained and grounded both of these facts in the events taking place on the day of Pentecost. The giving of the Spirit was seen as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, and that in turn proved that Christ was sitting on David's throne in fulfillment of God's covenant to him. In other words, Peter was declaring that the day of Pentecost clearly proved the following:

- It was the absolute proof that the man they had crucified was not only truly alive from the dead, but he was at that very moment sitting at God's right hand in resurrected glory, and
- The ascension of Christ to David's throne with glory and power was the fulfillment of the specific prophecy made to David in 2 Samuel 7 concerning the establishment of the kingdom.

Peter saw the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as the fulfillment of the specific prophecy given to Joel concerning the inauguration of the 'new age.' In other words, the personal advent of the Holy Spirit was the proof that Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled; and that in turn proved that Christ, David's seed, had been 'raised up' to sit on David's throne, just as God had promised in the Davidic covenant.

Acts 2 is a very crucial passage that bridges the Old and the New Covenants. Neither Dispensationalism nor Covenant Theology can correctly grasp the heart of Peter's message on the day of Pentecost. Dispensationalism cannot see Pentecost as the true fulfillment of the kingdom promises given through Joel and David. Their system cannot see the Church as the true Israel of God in any sense whatever. Covenant Theology, on the other hand, cannot see a totally new age, a new people, and a new experience coming into being at Pentecost as proof that the Old Covenant has passed away and the promised New Covenant has taken its place (Heb. 8:6–13).

Chapter Six

The Unique Seed Continued—An Exposition of Acts 2

Since Acts 2 is such a crucial passage in bridging the Old and the New Covenants, it might be well for us to digress a moment and give an expanded outline of the main points in the chapter. As I mentioned, this book is primarily concerned with demonstrating basic presuppositions. This section will not only help to do that, but it will also be an opportunity to show that our hermeneutical approach will greatly affect our basic understanding of the OT Scriptures.

Acts 2:1–11—*The Miracle of Tongues*. Verse 7 says, “they were all amazed,” and verse 12 also says, “they were all amazed.” The first amazement was that men from sixteen places and speaking sixteen different languages, each heard the message of the gospel in his own tongue:

Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how *is it that* we hear, **each in our own language** in which we were born” (Acts 2:7, 8 NKJV).

The second cause of amazement was that the gospel, or “wonderful works of God,” was being preached to *Jews* in *Gentile* languages:

“...we hear them speaking in **our own tongues the wonderful works of God**.” So they were all amazed and perplexed,... (vv. 11, 12 NKJV).

Acts 2:12—*The Obvious Question*. The question, “What could this mean?” grows out of both of the *amazements* mentioned above. The greatest amazement was probably not the tongues, but the message that was given in the tongues.

Acts 2:13—*The Carnal Answer*. One will notice that the Holy Spirit says, “*Others* mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’” All of those present did not hear the message of the wonderful works of God. Those asking the question saw the hand of God in the message that they were hearing, but others heard only babbling. The miracle well might have been on the ear of the listener as well as on the tongue of the speaker.

Acts 2:14–20—*Peter’s Inspired Interpretation*. Peter’s understanding of what took place on the day of Pentecost is full of instruction,

especially for us in our discussion concerning the “seed to whom the promise was made.” Here is the beginning of his sermon:

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this **is what was spoken by the prophet Joel**:

*‘And it shall come to pass in the **last days**, says God,
That I will **pour out My Spirit** on all flesh;
Your Sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.
And on **my menservants** and on **my maidservants**
I will **pour out My Spirit** in those days;
And they shall **prophecy**.
I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.
The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord ...’ (Acts
2:14–20 NKJV).*

The pouring out of the Spirit was the sign that would inaugurate the New Covenant age. This was clearly foretold by the prophets (not only by Joel), and Peter was telling his hearers that the events they were witnessing were the positive proofs that the New Covenant Age had come.

We must avoid two extremes as we seek to understand Peter’s use of the prophecy of Joel. First, we must not get our concept of the kingdom out of Joel and then demand that the events in Acts literally, meaning *in natural language*, agree on a one to one basis. This method will easily prove that Joel’s prophecy was not literally fulfilled at Pentecost and therefore it awaits a millennium fulfillment. This is using the Old Testament Scriptures to interpret the New Testament Scriptures instead of the other way around. This is not allowing Peter to mean what he literally says.

The second mistake is to make Peter’s words in Acts 2 mean far more than they actually say. This is often done by showing that Peter clearly understood Joel 2:32 to be fulfilled in the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to indwell believers. So far, so good. However, this

fact is then extended to *everything* in the book of Joel, and by further extension, to *every kingdom prophecy* in the Old Testament Scriptures. It seems to me this is as bad as the first extreme. There is no question that Peter is using both the Davidic covenant and Joel's prophecy to prove that *the kingdom has truly come*, or been *inaugurated*, but that in no way means that the kingdom's fullness, or every predicted aspect, has been accomplished. Because Peter declares Joel 2:32 to be fulfilled does not mean every single kingdom prophecy has been fulfilled.

Acts 2:21—*The Heart of the Pentecost Passage*. This is the heart of Joel's prophecy and shows beyond question that Joel was talking about the gospel message for the whole world when he was prophesying. Joel was talking about this present age when the gospel of grace would be extended to all men, including the "far-off" Gentiles, and Peter was saying, "That age has come. That prophecy is being fulfilled in front of your eyes." Look carefully at Peter's interpretation of Joel:

*'...And it shall come to pass
That **whosoever** shall call on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved'* (Acts 2:21 NKJV).

By setting Peter's words along side of Joel's words, we not only see how Peter understood Joel's prophecy, but we also get a lesson in how the inspired New Testament Apostles interpreted the 'kingdom' prophecies of the OT Scriptures. We must insist that our hermeneutical approach to the OT Scriptures be the same as that of the writers of the NT Scriptures. It seems quite clear to me that both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism approach the NT Scriptures with a system already fixed in their minds that they derived entirely from the OT Scriptures. Both of those systems of theology insist on interpreting the new in light of the old instead of the other way around. Unfortunately, both systems are fully developed before they even get out of the book of Genesis. Instead of allowing the Apostles to tell us what the Old Testament prophets meant, both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism make the Old Testament prophets establish what the Apostles have to say. They merely do it in different areas in order to prove different doctrines.

The following comparison of Joel's prophecy and Peter's inspired interpretation is an example of how we must learn to read the OT Scriptures in the light of their interpretation by inspired NT Apostles. It is obvious that the 'deliverance' spoken of in Joel is not political

freedom for the Jews in a future earthly kingdom, but is clearly understood by Peter to be referring to the full salvation that will be experienced by Jew and Gentile under the gospel age (Luke 1:68–79).

And it shall come to pass, <i>that</i>	<i>And it shall come to pass</i>
whosoever shall call on the name	<i>That whoever calls on the name of</i>
of the LORD	<i>the LORD</i>
shall be delivered : ... (Joel 2:32)	<i>Shall be saved' (Acts 2:21 NKJV).</i>

The new age 'of the Spirit' is the gospel age predicted by Joel. Peter was stating the following facts about the kingdom.

1. *When would this kingdom be established?* Joel's prophecy concerned the time in which you and I live today and not just the future.

2. *To whom was this kingdom promised?* The promise is equally applied to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. According to Peter's interpretation of Joel's prophecy, the promise is to whosoever and not just the nation of Israel.

3. *How were the blessings of the kingdom to be received?* The deliverance was to be given on the basis of faith in the gospel message and had nothing at all to do with physical birth.

4. *Exactly what did Joel mean by 'deliverance?'* Peter clearly says that Joel's 'deliverance' was spiritual salvation and not national, political freedom.

Acts 2:22–24—Jesus had all of the credentials necessary to prove that he was the Messiah; but, in spite of all the evidence, the Jews still crucified him. However, "God raised him from the dead" (Acts 2:24a NIV). Peter's emphasis proves that the man they crucified had fulfilled the prophecies contained in the prophets concerning the Messiah King.

Acts 2: 25–28—This resurrection of Christ from the grave was also clearly prophesied by David.

Acts 2:29–36—Peter's application of the fact of the resurrection and the ascension of Christ reveals that David understood exactly what was being promised to him in 2 Samuel 7. Peter's sermon also shows that David understood both *when* and *how* the covenant promise to "raise up his Son to sit on his throne" would be fulfilled. This very clear 'time'

reference is often missed when discussing the establishment of David's throne.

Again, it will be helpful to put David's prophetic words and Peter's interpretation side by side. The following chart is designed to prove exactly how a New Testament apostle understood and applied an Old Testament prophecy concerning the Davidic kingdom.

Notice carefully the following facts that are clearly established in a careful comparison of the actual words in the prophecy and Peter's inspired interpretation of them.

	... let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David,
And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers ,	that he is both dead and buried , and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore
I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will	being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins , according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ
establish his kingdom.	to sit on his throne ;
	He [David] seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ ...
2 Samuel 7:12 (1 Chron. 17:11)	Acts 2:29–31

1. Peter substitutes the word *Christ* for *seed* so there is no question as to whom the prophecy refers. Christ is the seed that was “raised up” (or “resurrected”—clearly pinpoints the time of fulfillment) to sit on the throne in fulfillment of the covenant promise to David.

2. Peter shows that David understood these words to be more than just a promise of the bodily resurrection of Christ. Peter clearly connected the resurrection and ascension of Christ with the establishment of the kingdom promised to David. When one compares

the words of 2 Samuel 7 and Acts 2, it is impossible to miss that fact. The “setting up the seed” and “establishing the kingdom” are the *same thing* as “raising up Christ” to “sit on his (David’s) throne” and all of this was to happen at the *same time*. The Holy Spirit specifically tells us that when David spoke of “the raising up of Christ (resurrection) to sit on his (David’s) throne” that David was expressly speaking of the resurrection and ascension of Christ that had just taken place (vv. 30, 31). Peter’s words can only mean that David’s greater Son was to begin sitting on the promised throne *at the time of Christ’s resurrection and ascension*.

There is not the slightest hint of a postponed future earthly throne in Peter’s words. If one takes Peter’s words literally, he proves beyond question that the Holy Spirit deliberately spiritualized the Old Testament prophecy of the Davidic kingdom.

3. Further proof of this time factor can be seen in the words “while David was sleeping with the fathers.” This can only mean that Christ would sit on David’s throne at the *same time* that David was still “sleeping with the fathers,” or *before David’s resurrection*. This is why Peter deliberately mentioned that David is “both dead and buried and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.” Peter is saying, “The promise to David has been fulfilled in the exact manner and precise time (how and when) as it was prophesied to David.” The throne was to be established at the time of the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and it would happen “while David was sleeping with his fathers” awaiting his own resurrection (1 Chronicles 17:11 and Acts 13:35, 36 for the same time reference). It is impossible to fit Walvoord’s statement (see page 21) that “resurrected David will reign under Christ as a Prince over the house of Israel” into Peter’s inspired interpretation of God’s covenant with David. Recent ‘Progressive’ Dispensationalists admit that Walvoord is wrong in expecting David himself to be raised from the dead and rule in Jerusalem. However, they insist that substituting Christ for David is not to be understood as spiritualizing prophecy.

4. The words “I will establish his kingdom” in the promise to David becomes “raise up Christ to sit on his throne” in the inspired interpretation by Peter. Again, it is clear that this event took place at the ascension of Christ. There is not the slightest hint in Peter’s words of any expectations of a future Davidic throne or kingdom that has temporarily been postponed. If this enthronement of David’s Seed takes

place during a future earthly millennium, then David will not be raised from the dead until after that millennium is over.

The Holy Spirit could not possibly say any more clearly that David's Seed is sitting on David's throne right now and that the kingdom promised to David has, in some sense, already been established at the ascension of Christ (1 Chronicles 17:11–15). It would be grasping at straws to say that Christ *now* sits in heaven on a throne as *Lord* of the church, but he will *later* sit on a physical throne in Palestine as *King* of Israel. The NT Scriptures simply will not allow that distinction. The days of the manifestation of both the *glory* and the *power* of Christ began at the ascension. No New Testament writer ever thinks or writes of such a manifestation of Christ's glory and power as being totally future.²¹

The gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is the evidence of Christ's ascension to David's throne as promised in 2 Samuel 7. Pentecost is also a visible expression or exercise of Christ's earned Lordship or present Kingship (Joel 2:28, 29). The gift of the Holy Spirit was the direct and earned response to the victorious work of the enthroned King, and it was also the full proof that the Father was perfectly satisfied with that work.

Consistent Dispensationalism must either deny, ignore, or minimize a 'Lordship of Christ' theology for the present 'church age.' That system cannot see the events of the day of Pentecost as being the true fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and the Davidic Covenant. Joel's prophecy and David's throne simply must be pushed into the future and must be related to physical Israel. To accept Peter's spiritualizing of the OT Scriptures is to deny the basic hermeneutical principle upon which the Dispensational system of interpreting the Scripture rests. That system must understand Peter's words in the light of the natural (literal) meaning of Joel's words instead of the natural (literal) *spiritualizing* of

²¹ The key word in the last sentence is *totally*. Nothing I have said rules out the possibility of historic premillennialism being true. The Psalmist was not denying God's present sovereignty when he prayed for God to manifest his sovereign power. Likewise, it is not a denial of the present Lordship of Christ to believe there will also be a future visible revelation of that Lordship over the whole earth. We need not be forced into an 'either/or' or into a 'present' or 'future' kingdom. It may well be that *both* are true; it may be '*now/not yet*.'

those words by Peter. Such an approach makes it impossible to take the words of the New Testament writers literally when those writers give a *spiritual* meaning to the *natural* words used by the prophets. When Peter says, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," a Dispensationalist cannot take Peter's words literally unless he can see each physical word used by Joel fulfilled in a specific natural or physical event in Acts. His theology, without any help from the NT Scriptures, establishes Joel's literal (natural) meaning, and then demands that Peter's words have to agree with that natural interpretation. This method of interpretation simply cannot literalize Peter's words in the same manner that Peter literally *spiritualizes* Joel's words.

Covenant Theology, on the other hand, must downplay any idea that the day of Pentecost inaugurated either a distinctly new and different Covenant or any really new and distinct work of the Holy Spirit. The personal advent of the Spirit is reduced to merely a greater effusion of what was already a reality in the experience of the Old Covenant believer. Covenant Theology practically ignores the specific NT Scriptures that say otherwise.

In reality, Covenant Theology no more allows the NT Scriptures to interpret the OT Scriptures than does Dispensationalism. Both systems have a fully developed theology before they ever get to the NT Scriptures. In the one case, "God's unconditional covenant with *Israel*, Abraham's seed, enters the New Testament Scriptures *unchanged*." In the other case, "God's unconditional covenant with the children of *believing parents*, Abraham's seed, enters the NT Scriptures *unchanged*." In both systems the New Testament Scriptures are forced to fit into the mold that was formed entirely from a naturalizing of the Old Testament Scriptures. The basic hermeneutic is identical in both cases.

Here are a few things that must be faced if we are to be honest with the clear facts revealed in the NT Scriptures:

A. The Holy Spirit *could not come* until Christ had completed his redemptive work and ascended to his newly earned throne. When the Holy Spirit *did come*, it was as a direct consequence of Christ having ascended to the right hand of God to sit on David's throne after being crowned with glory and power as a reward for his finished work of redemption. The apostle John is emphatic:

(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him **should receive**: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was **not yet glorified** (John 7:39)).²²

This Scripture specifically uses the future tense “should receive,” and just as specifically tells us why “the Holy Spirit was not yet given” before that time, namely, “because Jesus was not yet glorified.” When the Holy Spirit is so clear and specific in his language, what reasons do theologians have for saying, “The Holy Spirit has always been here doing the same work as he now does?” There simply must be a New Covenant ‘coming of the Spirit’ to do a new and distinct work from that which he did in the Old Covenant, and that work must be in direct response to the ascension of Christ to the Father’s right hand. If this is not so, then the above verses have no real meaning.

I grant that I may not understand what the totally new work is that the Holy Spirit has come to do in this dispensation, but I do know that these verses demand *some kind* of a totally new work. These words cannot be glossed over by saying, “We know that since God’s people are always under the same covenant of grace, the verse cannot mean that there is something which is essentially and totally new and different in the Spirit’s ministry to believers today.” That is forcing Scripture to fit into a system instead of allowing the Scripture to produce a system.

Likewise, we must see that our receiving the Holy Spirit is a manifestation and proof that the days of Christ’s ‘glory’ have *already begun*. Look again at the words in John 7:39 and notice the specific and essential relationship between the ‘glory of Christ’ and the ‘giving of the Spirit.’ The latter is the proof that the former has already happened. Look at another text of God’s Word.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, **the Comforter will not come unto you**; but if I depart, **I will send him** unto you (John 16:7).

If the Holy Spirit was already here, then Christ’s words have no meaning. These words in John 16:7 demand a new ministry of the Spirit, and the beginning of that new ministry is contingent upon the victorious ascension of Christ to David’s throne. This is exactly how the early

²² This is only one of many texts that proves the “days of Christ’s *glory*” do not await a future kingdom but began when he ascended into heaven and sat down at his Father’s right hand.

believers understood these words of Christ. One does not wait for something that one already possesses. The Apostles were not waiting to receive the fulfillment of a promise for more of something they already had. They were waiting for the promise of the Spirit himself.

And being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but **wait for the promise of the Father**, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me (Acts 1:4).

The personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost began a totally new era in which he has a distinctly new ministry. One cannot take these verses seriously and believe that a New Covenant believer enjoys nothing but more of the same thing experienced by an Old Covenant believer any more than one can make these words offer a future hope of a postponed kingdom to national Israel. Covenant Theology simply cannot allow a new and distinct *dispensation* governed by a new and distinctly *different covenant* to come into being as the result of the personal advent of Christ and the personal advent of the Holy Spirit. There cannot be any essential difference between Israel and the church or between the older and the newer administrations of the same covenant of grace. Covenant Theology cannot see the Body of Christ as a totally new thing that could not possibly come into being before the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The Dispensationalist, on the other hand, cannot see that the kingdom of 'glory' anticipated by the OT prophets has already been inaugurated because the King himself has already been 'glorified' and is right now sitting on David's throne with "all power and authority." The Dispensational system will not allow the church to be the true Israel of God in any sense. It is forced to make the church an interlude between the time the kingdom was postponed (when Christ supposedly announced an earthly kingdom and the Jews rejected it) and the future time when God again deals with Israel as a nation and establishes the earthly kingdom (millennium) that was postponed.

Dispensationalism cannot see that we now live in the very days "promised to the fathers and the prophets." The kingdom, the King, David's throne, the days of glory, the display of power, etc., must all be pushed into the future. The Amil on the other hand assumes, with no textual warrant, that we have seen and experienced the *full extent* of everything that was promised. He must insist that we have seen all of the earthly display of Christ's power and glory that will ever be seen on the

present earth. Everything else awaits the “new heavens and the new earth.”

When I hear Amils lauding the “present gospel millennium,” or as some refer to it, the “realized millennium,” as the *total package* for this dispensation, I feel like singing Peggy Lee’s song, *Is This All There Is?*²³ The kingdom inaugurated and established is not the kingdom consummated in total victory.

B. The Feast of Pentecost was fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits. The specific day was already established. We do not call the day upon which the Holy Spirit came “the day of Pentecost” because he came on that day. The Holy Spirit came that particular day because it *was* the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:1 says, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (NIV). The coming of the Spirit on that particular day was the direct fulfillment of the Levitical feasts, just as the death of Christ was on the day of Atonement. The events that happened on the day of Pentecost were the final and full proofs that Christ was the true Passover Lamb. The long awaited promise of the “pouring out of the Spirit” (Joel 2:28, 29) had come. The promise of Jesus to the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be “in them” was being realized. This is the new ministry of the Holy Spirit that had to await the crowning of the victorious ascended Lord and King. It was a work that was clearly *foretold* in the prophets but not *experienced* until the exaltation, or glorification, of Christ.

The giving of the Spirit was the heart of the *promise* of the gospel in the OT Scriptures, and it is the crowning *experience* of the gospel under the New Covenant. This is why the Apostles not only emphasized the ascension of Christ to the Father’s right hand in their preaching, but they also emphasized it as the fulfillment of the promises made in all of the

²³ If a Premil is totally consistent, then he cannot have any kingdom prophecies fulfilled before the second coming of Christ. Likewise, if an Amil is totally consistent, he cannot have any kingdom prophecies fulfilled after Christ comes. It is impossible to use the word *millennium* to denote any prophetic system without creating contradictions and confusion. We need to speak in terms of ‘the Kingdom’ instead of ‘millennium,’ and when we do, we will realize that the Kingdom has already come and the Kingdom is yet to come. This is called ‘now/not yet.’ However, we must add that when both an Amil and a Premil say “now/not yet”, they mean two different things.

prophets. Joel's prophecy and the covenant made with David are both clear examples.

Peter's whole sermon hinged on the personal advent of the Holy Spirit being the following things: (1) The fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel, (2) the fulfillment of the covenant made with David, and (3) the fulfillment of the OT concept of the kingdom promised in all of the prophets.

Spurgeon has a great sermon, taken from the words "and I will put my Spirit within you" in Ezekiel 36:27 entitled "The Covenant Promise of the Spirit." He emphasizes the newness of the Spirit's ministry in this age:

Clearly this is a word of grace, for the law saith nothing of this kind. Turn to the law of Moses, and see if there be any word spoken therein concerning the putting of the Spirit within men to cause them to walk in God's statutes. (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 37, p. 217).

When we put together several verses of Scripture, they show us exactly what this new ministry of the Spirit is, and why it could not begin until the ascension of Christ and the establishing of the New Covenant:

Therefore being at the **right hand** of God **exalted**, and having received of the Father the **promise of the Holy Ghost**, he [Jesus] hath shed forth **this**, which you now see and hear (Acts 2:33).

...but wait for the **promise of the Father**, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be **baptized with the Holy Ghost** not many days hence (Acts 1:4b, 5).

The baptism of the Spirit is the New Covenant experience of Christ in you and you in Christ, and this experience is only possible because Pentecost has taken place. And remember, Pentecost could not take place before the ascension of Christ to glory. The experiential reality of being personally united to Christ in his "death, burial, resurrection, and ascension" could not possibly precede Christ's own ascension to His newly earned throne. The giving of the Spirit is the result and absolute proof of his ascension and Lordship.

Old Covenant believers could never have had a realization of "[being seated] together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6 NIV). The book of Ephesians had not yet been written simply because the historical events described in Hebrews 9:11–28 upon which the Ephesian

experience is based had not yet occurred. Covenant Theology would have us believe that an Israelite could sit in his tent and read John Murray's great book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, even though the actual redemption had not yet been accomplished at Calvary.²⁴

3. It is the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that created the Body of Christ or 'New Man' of Ephesians. Pentecost united, on an equal footing, believing Jews and believing Gentiles by creating the totally new entity (the Body of Christ) described by Paul:

[His purpose was to create] in himself of twain one **new man**, so making peace, And that he might reconcile both unto God **in one** body by the cross,...for through him we both have access **by one Spirit unto the Father** (Eph. 2:15b, 16, 18).

Covenant Theology cannot make this text refer to the church as a new and distinct entity that never previously existed. Its view of Pentecost only allows for a greater effusion of what is already the experience of Old Covenant believers. However, it is obvious that neither the Jew nor the Gentile could have had the 'access' spoken of in this text as long as the veil, the covenant, and the old priesthood were in effect. John Owen has a great sermon on Ephesians 2:18 entitled "The Beauty of Gospel Worship" in which he sets forth this very truth. He contrasts worship under the Old Covenant with gospel worship under the New Covenant. Owen first shows how worship under the gospel age gives us access unto God himself, and then says the following:

We have in this spiritual worship of the gospel access unto God *as a Father*. I showed, in the opening of the words, that God is distinctly proposed here as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our God and Father. Hence are we said to come "to the throne of grace," Hebrews 4:16; that is, unto God as he is gloriously exalted in the *dispensation of grace*, in kindness, love, mercy,-in a word, as a Father. God on the throne of grace, and God as a Father, is all one consideration; for, as a Father, he is all love, grace, and mercy to his children in Christ. When God came of old to institute his worship in giving of the law, he did it with the dreadful and terrible representation of his majesty, that the people chose not to come near, but went and "stood afar off, and said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die," Exodus 20:18, 19. And

²⁴ It is equally fair to say that some Dispensationalists seem to picture the old Israelite in his tent studying Charles Larkin's charts or Scofield's notes.

by this dreadful representation of the majesty of God, as the object of that worship, were they kept in fear and bondage all their days. BUT NOW are the saints encouraged to make their approach unto God AS A FATHER; the glory whereof the apostle excellently expresth, Rom. viii. 14, 15. **That fear and bondage wherein men were kept under the law is now removed, and in the place thereof a spirit of children, with reverent boldness going to their father, is given unto us.** This, I say, adds to the glory, beauty, and excellency of gospel worship. There is not the meanest believer but, with his most broken prayers and supplications, hath an immediate access unto God, and that as a Father; nor the most despised church of saints on the earth but it comes with its worship into the glorious presence of God himself.²⁵

Owen is correct in stressing that this new access to God as *Father* is a new and distinct reality under the New Covenant that was not possible under the Old Covenant.²⁶ It is the baptism by the Spirit of every believer into the Body of Christ that gives New Covenant believers, for the first time, the status of 'adopted sons' (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 4:4–7) and destroys forever all of the distinctions and categories established and enforced by the Old Covenant (Gal. 3:26–29). It is the new status of *sonship* that gives the new boldness to approach the throne and know that he who sits there is our elder Brother. An Old Covenant believer could never even imagine such a thing. It is impossible to have the 'in Christ' experience where every believer, Jew or Gentile, is united to Christ in his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and to each other, as equal brothers and sisters, and at the same time, be 'under the law' with the distinctions of Jew/Gentile, male/female and bond/free that the Old Covenant mandated.

The Old Covenant proved one's guilt and forbade one to draw near without a perfect righteousness or an acceptable sacrifice. The New Covenant declares a believer to be both righteous and acceptable in God's sight, and it bids him come boldly without fear into the very Most Holy place that was totally closed off to all but Aaron under the Old Covenant.

²⁵ *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. IX, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988) pp. 59, 60.

²⁶ J.I. Packer makes an excellent presentation of this same emphasis in his book *Knowing God*. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973) pp. 182–184.

The law as a legal covenant ended when the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50, 51),²⁷ and the law as a pedagogue over the conscience was dismissed on the day of Pentecost when the 'promise of the Father' took up his abode in every believer as the personal Vicar of the ascended Lord. The giving of the Spirit is the proof of the accepted work of Christ in the heavenly tabernacle, and the 'given Spirit' *indwelling* the believer is the indelible assurance of our eternal acceptance by the Father. This is the truth that Peter was delivering in his message in Acts (Gal. 3:24–29):

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear (Acts 2:33).

Acts 2: 37–41—*The Effect of the Sermon*. The unbelieving Jews were convicted of their sin and cried out in fear, "What shall we do?" Peter repeated the gospel message and again reinforced it with the prophecy of Joel. Peter exhorted them to repent and be baptized and assured them that they would be saved and would receive the Holy Spirit just as Joel had prophesied:

... the promise [of salvation and the giving of the Holy Spirit promised to whosoever believes as prophesied by Joel] is unto [1] you, and [2] to your children, and [3] to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39).

Again it will be helpful to put Joel's words and Peter's interpretation and application side by side. Notice that the "whosoever" in Joel becomes "you, your children, and all that are afar off" in Peter's interpretation.

²⁷ I have developed the significance of Matthew 27:50, 51 in a paper entitled *The Better Priesthood of Christ*. These verses, along with Hebrews 8:6 are some of the most important words in the New Testament for understanding biblical covenants and the relationship of law and grace.

Joel 2:32	Acts 2:38–40
And it shall come to pass,	...the promise is unto
that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD	you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, (v. 39).
shall be delivered:...	...shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (v. 38). ...words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves...(v. 40).
...and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.	...even as many as the Lord our God shall call (v. 39).

It is not in the scope of this book to probe into the subject of infant baptism. However, I must mention that it amazes me that Paedobaptists would use Acts 2:39 as a proof text for baptizing babies; and they not only do use it, but it is one of their *key* texts for proving infant baptism. (For a short discussion of this text as it applies to infant baptism, see Appendix 4).

Let us continue our discussion of Christ the *unique* Seed.

5. The unique Seed pictured—Christ is the *subject of all Scripture*. Every type and shadow in the OT Scriptures teaches us something about our Savior. Every single passage of Scripture leads to Christ in some way.

And he said unto them... that **all things** must be **fulfilled**, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the Psalms, **concerning me**. Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures, (Luke 24:44, 45).

The OT Scriptures are not just a book of laws nor do they merely contain the history of the nation of Israel. They are all pictures of Christ the promised Messiah (Hebrews 10:5–9).

6. The unique Seed presented—Christ is the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He is the fulfillment of the gospel promise that God gave to Abraham, David, and all of the fathers and prophets. Luke’s words cannot mean anything else.

Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And **hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David**; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our **father Abraham**, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him **without fear**, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give **knowledge of salvation** unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:68–79).

The Seed is here presented and his kingdom of grace is proclaimed. It would be difficult indeed to get the Dispensational view of a ‘postponed earthly kingdom’ into Luke’s words. This passage of Scripture shows that the pious Jew living prior to Christ’s coming was looking forward to a *spiritual* kingdom. The kingdom described in these verses is the very kingdom that Christ both offered and established. It is the same kingdom that was the subject and hope of all of the Old Testament prophets. It is the “kingdom of his dear Son” into which we have already been translated (Col. 1:13) and of which we are willing subjects that “serve him without fear” (Luke 1:74).

7. The unique Seed positioned—He is *Lord and King*. Compare Acts 2:29, 30 and Rev. 1:5. We have already discussed the ascension of Christ under “The Seed Pledged.”

8. The unique Seed proclaimed—He is both the *sum and substance of the gospel of sovereign grace* (Acts 2:36; 3:24–26; 7:2–53; 13:32–41). Again, we have covered this briefly under “The Seed Pledged.” The preaching of the gospel is nothing less than telling the story that (1) the promised Seed of Abraham has finally come; (2) God has fulfilled, in Christ, all of the promises made to Abraham and his Seed; and (3) now those same promises are being fulfilled in all those that are united to that true Seed, Christ, by a living faith.

Let us look again at the outline of “Christ the Unique Seed.” I repeat, Christ himself is the *key*, and *keystone*, of all Scripture, and seeing his one plan and purpose of saving his one elect people is the only way to

establish and maintain genuine unity in the whole of the Bible. Christ, the Seed, or Messiah, was:

Purposed

He is God's eternal Lamb (Rev. 13:8)

Predicted

He is the Seed of woman (Gen. 3:15)

Promised

He is the Seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:3)

Pledged

He is the Son of David (2 Sam. 7:12)

Pictured

He is the subject of all Scripture (Luke 24:44, 45)

Presented

He is the fulfillment of the promise (Luke 1:68–79)

Positioned

He is the exalted Lord and King (Acts 2:29–30)

Proclaimed

He himself is the gospel (Acts 2:36)

We now come to Abraham's *special* natural seed, the nation of Israel, and its relationship to the church today and in the future. This is the heart of the issue.

Chapter Seven

Abraham's 'Special' Natural Seed-The Nation of Israel

Up to this point our study has still been fairly easy. Some of the implications of what has been stated may be debatable, but the basic facts themselves are biblical. Some of these facts have been totally ignored by both Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians in their discussions about Abraham's seed. If all of these facts are kept in mind, it is impossible to make loose and general statements about the promises made to Abraham's seed in reference to either the nation of Israel or the children of believing parents today.

We now come to Abraham's *special* natural seed, the nation of Israel, and its relationship to the Body of Christ. We need to look carefully at this *special* natural seed of Abraham, since it is the heart of the issue. As I see it, here are some of the major problems we must wrestle with.

One: We must clearly distinguish in our thinking and discussion between the physical nation of Israel as a 'special' natural seed chosen from among all of the other natural seeds of Abraham and the true believers within that physical nation.

Perhaps a chart showing the four seeds and their specific relationship to Abraham (see next page) will help us see the comparison.

It should be obvious how important it is to keep these four seeds separate in our thinking and discussion, and it should be just as obvious that neither Dispensationalism nor Covenant Theology do so.

Kind of Seed	Natural Only	Special Natural	Natural and Spiritual	Spiritual Only
Those Included	All of Abraham's Physical Seed	Unbelieving Israelite	Believing Israelite	Believing Gentile
Represented By	Isaac and Ishmael	Ahab	David	Christians

We must never, in any sense except as a 'type,' equate the physical nation of Israel with the 'Body of Christ' any more than we dare equate physical birth into the nation of Israel with spiritual birth into Christ. We may speak of the one being a 'type which foreshadows' the reality of the other one, but we must never in any sense equate the two.

Two: We must distinguish and maintain the distinction between the *physical* blessings promised to and enjoyed by, the whole nation of Israel, and the *spiritual* blessings promised to every individual in the nation but only enjoyed by those who had Abraham's faith.

Abraham's faith is always the most important thing. If a person lacks all else, but has Abraham's faith, he will be saved whether he is a Jew or Gentile, or whether or not he was born in a Christian home. However, the reverse is equally true. If one has everything else, but lacks Abraham's faith, he will be as lost as the devil himself regardless of who his parents are or what 'signs and seals' were placed upon him. This foundational point is crucial to any correct thinking on our subject.

We must always remember that 'justification by faith' preceded circumcision, the law, and the covenant nation; therefore, neither salvation itself nor the gospel message that proclaimed that salvation are in any way integrally connected to any of the things just mentioned. The gospel of grace both precedes and continues after Abraham and circumcision. The gospel of grace was preached and believed before, during, and after the covenant of law given to Moses. There is only one gospel message and it is "salvation by grace through faith." The success of that gospel is determined by the sovereign electing grace of God irrespective of our works or our family tree.

Three: Just as we must not equate the physical nation of Israel with the 'Body of Christ,' so we must never give New Testament spiritual meaning to the physical blessings (which were only a type of the spiritual) that were experienced by every person born into the nation of Israel.

This is true even when the same words are used in both cases. The nation of Israel *as a nation* was *loved, chosen, redeemed, called, adopted*, etc., by God; and *every* Israelite, without exception, experienced each one of these blessings in a *physical* sense regardless of his personal spiritual relationship to God. However, none of those blessings mean the same thing when the NT Scriptures apply them to individual believers or to the Church as the Body of Christ.

The redemption from Egypt does not equal justification by faith. National 'adoption' does not equal 'sons of God.' Election as a nation among nations is not equal to "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" unto salvation. The national and physical redemption from Egypt by blood is not equal to the eternal spiritual redemption by the blood of Christ; and "called of out Egypt" is not the same as the effectual call in Romans 1:7. An *unsaved* Israelite was just as much 'redeemed' from Egypt as a believing Israelite. Every *unsaved* Israelite could say, "God loved me in a way that he did not love the Egyptians, and he redeemed me from Egypt by his mighty power because I am the seed of Abraham." However, when a Christian uses the identical words, they mean something entirely *different*. Again, I remind you that both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology often treat these as synonymous.

The following comment on Romans 9:4 by Robert Haldane sheds great light on this particular point:

Adoption—That is, the nation of Israel was a nation adopted by God as a type of the adoption of His children in Christ Jesus; and in that typical sense, in which they were the children of God as no other nation ever was, they are frequently spoken of in Scripture, Ex. iv:22; Jer. xxxi:9–20. In this way our Lord Himself recognizes them, when anticipating their rejection, He says, "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out," Matt. viii:12.²⁸

The same things that Haldane says about adoption can be said about the words *loved, chosen, and redeemed*, etc. when applied to the nation

²⁸ Robert Haldane, *Commentary on Romans*, (Publisher unknown) p. 444.

of Israel. The failure to see this is a basic error in Covenant Theology's view of the church. Their whole doctrine of the church is built on making a one-on-one comparison of Israel and the church. I repeat, *every single Israelite* could say, "I have been *loved, chosen, redeemed, and adopted* by God" whether he was personally saved or lost! Both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism treat all of those statements as if they were spoken in the light and experience of New Testament meaning instead of seeing them in a purely physical and national sense.

Four: We must see exactly what God's purpose was in putting the children of Jacob (as a special and unique nation) under a legal covenant of works at Mt. Sinai.

Exactly how are the nation and the legal covenant that brought it into existence related to the eternal and unchanging purposes of God in history and redemption? Our view of this relationship must accept at face value the statements of Paul concerning the nature and function of the law covenant made at Mt. Sinai. When Paul says the tablets of stone were a "ministration of death" designed by God to convict lost sinners of their guilt (Rom. 5:20; 7:7–13; 2 Cor. 3:6–9; Gal. 3:19), we must accept his words as a fact beyond dispute. Once Paul's inspired interpretation of God's intention in putting the nation of Israel under a true covenant of law is accepted, we will forever quit talking about the law covenant being a "gracious covenant given to a redeemed people for their sanctification."

It is impossible to make the God-ordained instrument of *condemnation* (the Decalogue as a covenant) that was given to bring lost sinners to see their need of faith in Christ (Rom. 7:7–11; Gal. 3:24) also be, at the same time, the chief instrument of a redeemed saint's *sanctification*. The Puritans were right when they spoke of the law being "the handmaid of the gospel." However, they also created confusion by trying to make the same law serve as the mother of holiness in the believer's sanctification. They were constantly trying to distinguish between 'legal' and 'evangelical' obedience to the law. They tried to make the law function in *two ways* at the same time toward the *same people*. They wanted the law to be a covenant with the power to convict sinners of their lost condition while insisting, at the same time, that the law was the rule of life for redeemed church members. On the one hand, they took all of the teeth out of the law and made it to be the rule of life for believers. However, at the same time they insisted on preaching the

law with fire, brimstone, and threat to sinners. They constantly waffled back and forth between treating the Israelite as a lost sinner needing the law to convict him and at the same time treating him as a church member that could not possibly be under a legal covenant.

John Bunyan has a beautiful illustration on the biblical purpose for which God gave the law to Israel as a covenant. It is the scene in the Interpreter's house where the man with the broom (representing the law) was stirring up the dust of sin in the human heart. His labor could not cleanse the heart, but was necessary to show the dirt and the inability of both the sinner and the man with the broom (Moses) to clean out the dirt. The damsel came in (the Holy Spirit) and sprinkled the room with water (the gospel) and cleaned the room with ease. So far so good. So far we all clearly understand what Bunyan was teaching. However, once the room is cleaned out, the Covenant Theologian then puts the broom *back into the hand of Moses and puts him in charge of keeping the room clean!*

How many times have we heard the statement, "Moses will send you to Christ to be forgiven and justified, and Christ will lead you back to Moses to teach you how to live and be sanctified." We must see that Bunyan is **not** saying, "The law cannot *justify* but it can *sanctify*." He is saying, "The law cannot conquer sin in the human heart, period." The law can no more *keep* the heart clean than it can clean it out in the first place.²⁹

Five: We must see that the covenantal foundation upon which the nation of Israel's existence and hope of blessing was built is not the same covenantal foundation upon which the Church is built.

If God has redeemed and brought the Church to himself on the same covenantal basis that he 'redeemed' Israel and brought that nation to himself, why then can he not disannul that same covenant and cast us off even as he did the nation of Israel? We will discuss this later when we talk about the 'true nation' of God that is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. This will involve the same things as Four above but in a more distinctly covenantal sense.

²⁹ We have a message on "John Bunyan and the Law" which is available from Sound of Grace on both audio and video cassette.

I have a paper on Hebrews 8:6 which deals specifically with this particular truth. This text states three clear comparisons that, when understood, set forth the glory of a believer's superior position under the New Covenant:

But now He has obtained a **more excellent ministry**, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a **better covenant**, which was established on **better promises** (Heb. 8:6 NKJV).

First Comparison. The *ministry* of Christ as our High Priest is far *better* than the Aaronic ministry it replaces.

Second Comparison. Christ's ministry is better because the *covenant* that He established and under which He ministers (the New Covenant) is so much *better* than the Old Covenant (made at Sinai) under which Aaron ministered.

Third Comparison. This New Covenant is so much *better* than the Old Covenant that it replaced, simply because the New Covenant is based on *better promises* than the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant said, "If you *obey*, then you will be blessed" (Ex. 19:5, 6), but the New Covenant says, "I have obeyed for you, *believe* and live" (Heb. 10:14–22).

The above three comparisons are clearly set forth in the text in Hebrews 8:6 and amplified in the context of Hebrews 8–10. The writer of Hebrews compares two different *ministries*, two different *covenants* (not two administrations of one covenant), and two different *promises*. His whole point is to show that a New Covenant believer's position is so much greater than the position of an Old Covenant believer simply because Christ brought in a New Covenant based on better promises.

Aaron's ministry was deliberately designed to remind men of sin because of the nature of the legal covenant under which he ministered (Heb. 10:3, 4). That was the stated purpose of that covenant, and its ministry. Our High Priest's ministry reminds us that "sin will be remembered against us no more" (Heb. 10:18). We will never need another Day of Atonement (Heb. 10:2) because the Old Covenant that condemned has been fulfilled and done away in Christ. This is our sure hope because of the gracious covenant that he established with his blood of sacrifice.

Lastly, it is essential to remember that neither the actual heart spirituality of an individual Israelite, nor the

heart spirituality of the nation as a group, had anything to do with Israel being 'redeemed' from Egypt and established as a nation under law to God at Sinai.

In reality, they were a group of proud, individualistic, self-seeking rebels. They were established and sustained as a nation only because of their *physical* lineage to Abraham and Jacob. God did this in fulfillment of his promise to Abraham and also to accomplish his purpose of bringing forth the Messiah through the appointed nation.

Establishing the above six things is not nearly as easy as most people imagine. However, it can be done if we will stick with Bible texts to establish our points. Separating the physical and spiritual seed of Abraham and the special covenant blessings promised to each seed is essential to a correct understanding of the Bible. As I previously stated, this is the heart of the difference between Covenant Theology as expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and Dispensationalism as set forth in the *Scofield Reference Bible*.

The above fact is also the primary reason that makes it literally impossible for the two views to be held at the same time. A Dispensational Covenant Theologian is really an impossibility. Most people would agree with that last statement because it is so obvious. It is just as obvious to me, but not so obvious to some of my Baptist friends, that it is just as impossible to be a *Baptist* Covenant Theologian. I do not think that a Reformed *Baptist* can believe the Covenant Theology of the *Westminster Confession* any more than a *Reformed* Baptist can believe the Dispensationalism set forth in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Contrary to much current thinking, Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology are not the only options. Many people have learned this fact in the last ten years, and many more are learning it every day!

After saying the above, I think I should add that it is impossible to make and maintain the six distinctions I just mentioned without clearly defining and accepting the fact that both a *dispensational* and a *covenantal* change took place when Christ completed his work of atonement. In reality, this is the biblical option to both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology that I, as a Baptist who is thoroughly Reformed in theology, clearly see in the Word of God. Notice that I said "Reformed" and did not say "Covenant Theology." Don't ever equate Covenant Theology with Reformed Theology. A Baptist can consistently hold the latter, but he must be grossly

inconsistent to hold to the Covenant Theology of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. We totally reject the Reformers' doctrine of sacralism, but agree with their view of sovereign grace in salvation. We also agree with much of Luther's and Calvin's views of law. The Reformers' position is far closer to our view than it is to that of the later Puritans.

It seems to me that our generation should attempt nothing less than finishing the job which the Reformation started so gloriously and then stopped when they picked up the steel sword. We must chuck the remaining remnants of error, especially the whole principle of sacralism, that the Reformers and Puritans hung on to after leaving Rome. Some remarks that I made in the introduction bear repeating here:

They [the Reformers and Puritans] thoroughly reformed the gospel message of justification by faith but failed to reform some other doctrines. They threw out *justification* by the works of the law, but they held on to *sanctification* by the law. They threw out the church's authority over your *soul* but hung on to the church's authority over your *conscience*. They discarded *priestcraft* but kept *clericalism*. They rejected the authority of church tradition (and Papal infallibility) but replaced it with man made creeds that have become the infallible authority (tradition) in the church. In reality they replaced a two-legged pope with a paper pope. They cried "*Sola Scriptura*" while waving their creed in one hand and a sword in the other hand. (From: *When Should A Christian Leave A Church?*, by John G. Reisinger, Sound of Grace, p. 21).

Chapter Eight

To Whom Are the Covenant Promises Made?

This is always the question to which we return. *Who is the seed of Abraham to whom the promises are made?* Who is the ‘covenant child’ that has every right to claim covenant blessings because of his relationship to Abraham? Perhaps the best way to understand this is to start with the nation of Israel. Fortunately, we have a clear textual answer for this question as it concerns the nation of Israel.

Let us take a close look at Romans 9:6, 7. This is a key passage that will help us see that the physical nation of Israel, despite all of its unique privileges and promises, was never under an “everlasting covenant of grace.” They were indeed a *special* nation, but, none the less, they were not a *spiritual* nation. There were spiritual individuals, but the nation by and large was unregenerate. As a nation, they were exactly what we have designated them: a ‘special natural’ seed of Abraham even though lost or unsaved. They were special and different from all of the other physical seeds of Abraham, but they were just as non-special and non-different when compared with Abraham’s spiritual seed. It is this fact that Paul drives home so emphatically in Romans 9. The following is a key text:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For **they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:** Neither, because they are the **seed** of Abraham, are they all **children:** but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called (Rom. 9:6, 7).

Regardless of what promises were made to ‘Israel’ in the Old Covenant, we must learn how to apply the principle “not all Israel is Israel” to all of God’s dealings with the nation made up of Jacob’s twelve sons. All of Abraham’s *seed* are not considered his ‘children,’ or *true* seed that inherits the promise. This is true no matter what theological view we hold, and it is just as true in the NT Scriptures as in the OT Scriptures. Let us look carefully at Paul’s argument in Romans 9.

Romans 8 is the greatest chapter in the Bible on assurance and security. It declares the certainty of ultimate salvation for every person chosen and called by God into a saving relationship. The closing verses are a Hallelujah chorus with one theme. It is as if Paul is saying, “Nothing in heaven or earth can destroy or harm a soul who is in a

saving covenantal relationship with God!" The obvious objection to all that Paul declared in Romans 8 is 'the casting off' of the nation of Israel. Did not God break his covenant with his chosen people when he cast them off and turned to the Gentiles?

Romans 9–11 deals with this question in the light of God's eternal purposes as seen in the OT Scriptures and in history. Paul shows that God was not in any sense unfaithful to his covenant promises. God never has, nor ever will, fail to keep every covenant he has made. "However," Paul declares, "God has never promised *any spiritual* blessing to *anyone* on the basis of fleshly birth." *This is the heart of the whole issue!* Paul's words apply to every Jewish child born into the nation of Israel, and his words also apply to every child born of Christian parents today. If this principle is grasped and then consistently applied, there will never be any more talk about 'a covenant nation' (physical Israel) or 'covenant children' (physical children of believers).

Every single promise of God that brings a spiritual blessing to any individual requires that individual to personally believe the promise. Israel never inherited the promised blessing because they "*sought it not by faith*" (Rom. 9:32). In other words, they rejected the gospel message that Abraham, their forefather, had savingly believed.

The heart of Romans 9–11 declares the absolute necessity of personal faith in order to receive any promised blessing from God. This is always true in every dispensation and under every covenant; and it is true for every person whether he is a Jew or Gentile; whether he was born of believing parents or unbelieving parents. Abraham's true seed are *all*, without a single exception, born-again *believers!* We must not speak of *anyone* being an heir to any spiritual promise made to Abraham and his seed unless we see repentance and faith in that person.³⁰

At the bottom line, Paul in saying that "not all Israel is Israel" simply means the difference between people with special privileges and people that actually possess grace. Every Israelite enjoyed great *privileges* because of his physical birth (Rom. 3:1–3), but no Israelite (nor anyone else) ever possessed any special *spiritual* status or received any spiritual

³⁰ For an excellent exposition of this point, see Dr. J. David Gilliland's work, *Jonathan Edwards on Biblical Hermeneutics and the "Covenant of Grace,"* New Covenant Media, 1998.

blessings apart from personal repentance and faith. God never promised an Israelite a single spiritual blessing just because he was an Israelite. Physical birth never put them, or anyone else, in a special or separate *spiritual category* before God. Israel definitely was in a separate *physical category* as God's chosen *nation*, and she had special spiritual *opportunities*, but she was *not* in a special *spiritual position* before God. God did not deny his promise or fail to keep his covenant when he cast off the Jewish nation. He did not break or dishonor his 'special covenant' relationship with Israel simply because that covenant and relationship were purely *conditional* and Israel never met the terms.

The apostle does not leave the matter in the abstract. He gives a concrete illustration of exactly what he means. His real point in the illustration is that the 'Israel within Israel' is a matter of sovereign election (Rom. 9:11) and effectual calling (Rom. 9:24), and has nothing at all to do with *physical* lineage. We must see this fact clearly and hold on to it tightly! It is a biblical key that unlocks many passages of Scripture. Neither Dispensationalism nor Covenant Theology applies this truth to their particular system of theology in a consistent manner.

It is important to note that Paul does not demonstrate and prove the doctrine of election by comparing a 'covenant child' (seed of Abraham) and a 'non-covenant' child (Gentile), but he compares two 'covenant' children. And they are not just two ordinary covenant children; they are the twin grandsons of *Abraham himself* as well as the true sons of believing Isaac. If ever there were two blue-blooded covenant children, they would be the twin grandsons of the man to whom the covenant was given in the first place. Paul uses Abraham's twin grandsons in his illustration in order to demonstrate beyond any question that inheriting God's true promises has nothing to do with being a so called covenant child, nor with being signed and sealed with covenant signs—even the God-ordained covenant sign of circumcision which was placed on Abraham, his son Isaac, and his twin grandsons.

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even **by our father Isaac**, (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the **purpose of God according to election might stand**, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob [the younger 'covenant child'] have I **loved**, but **Esau** [the older 'covenant child'] have I **hated** (Rom. 9:10–13).

In this illustration, Paul is telling us exactly what he means by “not all Israel is Israel.” Nothing that God ever promised or covenanted to the nation of Israel guaranteed, in any sense whatever, that they, or their children, would receive spiritual blessings. They had privileges, but they did not have the certainty of the blessings. They had spiritual opportunities, but they were not by birth in a special *spiritual* category. Esau had every single privilege that Jacob had. In fact, he had *more* (he was the oldest son and had the birthright), but Esau was not part of the ‘seed of Abraham to whom the promises were made’ even though he was a true physical child of Abraham. Esau received “the sign of the covenant” but he was not a true covenant child. God did not establish his covenant with Esau, even though the covenant promise was confirmed to both his believing father (Isaac) and his believing grandfather (Abraham). If Esau is really a covenant child *in any sense whatsoever*, then Scripture clearly teaches that God *hates* some covenant children (Rom. 9:13)!

If we really grasp Paul’s basic argument in Romans 9–11, we have the answer to many apparent problems that neither the system of Dispensationalism nor the system of Covenant Theology can solve. In these chapters, Paul is illustrating the basic principle that runs through all of Scripture, namely, that God’s grace is *totally unconditional*, and nothing, including all of the privileges listed in Romans 9:4–5, guarantees any individual a *spiritual* blessing. A Jew could not plead, on the basis of his physical birth and circumcision, any more from God than Esau could plead on the ground of his birth and circumcision. No priest or prophet could guarantee a Jewish parent that God had promised, in the covenant of circumcision, any more to him or his child than had been promised to Isaac as a believing father, or to Esau his circumcised son. Unless a Christian parent today has a different promise from the one given to Abraham himself, then the same is still true today in reference to that parent’s children.

A Christian parent cannot appeal to the covenant made with Abraham and his seed and claim any more for his so-called covenant child than Isaac, as a believing parent, could claim for his covenant child Esau. If ever a believing parent could claim that both of his children were part of Abraham’s seed and under the covenant, it was Abraham’s own son, Isaac!

The very designation ‘covenant child’ is as unbiblical and useless a designation as ‘covenant nation’ now that Calvary and Pentecost have established all those ‘born of God’ as the true New Covenant people of God (Heb. 8:6–11). There is no such thing as a covenant nation today in any *physical* sense. One cannot substitute the *spiritual* Body of Christ for the *physical* nation of Israel. Calvary and Pentecost established the New Covenant people of God as a totally new spiritual entity (Eph. 2:11–22). As we shall see later, the true ‘nation of God’ is the Church.

Chapter Nine

The Abrahamic Covenant

It is time to examine the Abrahamic Covenant itself and see exactly what was promised in that covenant and how those promises relate to the nation of Israel and believers today. Genesis 12:1–3 records the first promise to Abraham.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3).

The specific things in this text that are of major importance in our study are the promises concerning a *great nation*, the *land*, and *in thee shall all of the families of the earth be blessed*. We have already established that the last thing mentioned is the gospel promise of Christ himself. This particular promise cannot possibly refer to physical Israel except as she is the vehicle through which the Messiah is brought into the world. We will deal with the land promise first.

THE LAND PROMISE

The specific land is not promised in Genesis 12:1–3. Abraham is merely told to “go to a land that I will show you.” After he came into the land of Canaan, God then promised that specific land to him and his seed.

And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite *was* then in the land. And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, **unto thy seed** will I give **this land**: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him (Gen. 12:6, 7).

After Abraham and Lot part company, God reaffirms his promise to Abraham that his seed would inherit the land. God now adds that the inheritance would be ‘forever.’ It is impossible not to see that the very essence of the promise that God made to Abraham involved the following:

1. The physical land

2. The natural children are the seed that is to inherit that land
3. The inheritance of the land is to be 'forever.'

I personally believe the NT Scriptures make the physical land to be a type of spiritual rest and the Israelite to be a type of a true believer. However, we could not come to that conclusion from anything in the OT Scriptures. If all we had was the OT Scriptures, it would be very easy to hold the same view of Israel and the land of Palestine as that held by Dispensationalism.

The following description of a real physical land is the uniform message of the OT Scriptures:

And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For **all this land** which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to **thy seed for ever**. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, *then* shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, **walk through the land** in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will **give it unto thee**" (Gen. 13:14–17).

In Genesis 15:6–7, God reaffirms both the promise of the innumerable seed and the land, and he clearly states that it was for this purpose that Abraham was called out of Ur:

And he said unto him, I *am* the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee **this land** to inherit it (Gen. 15:7).

Part of the reason the land is given as a permanent inheritance is that it is one of the things that would maintain the special people, or human heritage, out of which the Messiah will come.

In verses 8–17 we have the record of the actual covenant that God made with Abraham, and verse 18 again states the essence of that covenant to be the physical land. Dispensationalism insists that this is an 'unconditional' promise that has never been literally fulfilled and is therefore still in force in reference to the physical nation of Israel. The text gives the specific boundaries of the land:

On the **same day** the Lord made a **covenant with Abram**, saying, Unto **thy seed have I given this land**, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates... (Gen. 15:18).

No mention is made of "the blessing to all nations" in this entire chapter. I am sure you see the significance of that fact.

Genesis 17 records God's reaffirmation to Abraham of the promises and covenant made with Abraham in Gen. 15:18. Abram's name is changed to Abraham and the innumerable seed promise is reaffirmed in verses 1–5. Verse 6 lists three distinct blessings that God promised to Abraham:

And I will make thee **exceeding fruitful**, and I will make **nations** of thee, and **kings** shall come out of thee (Gen. 17:6).

Notice carefully that the promises given to Abraham, in the early part of this chapter, are almost identical to the promises given to Ishmael in the later part:

And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have **blessed** him, and I will **make him fruitful**, and will **multiply him exceedingly**; twelve **princes** shall he beget, and I will make him a **great nation** (Gen. 17:20).

Genesis 25:12–18 records the fulfillment of the promise given to Ishmael in the above text:

Now these *are* the generations of Ishmael, **Abraham's son**, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham:... These *are* the sons of Ishmael, and these *are* their names, by their towns, and by their castles; **twelve princes** according to their **nations** (Gen. 25:12, 16).

Verses 7 and 8 in Genesis 17 are very important verses for many reasons. We must carefully notice exactly what is being promised:

And I will **establish my covenant** between me and **thee and thy seed** after thee in their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be a **God unto thee**, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and **to thy seed after thee**, the land wherein thou art a stranger, **all the land of Canaan**, for an **everlasting possession**; and I **will be their God** (Gen. 17:7–8).

These words are very clear as well as very instructive. They are the heart of the reaffirmation of the Abrahamic covenant and promises. Again we note the absence of the promise concerning “blessing all nations.” Several other things are also important.

First of all, the phrase “establish my covenant” in Genesis 17:7 is given to seeds, plural. It speaks of “their” generations. The NT Scriptures tell us that the “thy seed” in verse 7 refers to Isaac as the spiritual seed of Abraham. This is clear from the following comparison of Romans 9:7 and Genesis 17:18–21:

And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his

name Isaac: and I will **establish my covenant** with him for an **everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him**. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a **great nation**. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear... (Gen. 17:18–21).

Neither, because they are the **seed** of Abraham, *are they* all **children**: but, In **Isaac shall thy seed be called** (Rom. 9:7).

Romans 9:7 is actually quoting Genesis 21:12 where God repeats the same thing concerning Ishmael and Isaac. The phrase “establishing my covenant” is that which discriminates among the various physical seeds. This distinction concerns the seed line that will be the bearer of the promised Messiah. After Jacob, this designating of a particular son is discontinued. Once Israel is established as a nation, then the promise of the Messiah is taken up into the Mosaic Covenant and becomes the property of the whole nation as a nation.

The second thing to note in Genesis 17:7, 8 is the addition of the word *everlasting*. Notice in verse 7 God establishes his covenant with Abraham and his seed as an everlasting covenant and promises to be “a God unto thee and thy seed after thee:”

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee (Gen. 17:7)

In verse 8, God promises Abraham and his seed all of the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and then repeats the promise to be “their God:”

And I will give unto thee, and **to thy seed after thee**, the **land** wherein thou art a stranger, **all the land of Canaan**, for an **everlasting possession**; and I will be **their God** (Gen. 17:8).

It is exegetically impossible to separate the ‘land promise,’ the ‘everlasting covenant,’ and the promise to ‘be your God’ in these two verses of Scripture. The ‘seeds’ in verse 7 and in verse 8 must be the same people. God promises to give the *land* of Canaan for an *everlasting* possession to the *very same people* to whom he promises that he will *be their God* and they would be *his people*. We cannot pick and choose whatever suits our theological fancy, nor can we spiritualize part of this verse and naturalize the rest without clear NT Scripture evidence proving that is how the Apostles understood it. Covenant Theology uses

verse seven as a key proof text in an attempt to prove that their physical children are still included in “God’s covenant (of grace) with Abraham.” However, they will ignore the fact that verse eight is speaking to the same identical people and promising them the physical land of Palestine as an everlasting possession. Dispensationalism, on the other hand, will use verse eight to prove that the physical Jews have the land of Palestine unconditionally promised to them in the future.

From Genesis 17 throughout the rest of the OT Scriptures, the land will occupy one of the central features of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed. Actually, it is *the* central feature. This fact makes it essential to ask, and clearly answer, the question, “Is the ‘land’ promise to be understood physically, and is this promise still awaiting a *natural* fulfillment in the future; or is the land promise to be spiritualized and then understood as already fulfilled in Christ and the gospel?” Do we understand Hebrews 4:11 to mean the land promise is already fulfilled in the ‘rest in Christ’ in *certainty*, but not yet fulfilled in the totality of *experience*? I am sure that I need not mention how loaded with far reaching implications and consequences that question is!

How Long Is ‘Everlasting’?

Before we look at the land aspect of the promise, let us look at the word *everlasting*. It is crystal clear that the land of Canaan is promised to Abraham and his seed as an everlasting possession. We may not agree on how the NT Scriptures interpret that fact, but we have to deny the very words of Scripture written in Genesis 17:7, 8 if we will not admit that God made an everlasting physical land promise to Abraham and his seed.

We will have help with the land promise if we clearly understand how the OT Scriptures use this word, *everlasting*. How are we to understand the everlasting things that not only did not last forever, but obviously were not intended or expected to last forever? The word everlasting is used of many things promised under the Old Covenant, and the New Testament Scriptures clearly prove that most of those everlasting things have not only ended, but it was clearly prophesied that they would end when Christ came. If we list some of these everlasting things, it will help us understand how the word is used in Genesis 17:7, 8, and that in turn will throw some needed light on the land promise itself.

1. The Aaronic priesthood was to be an 'everlasting priesthood,' but it definitely ended. The following text may give us a clue when it adds the phrase "throughout their generation" as a possible explanation of how long the everlasting priesthood is to really last:

... for their anointing shall surely be an **everlasting priesthood** throughout their generations (Ex. 40:15).

And he shall have it, and his seed after him, *even* the **covenant** of an **everlasting priesthood...** (Num. 25:13).

Here the word everlasting is used to denote God's purpose and pledge to Aaron and his sons that they will be his priests 'forever.' We know that the Aaronic priesthood definitely ended with the death of Christ and the forming of the Body of Christ at Pentecost.

2. The Passover was to be a 'feast *forever*.'

And this day [Passover] shall be unto you for a memorial;...ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance **for ever** (Ex. 12:14).

3. All of the tabernacle rites, ceremonies, and services were to last 'for ever' (Ex. 27:21).

4. The sabbath was a 'sign for ever.'

Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath ... It is a sign between me and the children of Israel **for ever** ... (Ex. 31:16a, 17a)

5. The sign of 'circumcision' was an everlasting sign. It was given as the sign of the 'everlasting' land promise (Gen. 17:8).

He that is born in thy house ... must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in **your flesh** for an **everlasting** covenant (Gen. 17:13).

We know for sure that none of the above actually did last forever. We also know that God never intended that they should. It is obvious that 'everlasting' cannot mean 'never end' in any of these passages in the OT Scriptures. If we insist that it does, then either God used the wrong word or else we do not understand how he meant the word to be understood. I am aware that this is difficult to fit into the Dispensational hermeneutic, but it is still a clear biblical fact.

The everlasting priesthood of Aaron was done away in Christ. The everlasting Passover feast was done away when the true Passover Lamb was offered; the everlasting tabernacle services were only types of the true everlasting ministry of Christ; the everlasting seventh day Sabbath given to Israel as the sign of the Mosaic covenant was a beautiful picture

of our eternal rest in Christ, our true Sabbath (Heb. 4:1–11); and circumcision in the flesh was a type of regeneration or circumcision of the heart. It is clear that none of these things was meant to be permanent and yet the OT Scriptures specifically state that all of these things were to endure forever or everlastingly. What rule of logical interpretation do we violate when we view the everlasting land promise the same as the other everlasting things mentioned above?

It is perfectly clear from the NT Scriptures that we must understand the word *everlasting* in one of two ways depending on the context.

1. It may mean that something is given as a physical and temporary ‘type’ of something else that is spiritual and eternal. The thing promised becomes truly everlasting as it finds its fulfillment in its antitype. Israel is a nation before God ‘forever’ as it is fulfilled in the church, the true ‘Israel of God.’ Aaron is indeed a priest ‘forever’ as he finds his fulfillment in Christ our High Priest. The Sabbath is a sign forever as it finds its fulfillment in eternal salvation or rest in Christ. God’s people will indeed dwell secure in the true holy land forever as they eternally rest in Christ.

2. The word everlasting may also mean that something will last as long as the covenant lasts under which that something was instituted. A change in covenants changes everything under that covenant (Heb. 7:11, 12).

The end result, as it relates to our discussion, is the same regardless of which view we take. Whether the word everlasting means either, both, or neither of the above, one thing is absolutely certain—everlasting can not possibly mean ‘without any end’ in many OT Scriptures. The NT Scriptures specifically state that most of the everlasting things under the Old Covenant definitely ended when Christ came. When the New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant, it also replaced everything that the Old Covenant had brought into being. This is a clear New Testament fact that must be recognized and implemented into our theological thinking.

It was the Passover that dated the beginning of Israel as a nation (Ex. 12). The Sabbath was the sign of the covenant that established Israel’s unique relationship to God as a special nation (Ex. 31:12–17; Deut. 5:15; Ezek. 20:12, 20). The whole function of the priesthood was built around “the sins committed” under that Old Covenant (Heb. 9:15) which

was housed in the Ark of the Covenant behind the veil in the Most Holy Place. All of those things together are what made Israel a special and everlasting separate nation. The everlasting nation, the everlasting priesthood, and the everlasting sign all ended when the Old Covenant that established all of these things was fulfilled by Christ. The antitypes of all of these things are truly established forever because they are built on the new and true everlasting covenant (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 13:20) that will never need to be modified, added to, or changed in any way. This is the true *everlasting* covenant spoken of in Hebrews 13:20 that will never be replaced. It is a covenant that really will never end!

The rending of the veil from top to bottom took place the very second that the true Passover Lamb “gave up the ghost” (Matt. 27:50, 51). The true High Priest has not only gone behind the veil, he has totally removed it. We must see that particular moment of time and that meaningful event as the beginning of Christ administering the New Covenant and the ending of the Old Covenant along with everything that it established. And everything must include every single everlasting thing mentioned under the Old Covenant.

The Dispensationalists are right when they insist that the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant as expressed in the language of the OT Scriptures is the promise that “Israel will inherit the land of Canaan forever.” The covenant that promised this was cut in Genesis 15 and the language used in the covenant precisely describes the specific boundaries of the land that was promised to Abraham and his seed. Only special revelation from God could allow anyone to spiritualize the land promise in the Abrahamic covenant in the following text:

In the **same day** the Lord **made a covenant** with Abram, saying, **Unto thy seed** have I given **this land**, from the river Euphrates ... (Gen. 15:18).

It proves nothing to quote Joshua 23:13 and similar texts to prove “all this has already been fulfilled.” In David’s day, long after Joshua 23:13 was written, the fulfillment of the ‘covenant of Abraham’ was still understood as future, and the heart of the promise was still in terms of the same land being given as an everlasting inheritance to the nation of Israel. Again, the words are clear.

O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of **his covenant**; the word *which* he commanded to a thousand generations; *even of the **covenant*** which he made with **Abraham**, and of his oath unto

Isaac; And hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, *and* to **Israel** for an **everlasting covenant**, Saying, Unto thee will I give the **land of Canaan**, the lot of your inheritance (1 Chron. 16:13–18).

These words are plain. The promise of the physical land is just as much a part of the everlasting covenant that God made with Abraham as the promise “I will be their God and they shall be my people.” We may believe that the NT Scriptures spiritualize the land promise, but we cannot deny that the covenant itself, as given to Abraham, concerned the natural land of Canaan. Likewise, we cannot deny that the land promise is always the prominent thing throughout the whole of the OT Scriptures. I believe the Dispensationalist is wrong in not seeing that the NT Scriptures spiritualize the land promise, but the answer is not to deny what the Old Testament Scriptures clearly say. As one brother said, “Just because the Dispensationalist ties the horse up to the wrong hitching post does not mean that there is no horse.”

Psalms 105 is a recitation of God’s past blessings and future (from that point) promises for the nation of Israel. David repeats the same words as those quoted above. He adds, “He hath remembered his covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations” (v. 8), and then proceeds to talk about the land.

O descendants of *Abraham* ... He is the LORD our God ... He remembers his *covenant forever*, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the *covenant he made with Abraham*, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an *everlasting covenant*: “To you will I give the *land of Canaan* as the portion you will inherit” (Ps. 105:6–11 NIV).

It seems impossible to compare the above verses with texts like Luke 1:68–79 and not see that the NT Scriptures use the same terms in a *spiritual* way. The physical land is without question the heart of the promise in Psalms 105:6–11, but *salvation*, or *spiritual* rest, becomes the heart of the fulfillment of the same promise in Luke 1:68–79 and other NT passages. We do not find even a hint of the physical land of Palestine in Luke’s words. He totally spiritualizes the words found in the OT Scriptures.

In Jeremiah’s day, “I will be their God” and possessing the land are both equal parts of an everlasting covenant that God promises to make with Israel in the last days. We could ask, as we read these verses, “What happened to the previous everlasting covenant that God made

with Israel?" How can a truly everlasting covenant be replaced with another everlasting covenant if the word *everlasting* means *never ending*?

Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto **this place**, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and **they shall be my people, and I will their God**: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an **everlasting covenant** with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will **plant them in this land** assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul (Jer. 32:37–41).

How are we to understand the land promise given to Abraham and reiterated all through the OT Scriptures? There is absolutely no question that inheriting the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession is the heart of the covenant that God made with Abraham and also constantly told Israel to remember. Is that covenant promise still awaiting a natural fulfillment in the physical land of Palestine by national Israel? Are the Dispensationalists correct in their basic approach to Scripture? Or is the land promise to be spiritualized? Do the answers to the above questions lie in the OT Scriptures or in the words of the Apostles as they interpret the OT Scriptures? The last question is the basic one. *Where* one looks for the answers to the questions will determine *what* the answers will be! Use the OT Scriptures to interpret the New and you will get entirely different answers than if you use the NT Scriptures to interpret the Old.

First of all, we must realize that there is not a single repetition, or mention, of the land promise in any passage in the NT Scriptures including Romans 11 and the entire book of Revelation. True, this is an argument from silence, but it is an obvious silence, and it does leave the Dispensationalist with a theology of Israel and the land that is built *entirely* on the OT Scriptures. It also leaves them with an expectation of a future *natural* fulfillment that is *identical* to that held by the people who rejected and crucified Christ because they were not interested either in him or in *his kind of kingdom*.

Second, the NT Scriptures definitely spiritualize the land promise in passages where one would expect to find it reiterated. This is clearly illustrated in every sermon in the book of Acts, the book of Hebrews,

and in passages like Luke 1:68–79 quoted earlier. The writers of the NT Scriptures always point a Jew back to the Cross and Pentecost as the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham (Acts 3:24–26). They never once point him forward with a future land promise.

Third, the one New Testament passage that does clearly speak about the ‘promised land’ makes it evident that the land was only a pledge of something greater.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in **the land of promise**, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; **for he looked for a city** which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God (Heb. 11:8–10).

Abraham obviously realized, while his feet were actually standing in the promised land itself, that the land was not the full or real promise, but only a pledge of something greater. Abraham’s ultimate hope was “heavenly” (v 16) and not “earthly” (v 13). He was still looking for a heavenly city even while dwelling in the physical land of promise. It is clear to anyone without a total theological bias that Abraham’s hope was not in the earthly city of Palestine but in the heavenly city itself. Verses 13 and 16 in Hebrews 11 establish that beyond question. However, we must insist that we only know what Abraham understood by what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us in the NT Scriptures. We could read the life of Abraham in Genesis for a million years and never find what is revealed in Hebrews 11:8–10.³¹

Dispensationalism keeps insisting that the faithfulness of God to keep his covenant is at stake in Israel inheriting the land of Canaan sometime in the future. This reasoning misses the whole point of the real promise. Suppose a father promised his son a car if he graduated from High School with a *B* average. The boy pictures in his mind a small compact. He really works and graduates with a *B+* average. On his graduation day his father hands him a set of keys and says, “Your new wheels are in the garage.” The boy rushes out to the garage trying to imagine which compact and what color awaits him. Imagine his amazement if he found

³¹ The Dispensationalist will not accept the NT revelation of what was in Abraham’s heart, and Covenant Theology insists on reading that revelation back into the OT Scriptures.

a brand new \$30,000 sports car with every option imaginable. Would one expect the boy, in great disappointment, to go in to his dad and say, "Gee, I was expecting a Geo™ or an Escort™"?

Do you think that any OT believer, including Abraham himself, would trade what he now possesses in the presence of God for every inch of Palestine? Do you really think a believing Jew in the future would feel "let down" if all he got was heaven itself? If you were a Jew living in the celestial city, would you feel that God had gone back on his Word for giving you a heavenly city instead of the earthly city of Jerusalem? Would you lament his unfaithfulness to his unconditional promise made to Abraham?

What we are really saying is this: (1) Every promise that was made to Abraham and his seed is either now fulfilled spiritually in Christ; or will be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth; or else it ended when the Old Covenant was done away; or there will be, in some cases, a 'double' fulfillment. (2) Every single thing given to a believer 'in Christ' is far better than anything in the natural world, including all of the land of Palestine. Every believer, whether Jew or Gentile, will ultimately be united to Christ and be part of his bride (Rev. 21) and experience the "better things" of Hebrews 11:39, 40.

Both the Dispensationalist and the Covenant Theologian want to bring the promise of Abraham and his seed into the present age in a *physical* sense via the lineage of their physical children. They both insist that the promise made to Abraham and his seed is an unconditional covenant and is therefore still in effect for physical seeds. The Dispensationalist naturalizes the seed to mean physical Israel, and the Paedobaptist naturalizes the seed to mean the physical children of believers. The Paedobaptist wants to make the Abrahamic covenant to be a special covenant with believers concerning the salvation of their *physical* children that is still in effect today. The Dispensationalist wants the same covenant to be a special covenant still in force with Jews concerning the land of Palestine. In the end, the Paedobaptist does exactly the same thing with Abraham's seed as the Dispensationalist! He merely does it for a different purpose.

Fourth, it seems clear that the NT Scriptures see all of the things that are implied in the promise concerning "a land of your own" to be the New Covenant believer's possession in a spiritual sense. The heart of the land promise involved "rest from your enemies" and full provision of

every need. The prominent theme in the OT Scriptures was ‘rest’ and all that goes along with it. The heart of the gospel message in the NT Scriptures is rest and full provision, but it is spiritualized. It is not difficult to read the fulfillment of the promised rest into passages like Matthew 11:28–30, Hebrews 4, and specifically Luke 1:68–79. It is not the real estate (physical land) that was important but an eternal real ‘estate’ (the blessing that was typified by the land).

It may be beneficial to review this section in the form of a chart. It will help to fix in our minds how we are to understand the word *everlasting* as it is used in the many Old Covenant promises.

Thing Promised	OT Type	NT Fulfillment
Everlasting Priesthood	Aaron	Christ
Everlasting Sanctuary	Tabernacle	The Body of Christ
Everlasting Sabbath	Seventh Day	Salvation Rest (Heb. 4)
Everlasting Circumcision	Physical Circumcision	Regeneration
Everlasting Land	Earthly Jerusalem	New Jerusalem (Rev. 21)

Chapter Ten

Who Then Is Abraham's True Seed?

As one can see, the problem always comes back to the question, “Who is Abraham’s true seed”? Charles Hodge has some excellent comments on Romans 9 that are helpful in answering this question. I confess that I find it hard to believe that a Paedobaptist Theologian could say some of the things that Hodge says:

The apostle now approaches the subject which he had in view, the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles. That God had determined to cast off his ancient covenant people, as such, and to extend the *call of the gospel indiscriminately to all men*, is the point which the apostle is about to establish.³² He does this by showing, in the first place, that God is perfectly free thus to act, verses 6–24, and in the second, that he had declared in the prophets that such was his intention, verses 25–33.

That God was at liberty to reject the Jews and to call the Gentiles, Paul argues, 1. By showing that the promises which he had made, and by which he had graciously bound himself, were *not made to the natural descendants* of Abraham as such, but to his *spiritual* seed. This is plain from the case of Ishmael and Isaac; both were the children of Abraham, yet one was taken and the other left. And also from the case of Esau and Jacob. Though children of the same parents, and born at one birth, yet “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated,” is the language of God respecting them, verses 6–13.³³

Hodge correctly understands Paul’s argument. By “not all Israel is Israel,” Paul clearly means exactly what Hodge states. Look again at what he said:

... the promises which he [God] has made, and by which he had graciously bound himself, were not made to the *natural descendants* of Abraham as such, but to his *spiritual seed*.

Hodge then labors to show how the Jews totally misunderstood God’s covenant with Abraham by thinking it meant *physical children*.

³² This is the heart of the issue. God did not cast off a physical *nation* and then replace it with a physical *church*. He fulfilled the true promise to Abraham by creating a *spiritual regenerate nation*, the Body of Christ.

³³ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989) p. 303.

His exposition of this section is superb. One could only wish that Hodge would have consistently applied his own statements to his theology of infant baptism. The emphasis in the following quotation is mine:

Verse 6 ... [I]t was a common opinion among the Jews, that the promises of God being made to Abraham and to his seed, all his *natural descendants, sealed as such, by the rite of circumcision*, would certainly inherit the blessings of the Messiah's reign... The reason why the rejection of the Jews involved no failure on the part of the divine promise, is, that the promise was *not addressed to the mere natural descendants* of Abraham.... His object is to show that the promises made to the children of Abraham *were not made to his natural descendants as such*.³⁴

Verse 8. "That is, they which are the children of flesh, these are not the children of God."³⁵

How can Hodge not see that his Paedobaptism makes the very same mistake that the Jews made? If one really understands the ground upon which infant baptism rests, and read the above comments substituting 'Christian parents' for 'Jews,' it should be enlightening!³⁶ Hodge wants to eliminate the Jews, as the natural seed, from the covenant made with Abraham because, as he says, "The promises were *not* made to the natural descendants of Abraham, but to his spiritual seed." However, Hodge then wants the identical covenant of Abraham to include the *natural descendants* of believers today. As a wise man once said, "Consistency is a gem of rare value."

How can a Christian parent claim that his physical children are included in the covenant with Abraham when that covenant never even promised that to *Abraham himself*? Did God's covenant with Abraham really include both Jacob and Esau? If it did not, then how can a Christian parent claim that the same covenant includes all of his physical seed today? Unless a parent can prove beyond any question that his child is *one of the elect for whom Christ died*, then he has no more reason to

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 304–306

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

³⁶ ...It was a common opinion among the Jews [Paedobaptists], that the promises of God being made to Abraham and to his seed, all his *natural descendants sealed as such, by the rite of circumcision [baptism]*, would certainly inherit the blessings of the [covenant]...

believe that his child is in the covenant than Abraham had to believe that his son Ishmael, or his grandson Esau, was in the covenant.

Paedobaptists actually claim for their physical children through the Abrahamic Covenant more than Abraham himself could claim for his physical children in the same covenant. Hodge sees this clearly as it relates to the Jews, but then he turns right around and uses the identical argument and the same covenant promise that the Jews used in order to prove his infant baptism.

It seems to me that both the Covenant Theologian and the Dispensationalist simply will not take Paul seriously in these verses in Romans 9. Neither of them will accept the fact that “and thy seed” cannot, in any sense, be made to mean the physical children of either a Jew or a Christian. They both insist that the heart of the Abrahamic covenant was made with parents and their physical children; and since that same covenant is still in effect today, then the physical children must still be included. Both of these systems of theology refuse to accept the clear Apostolic interpretation given in the NT Scriptures of “to you and your seed” and “not all Israel is Israel.” If Romans 9:6 means anything even close to what Hodge’s exposition states that it does, then neither a Jew nor a Christian parent may apply the words “and to thy seed” in Genesis 17:7–8, to their physical children today.

When all of the smoke clears, it is apparent that either we have to ‘naturalize’ the whole covenant in Genesis 17:7–8 or else we have to ‘spiritualize’ it. Neither the Dispensationalist nor the Covenant Theologian is willing to either naturalize or spiritualize the whole passage. They both want to naturalize one part and spiritualize the other. They just choose different parts. In reality both systems ultimately wind up with a hermeneutic that makes the OT Scriptures interpret the NT Scriptures instead of vice versa. As long as both of these theological systems insist that the promise to Abram and his seed means *physical* children, they will both continue to insist on maintaining the very thing that has been forever done away in the New Covenant.

Dispensationalism insists the Israel/Gentile distinction is still true in the ‘church age.’ Israel is still God’s special ‘covenant nation,’ and, as such, God has still ‘unconditionally promised’ to them things that he has not promised to the Gentiles who are ‘outside the covenant.’ Abraham’s physical seed will inherit the land of Palestine because that is part of the unconditional covenant made with Abraham as the father of the Jewish

nation. The covenant made with Abraham and the nation of Israel comes into the New Testament still in force and unchanged in any way. For God to cast off the natural seed of Israel would be to deny himself and his oath. The seed, the nation, the land, etc. are all physical and are to be understood 'literally.' The special nation is still under God's unconditional covenant and has future purposes distinct from the Church. Jewish children, by birth, have the right and obligation to the covenant sign of circumcision and all that it promised, including the future promise of inheriting Palestine.

The Covenant Theologian does exactly the same thing. He insists that the very same Israel/Gentile distinction—by another name (covenant community/all others)—is still in effect because the unconditional covenant (of grace) with Abraham (the believer) and his children (physical seed) is still in effect. Covenant theology sees *nothing really new*, in the sense of *different in nature*, in the New Covenant. In actual fact, he does not even have a distinct New Covenant. The new covenant of Covenant Theology is merely a '*spiritualized* administration' of the identical covenant that Israel (the Jewish church) was under.

Under the 'new administration' of the one covenant of grace everything is still the same because the covenant is the same. The same things simply get new names. The 'Jewish' church becomes the 'Christian' church, circumcision becomes baptism, the Sabbath becomes Sunday, etc. Everything is spiritualized and brought over into the new administration of the same covenant. All that has been changed are the outward methods and means of visible representation. The covenant children of believers still have promises made to them which non-covenant children do not have. Covenant children today have the right and obligation to the covenant sign of baptism since they are born into the Church, even as the Israelite child was born into the nation (church) under the old administration of the same covenant. All that has really changed according to this system is the *sign* of the covenant. The Israel/Gentile distinction is still in effect in a quasi-spiritual/physical manner as it respects covenant and non-covenant children, and the covenant community (Israel = Church) and non-covenant community (Gentile = unchurched).

One of the basic errors of both Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism is their doctrine of the Church. Dispensationalism does not see the Church as the *true fulfillment* of the promises made to

Abraham and the nation of Israel. It does not believe the Church is the true seed of Abraham to whom the real promises were made. This system of theology introduces a disunity into the Scriptures and the purposes of God at Genesis 12 from which it can never recover. It separates Israel and the Church in such a way that makes their distinction from each other to be total and permanent. In reality, there is no such thing, in any sense whatsoever, as a 'true *spiritual* Israel' in Dispensational theology.

Covenant theology, on the other hand, does not see the Body of Christ as a totally new thing created by the Holy Spirit at his personal advent on the day of Pentecost. They do not see the whole physical nation concept finished forever and a new thing—the Church as the spiritual Body of Christ—brought into being (Eph. 2:12–21). The Covenant theologian's doctrine of the Church makes it impossible for him to realize that many of Paul's doctrinal statements could *never* have been spoken or written by any prophet before the day of Pentecost. The following words are only one example:

Wherefore the law was **our** [Jewish believer] schoolmaster to bring **us** to Christ, that **we** might be justified by faith. But after that faith [the gospel age] is come, **we** are no longer under a schoolmaster. [Could David have said those words prior to Pentecost?] For **ye** [Gentile believers] are all the children [sons—in the sense of 'mature children'] of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of **you** as have been **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ. There is neither **Jew** nor **Greek**, there is neither **bond** nor **free**, there is neither **male** nor **female**: For **ye** [Gentiles] are all **one in Christ Jesus**. [Could a Jew, living under the very covenant that mandated those distinctions, utter these words?] And if **ye** [Gentiles] be Christ's, then are **ye** Abraham's seed [Could a Jew, before Calvary and Pentecost, speak these words to a group of Gentiles?], and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:24–29).

The personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost not only produced a 'unity in Christ' of all believers (both Jews and Gentiles); it also established a total equality '*outside* of Christ' of all *unbelievers* (again, both Jews and Gentiles). A Gentile believer under the New Covenant, along with his believing Jewish brother in Christ, is raised to a higher status and privilege (sonship) than Moses or Aaron ever enjoyed; and likewise, the Jewish unbeliever is now lowered to a position of total equality with the Gentile dogs outside the covenant.

There were indeed great differences between Jews and Gentiles before the Day of Pentecost in respect to special privileges, but now there is no difference at all. The truth of 'no difference' is the one thing that the Jew just could not accept. He could not conceive that every one of the distinctions and advantages (Rom. 3:1–3) that he enjoyed under the Old Covenant were forever gone and that he was now put on the same level with the Gentile. Of course he still has the same free offer of the gospel promise that all other men have, but neither he nor his physical children any longer have any special covenantal claim on God.

In reality, the Covenant Theologian has the identical difficulty believing that same thing in reference to his children. He insists that his children are in a different category before God than non-covenant children. 'There is no difference' somehow just cannot mean *his* children. After all, his children are covenant children and are therefore under the unconditional covenant of grace that God made with Abraham *and his seed*. That covenant gives the believer a special promise for his physical children. 'There is no difference' simply cannot mean that a believer's children are in the same category before God as a child born in a non-covenant, or pagan, home.

Let us ask a few questions that will help us to understand the doctrine of the Church in relationship to the two testaments.

1. Are all believers today, without any exception, 'in Christ?' Yes, beyond question (1 Cor. 12:12, 13; Gal. 3:26–29; whole book of Ephesians).

2. Is being 'in Christ' and being part of 'the Body of Christ' the same thing? Yes, they are interchangeable statements (*Ibid.*, *same texts*).

3. How does one get into the Body of Christ? We are baptized into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (*Ibid.*, *same texts*).

4. Were believers living prior to Pentecost also, at that time, baptized into the Body of Christ and given the Holy Spirit as the 'Spirit of Adoption'? No, because such an experience was impossible prior to the personal advent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The Old Covenant believers were just as truly saved as we are today, and they were saved in exactly the same manner, namely, by grace through faith in the gospel promise. However, they were 'heirs in non-age' waiting for the time of full-fledged 'sonship' to come (Gal. 3:24–4:7), and the

essence of that sonship is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and deliverance from the law as a *pedagogue*.

5. Why was it impossible for an Old Covenant believer to be baptized into Christ and to be given the Spirit of Adoption? The Apostle's whole argument in Galatians 3:26–4:7 would be utter nonsense if that would have been possible. In that passage Paul is not discussing how or when unbelievers get *converted* and become *children* of God, or part of the family of God. An Old Covenant believer was just as much a part of the family of God as a believer today, and he became a child of God in exactly the same way, namely, by faith in the gospel promise. In Galatians 3 and 4, Paul is showing the difference between a *child in minority under a Pedagogue* (a Jewish believer under the law covenant) and a *mature son* (a believer under the New Covenant) brought into full family rights and governed from within by a new Pedagogue, the Holy Spirit himself.

Few people notice the reverse order in which a Jew and Gentile come into sonship and heirship. This is an important part of Paul's argument in Galatians 4:1–7. A believing Jew living under the legal covenant was a true child of God and therefore an heir-in-waiting of the full benefits of the status of sonship. The law covenant in his conscience was the Pedagogue that controlled him in his minor state. When the Holy Spirit came to indwell each believer, the minor child was raised to full mature sonship and the old Pedagogue was dismissed and the Holy Spirit became the new Pedagogue.

On the other hand, the Gentile was an heir of nothing but wrath. We were not 'immature heirs-in-waiting,' but rather 'strangers to the covenant and promises, etc.' We were without covenants, promises or hope. The Gentiles were never under the period of the tutorship of the law. We came into full sonship the moment we trusted in Christ. Unlike the Old Covenant believer, we did not have a waiting period under a Pedagogue for Christ to come before we could receive the gift of the Spirit. We were immediately given, at conversion, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption to testify to our full sonship and all of its privileges. We were also given the full inheritance. However, unlike the Jewish believer who was an heir waiting to come into sonship, we became heirs because we had become sons. The heir/sonship order is reversed. The Old Covenant believer was an heir who became a son on the day of

Pentecost, and under the New Covenant the Gentile believer becomes an heir because he was first made a son.

The distinctions between Jew and Gentile, male and female, and bond and free in Galatians 3:27, 28 were all established and enforced by the law covenant made at Sinai. A Jew, prior to Pentecost, could not have married a Gentile without deliberately sinning against God. All of these distinctions existed, and were carefully enforced, by God's orders simply because God himself had *made a difference* between Israel and every other nation, and he wanted that distinction maintained "until the seed came to whom the promises were made" (Gal. 3:19). The means that God used to establish the difference was the Covenant of Law, and its attending rules and ceremonies, given at Sinai. The means of enforcing the difference was stoning to death for breaking the law covenant.

It was God himself that established the middle wall of partition that had to stand until the Cross and Pentecost. It is only because every believer has now been baptized into Christ that these distinctions cannot exist in the Church. It is only because the cross has forever broken down the middle wall of partition (the Old Covenant) that was erected (Col. 2:14, 15), that the baptizing and uniting work of the Holy Spirit could take place. This is the clear argument in Ephesians 2 and 3 as well as Galatians 3 through 5.

The personal faith of a genuine believer prior to the coming of Christ did not allow him to ignore the Jew/Gentile distinctions. A pious Jewish woman could not ignore the restrictions set out in the law that put clear distinctions between her and males. Justification by faith did not allow even the most godly Jew the 'Christian liberty' to eat pork chops with his Gentile neighbor. Or with anyone else!

Read the following very carefully:

Wherever we find any of the distinctions mentioned in Galatians 3:27, 28 in force, we cannot have the 'one in Christ' experience; and wherever we have the 'one in Christ' experience, we cannot have any of those distinctions in force.

The Old Covenant believer was forced, in some cases upon pain of death, to rigidly maintain certain customs and standards, in his relationship with Gentiles, that are now absolutely forbidden for a

Christian. How could this be possible if he was baptized into the Body of Christ and one in Christ with the Gentile? Is not this one of the major problems dealt with by the Apostle Paul because the Jewish believers (including Peter) had such difficulty accepting the Gentile as being equal in Christ? Personal faith in a coming Messiah did not nullify the Jew/Gentile category as it concerned a true believer living under the Old Covenant. It took the Cross and the personal advent of the Holy Spirit to create the 'New Man' (Eph. 2:14–18), and it also took the establishment of the New Covenant to destroy *all* the distinctions established by the Old Law Covenant.

6. What really happened that changed the whole situation? The fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham and his seed set aside the Law Covenant (Gal. 3:19) that functioned as a pedagogue in the conscience of immature heirs of the promise (Gal. 4:1–3). The Law Covenant that established the distinctions was fulfilled and nullified, and a New Covenant (which fulfilled the promise to Abraham and his seed) was brought in to take its place. It was the Law Covenant that established Israel as a distinct and separate nation, and that separation had to be maintained under threat, even down to clothing, food, agriculture, etc., as long as that Old Law Covenant stood in force. Everything stood or fell together.

The inauguration of the New Covenant made possible the creation of the Body of Christ, the New Man of Ephesians 2. The new experience of the Holy Spirit indwelling every member of God's true temple is the essence of New Covenant sonship and this made possible the new approach to God (Heb. 10, 2 Cor. 3). The old Pedagogue (Law Covenant) has been dismissed now that the child has become an adult, and the new Pedagogue (the indwelling Spirit) treats us as full-fledged sons. This is the message of Ephesians and Galatians. This is the "liberty we have in Christ Jesus" that Paul expounds and defends:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made **both one**, and has **broken down the middle wall** of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of **commandments contained** in ordinances, so as to **create in Himself one new man** from the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in **one body** through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace **to you who were afar off** [Gentiles] and to those who were

near [Jewish believer under the law]. For through Him **we both have access** by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:13–18 NKJV).

This is true 'liberty of conscience,' and it is a liberty that must be protected against legalism. It is impossible for men who do not see this liberty as a distinct New Covenant blessing to ever protect it. The moment one reads this liberty of conscience back into the experience of an Old Covenant believer, he has *already* lost the reality of the liberty itself. John Stott has some excellent comments on Galatians 5:1 where the Apostle Paul exhorts us to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty with which Christ has made us free...":

As the New English Bible puts it, "*Christ set us free, to be free men.*" Our former state is portrayed as a slavery, Jesus Christ as a liberator, conversion as an act of emancipation and the Christian life as a life of freedom. This freedom, as the whole Epistle and this context make plain, is not primarily a freedom *from sin*, but rather *from the law*. What Christ has done in liberating us, according to Paul's emphasis here, is not so much to set our will free from the bondage of sin as to set our *conscience* free from the *guilt* of sin. The Christian freedom he describes is *freedom of conscience*, freedom from the *tyranny* of the *law*, the dreadful struggle to keep the law, with a view to winning the favor of God. It is the freedom of acceptance with God and of access to God through Christ. (From: *The Message of Galatians*, by John R Stott, IVP, p. 132).

Much Reformed preaching, especially by some Reformed Baptists, is designed to bring the law down on the conscience in a way that cannot avoid legalism and fear. Preachers vehemently deny that they are setting men under the law in order to be saved. However, when these same preachers consistently appeal to fear as the primary motive essential to produce holy living, the end result is experientially the same as it effects the conscience before God.³⁷

A legalist sincerely believes that a conscience freed from the fear of the law is the breeding ground of antinomianism. He honestly believes that bringing the law down on the conscience is the only way to produce holy living.³⁸ Paul constantly says that the exact opposite is true. The

³⁷ For a lengthy discussion of the law and the conscience see the article on "John Bunyan's View of the Law" published by Sound of Grace. This message is also on both audio and video cassette tapes.

³⁸ Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts the following words into the mouths of the objectors of Paul's doctrine of 'free from the law:'

conscience freed from the law by a realization of God's amazing grace and unchanging love is the only way that true holiness, or law keeping, can ever take place: And, I must add, such a realization will *always* lead a person to want to obey the whole revealed will of God, as that will is embodied in clear ethical and moral commandments in Scripture.

The legalist's great mistake is confusing the means with the ends. His goal of holy living is the goal that we all have. We all long to see the holiness demanded by the law embodied in our own lives as well as in the lives of those to whom we preach. Our difference with the legalist is over what *kind of preaching* will produce biblical holy living. What kind of theology in men's hearts will produce a 'love that obeys the law?' The two different answers to these questions are the difference between law-centered preaching and Christ-centered preaching.

I recently listened to a message on Ephesians 2:14–18 by a noted Reformed Baptist preacher committed to Covenant Theology. At the close of the message he said, "I have struggled to find an application for this message this morning." I could see why the man had such difficulty finding an application. He had waffled all the way through the sermon without actually explaining the text. He kept insisting, "We must remember that the law at Sinai was a 'gracious' covenant given to a 'redeemed people' for their sanctification." The man was so scared of setting the believer's conscience free from the fear of the law, that he could not in honesty exegete the text. He reminded me of some hyper-Calvinists who simply cannot read out loud the words in John 1:29.

We must see that passages like those just discussed from Ephesians and Galatians could never have been written prior to the cross and the personal advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The 'in Christ' experience of being 'baptized into his body' cannot take place until the

"At once his opponents take up the cudgels and say, 'Surely these are very wrong and very dangerous statements to make; surely if you are going to abrogate the Law and do away with it altogether, you are doing away with every guarantee of righteous and holy conduct and behavior. Sanctification is impossible without the Law. If you treat the Law in this way and dismiss it, and rejoice in doing so, are you not encouraging lawlessness, and are you not almost inciting people to live a sinful life? Law, they believed, was the great guarantee of holy living and sanctification.'" D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, The Law: Its Function and Limits*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1973) p. 4.

“middle wall of separation” erected by the Law Covenant has been removed. The true inheritance cannot be realized until the “true seed to whom the promises are made” has come and fulfilled the Old Covenant, earned the blessing it promised, died under its curse, and then established the New Covenant, the new man, the new access, the new status, yea, the whole new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). This is exactly what we celebrate when we sit at the Lord’s Table and remember the New Covenant sealed in his blood (1 Cor. 11:25).

The Covenant Theologian cannot see that many things which are spoken of Israel as a nation could never be spoken of the Church and vice versa. Just as Galatians 3:24–4:7 could never have been written to the nation of Israel, and just as the verses in Ephesians, the two which were quoted previously, could never have been written before Pentecost, so passages like Romans 9:6 could not be spoken today in reference to the New Covenant people of God, the Body of Christ. The following words were true of the nation of Israel, but the same words could never be true of the Body of Christ:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel ... (Rom. 9:6).

Paul could say, “Not all Israel is Israel” in reference to people in the physically ‘redeemed’ nation of Israel simply because a person was part of the nation by their physical birth. However, one could be part of the redeemed nation and still be lost, but the same situation cannot be true under the New Covenant. Paul could never say, “not all of the Body of Christ is the Body of Christ,” in reference to people under the New Covenant simply because every single person in the Body of Christ is a true believer. Everyone in the Body of Christ has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into that Body. Each has been born of God and given the Spirit of Adoption. That is the only way one can get into the Body of Christ. Paul can, and emphatically does, warn professing believers in a local congregation to be sure they are saved, or truly in Christ, but he can never say that the Body of Christ has unbelieving members who will ultimately be lost.

The ‘visible/invisible’ Church idea is not a biblical concept as it is used by the Covenant Theologian. It is another theological invention that allows a congregation to *deliberately* and *consciously* include both believers and known unbelievers in its membership. Baptist churches may have unregenerate people as members, but it is never with a

conscious knowledge and consent. Charles Hodge, in his section trying to prove infant baptism, argues that it is not even God's *purpose* to have only regenerate members in the so called visible church:

Second Proposition. The Visible Church does not consist exclusively of the Regenerate.

It is no less clearly revealed that it is not the purpose of God that the visible Church on earth should consist exclusively of true believers....³⁹

A false profession of faith and a non-profession of faith are two different things. Accepting a hypocrite (only because we cannot see his heart) who has made a false confession of faith is a totally different matter from knowingly saying unbelievers may be church members. The Baptist concept of visible/invisible Church is radically different than a Paedobaptist's view. The Church as 'believers only' and the church as 'believers and *their children*' are two totally different concepts that have far-reaching consequences. A Covenant Theology concept of the Church is absolutely essential to the practice of infant baptism. Hodge makes an amazing admission when introducing his section on infant baptism:

10. *Infant Baptism.*

The difficulty on this subject is that baptism from its very nature involves a profession of faith. It is the way in which by the ordinance of Christ, He is to be confessed before men; but infants are incapable of making such a confession; therefore they are not the proper subjects of baptism. Or, to state the matter in another form: the sacraments belong to the members of the Church; but the Church is the company of believers; infants cannot exercise faith, therefore they are not members of the Church, and consequently ought not to be baptized.

In order to *justify* the baptism of infants, we must *attain and authenticate such an idea of the church as that it shall include the children of believing parents*...⁴⁰

And guess what? By applying logic to his Covenant Theology, Hodge manages to deduce a view of the church that will justify baptizing babies. It is this kind of 'theological truth' that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is referring to when it says "good and necessary

³⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970) p. 548.

⁴⁰ (*Ibid.*, pp. 546, 547).

consequence may be deduced".⁴¹ I am certain it was not the intention of the framers of the Confession to equate logic and Scripture, but the practical result as seen in their system is the same as if it were intended. A Christian should have only *one source* of absolute truth, namely, texts of Scripture, upon which to build his basic presuppositions. The Westminster Confession uses two equal sources of truth to establish its basic presuppositions, namely, texts of Scripture *plus* the theological implications that logic can deduce from its system of theology. Infant baptism, by Hodge's own admission, is not a result of textual exegesis but purely a theological necessity deduced by logic.

⁴¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter I, Section VI, (Inverness: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1976) p. 22.

Chapter Eleven

Who is the ‘Great Nation?’

This leads us to the last point we will cover in this book. Who is the ‘great nation’ that was promised to Abraham, and who are the ‘kings’ and ‘priests’ who come from him? Has this promise been fulfilled or is it still awaiting fulfillment?

In a natural sense the great nation part of the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Ishmael (Gen. 17:20). It was also fulfilled in a special natural sense in the nation of Israel. However, the NT Scriptures make it clear that this promise was not really fulfilled until Christ came. The Church is the true nation promised to Abraham, and all her children are kings and priests. Dispensationalism totally misses this truth because of its view of Israel and the Church. Dispensationalists see this ‘Church Age’ as a parenthesis between the past and future dealings of God with the physical nation of Israel. However, the New Testament Apostles tell us that the present Church Age has been God’s prophesied goal ever since Genesis 3:15.

The Covenant Theologian confuses what he calls the visible church, including believers and their children, with the Body of Christ which is purely spiritual. He makes the visible Church take the place of physical Israel on a one-on-one basis. This system merely replaces a physical *nation* with a physical religious *organization*. This is the only ground upon which one can bring the signs of the Old Covenant circumcision and the Sabbath over into the Church, and most Covenant Theologians will admit this is true.

The Body of Christ is a new entity on the earth (Eph. 2:11–21). In no sense whatsoever does this mean that the believer living prior to Christ’s coming was not just as saved and secure as we are, or that he was not saved in exactly the same way that we are today. It does mean that his personal experience, or apprehension of his experience, cannot exceed the revelation or covenant under which he lived. We cannot treat an Old Covenant believer as if he had a library full of either Reformed books or Dispensational charts. He certainly had a hope in a coming Messiah, but that hope was not realized until Calvary and Pentecost actually took place (Heb. 11:39, 40; 1 Pet. 1:10–12). However, we must add that this

hope was realized when Christ came and was not postponed until a future millenium.

The Church is the 'nation born in a day.' She is the true 'House of David.' She is the Temple of the Living God and each of her members are living stones in that growing temple. God himself not only dwells in her midst, but also he literally indwells every stone. Her children, without exception, shall dwell safely in the mountain of God forever. She is Abraham's seed because she is in Christ, and every one of her children, without a single exception, are true believers because they are all born spiritually. They are all baptized into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit of Promise and are all given the Spirit of Adoption in order that they might realize that new position. The New Covenant community that was promised in the prophets has been now established forever, and that New Covenant community is the true and final fulfillment of God's promise to make Abraham a great nation.

If we look carefully at the argument in Hebrews 8, that chapter alone will make it impossible for us to hold the basic presuppositions of either Dispensationalism or Covenant Theology. We will clearly see in that passage a specific New Covenant replacing a specific and different Old Covenant. This makes the 'one covenant/two administrations' view impossible. A careful reading of verses 6, 7 and 13 of Hebrews 8 will clearly show that God has made this New Covenant with the 'house of Israel.' Since the context demands that this covenant is in effect *right now*, then the church simply must be the house of Israel in *some* sense. Is not this exactly what verses 8–10 are saying? Thus the Dispensational view is impossible in this chapter.

Finally, this chapter will show us that: (1) The true covenant promise to Abraham concerns salvation and not a physical land; and (2) everyone in this New Covenant is a regenerate believer, not believers and their children.

For this *is* **the covenant** that I will make with the **house of Israel** after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, **from the least to the greatest** (Heb. 8:10–11).

There is not a single unbeliever in the New Covenant nation. Every member of this redeemed nation is a king and a priest. The New

Covenant community is that spiritual 'holy nation' that was 'born in a day' when the ascended King sent his personal Vicar to indwell every redeemed and adopted seed of Abraham.

The following two statements illustrate the relationship of the two covenants as they relate to each other as well as to Israel and the Church:

1. Under the Old Covenant, circumcision defined a physical nation *irrespective of regeneration*. Under the New Covenant, *regeneration* defines a *spiritual* nation *irrespective of nationality or parentage*.

2. Under the Old Covenant, perfect obedience was the only ground of receiving the blessing promised. Under the New Covenant, both the blessing and the necessary obedience are guaranteed by Christ our Surety:

(A) Christ's life of obedience under the law earned every blessing the law covenant promised, and his dearth under the curse of that same law covenant removed every curse it threatened.

(B) The giving of the Holy Spirit to *every* believer as an indwelling Pedagogue guarantees obedience from the heart. From this obedience there comes more and more external conformity to Christ and his law. The legalist attempts to produce internal change with external standards and threats. His method is much easier and produces an immediate outward result. However, such a method does not change the inner man and therefore it will not last. Paul describes this very thing in Colossians 2:21–23.

The chart on the next page compares the nation of Israel with the Body of Christ. It has been very helpful to a lot of people. I am sure some readers may be able to improve on it. I suggest you glance at the chart, read the instructions below, and then go back over the chart carefully.

The message of God's redeeming grace is built around two *nations* and two different *covenants*, but God has only *one single goal*. The one nation is physical (Israel) and the other nation is spiritual (the Church). The physical nation was a type of the spiritual nation, and was never meant to be an end in itself. The covenant with Israel was legal and temporary, and the covenant with the Church is gracious and everlasting. The spiritual nation and the gracious covenant have been the goal of God in redemptive history since the dawn of sin. The physical nation of

Who is the 'Great Nation' promised to Abraham? Is it Israel or the Church? See page 115 for the explanation of this chart.

Point of Comparison	The nation of Israel	The Body of Christ
Promise to Abraham	Same promise given to the nation of Israel	Fulfilled in the Church
"I will make of thee a Great Nation" (Gen. 12:3)	"If ye will <i>obey...and keep my covenant</i> , then ye shall be a <i>peculiar treasure</i> unto me...a <i>kingdom of priests</i> , and an <i>holy nation...</i> (Ex. 19:5, 6)	Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood,...ye are a chosen generation, a <i>royal</i> [kingly] <i>priesthood</i> , an <i>holy nation</i> , a <i>peculiar people</i> ;... (1 Peter 2:5, 9).
Both chosen "nations"	Isaiah 51:4	1 Peter 2:9
Kind of nation	Physical	Spiritual
Basis of citizenship	<i>Natural</i> birth	<i>Spiritual</i> Birth
Spiritual state of citizens	Saved and lost—Romans 9:6	Saved only—Hebrews 8:10, 11
Proof of citizenship	Circumcision of the flesh by human hands	Circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit
Both are the "seed of Abraham" by birth	Born "after the flesh" - "natural" seed only	Born "after the Spirit" - "spiritual" seed
Relationship to God	Loved, chosen, redeemed, adopted, as a physical nation among nations	Loved, chosen, redeemed, and adopted as a spiritual family
Both "redeemed"	Physically—from Egypt	Spiritually—from sin
Both "called by God"	Out of Egypt	Out of the world
Covenant foundation of nationhood	Decalogue—"Do" and live, disobey and die	Blood of Christ "Finished"—believe
Condition of blessing	Works—Obedience	Grace—Faith
Government or rule	Whole Mosaic Economy	Whole Law of Christ

Point of Comparison	The nation of Israel	The Body of Christ
Goal-Become the true "holy nation" of God Exodus 19:4, 5	Never realized-The "if" never fulfilled	Realized by <i>every</i> citizen in the nation-"ye <i>are</i> "
Time frame of nation's existence	Began-Exodus 24:8 Ended-Matt. 27:51	Began-Pentecost 1 Cor. 12:12, 13 Never end-Eph. 2:21-23
Conclusion	All Finished-Heb. 8	All New-Heb. 9 and 10

Israel has no separate purpose or future independent of the Body of Christ.

How to use the preceding chart.

The preceding chart is a comparison of Israel as a special chosen *physical* nation of God and the Church as the special chosen *spiritual* nation of God. The promise that Abraham would be the father of a 'great nation' was made in Genesis 12:3. This is a key text. The basic question concerns identifying the fulfillment of that promise.

Is the promise in Genesis 12:3 to be fulfilled in the future in a physical sense in the land of Palestine in the physical nation of Israel; or,

Is the promise in Genesis 12:3 spiritually fulfilled right now in the Church viewed as the true spiritual Israel of God?

The simple comparison of Exodus 19:4–5 and 1 Peter 2:5–11 in the preceding chart should convince us that the latter is true. The Church is right now all of the specific things that Israel never became. Israel never became the "holy nation of kings and priests" simply because she never kept the covenant that promised her that blessing. The Church is the true "holy nation of kings and priests" only because her Surety has kept the covenant and earned the blessing it promised (Heb. 7:22). The chart is based on the following biblical facts:

1. The physical nation of Israel was given the specific promise of becoming the true holy nation of God *if* the people would obey the covenant of law given at Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:27, 28).

Now therefore, **if** ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant [the tablets of stone, Exodus 34:27–29], **then** ye shall be a **peculiar treasure**

unto me above all people:... ye **shall be** unto me **a kingdom of priests**, and an **holy nation** ... (Ex. 19:5–6a).

The Scripture is clear that the terms of the Law Covenant were never met by the nation of Israel. The 'then' never became a reality because the 'if' was never fulfilled. Israel never kept that covenant, and therefore it never became the true holy nation of God. The Church, as the Body of Christ, became the *true holy nation* of God on the day of Pentecost (1 Peter 2: 6–9).

2. Israel, as the *physical* nation of God, was brought into being, as a nation or 'body politic,' by the Law Covenant at Sinai (Deut. 4:13). Their national existence and special relationship to God were based on their obedience to that legal covenant and all its ceremonial and civil accruements.⁴²

3. The *physical* nation of Israel was cast off and the special national covenant relationship was totally ended when Christ came (Matt. 21:43). The proof of this fact was the rending of the temple veil from top to bottom. The nation, the law covenant (the Tablets of Stone kept in the Ark of the Covenant) that brought the nation into being, the priesthood along with the sacrifices necessitated by the sins against that Old Covenant, all stood or fell together. It was one ball of wax.

4. The spiritual nation, the Body of Christ, was 'born in a day' and has become all of the very things Israel never became.

Ye also, as **lively** stones, are built up a **spiritual** house, an **holy priesthood**, ... ye are a **chosen generation**, a **royal priesthood**, an **holy nation**, a **peculiar people**; ... (1 Pet. 2:5a, 9a).

It is impossible not to see 1 Peter 2:5–9 as the word-for-word fulfillment of the promise made to Israel at Sinai in Exodus 19:5, 6. We, as the Church, are the true fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham and his seed concerning a great nation. The *ekklesia* of Christ is the true nation that was promised to Abraham.

5. The *Church* inherits the true spiritual blessings promised to Israel in the law covenant at Sinai simply because her Lord has kept the covenant for her. Christ earned every blessing the law covenant promised by being born under that covenant (Gal. 3:24–4:7), and then rendering to it the perfect obedience that it demanded (Phil. 2:5–11 and

⁴² Cf. John G. Reisinger, *Tablets of Stone*, pp. 40, 41.

Rom. 8:1–4). This was the only way that he could earn (for us) the righteousness that was necessary to inherit the blessings that the law covenant promised. Christ also endured every curse that same law covenant threatened when he died on the cross under the judgment of God. This is biblical federal theology.

This is what Paul means in Romans 6:14 and other places when he says "...ye are *not* under the law [as a covenant where the blessings are earned by merit], but under grace [as a covenant where blessings have already been earned by our blessed Surety]."

The following conclusions should be obvious from the comparisons in the chart:

1. Neither Dispensationalism nor Covenant Theology understand the biblical doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ in the redemptive purposes of God.

(A) Dispensationalism does not see the Body of Christ as the true Israel of God in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and his seed. This system of theology insists on different promises for Israel and for the Church.

(B) Covenant Theology does not see that the Old Covenant believer never really inherited the promises made to Abraham and his seed (Heb. 11:13, 39). That system reads the doctrine and unique experiences of the Body of Christ back into the OT Scriptures. Covenant Theology must do this because their system cannot make a clear distinction between the nation of Israel and the Body of Christ.

(C) Dispensationalism does not see that the Body of Christ is the very thing God has been working toward ever since the Fall. It does not realize that the great "days of the Messiah" prophesied by all of the OT prophets are *not* something to be experienced in a future earthly millennium. The very days in which we live are the days of which the prophets spoke (Acts 3:24–26). The inability of Dispensationalism to see this fact grows out of its insistence on separate purposes for Israel and the Church. That system cannot see the Church in view anywhere in the OT Scriptures. Dispensationalists are locked into that by their basic presuppositions.

(D) Covenant Theology makes the opposite mistake. It does not realize that a New Covenant believer experiences the reality of spiritual blessings and a new status that could never have been

experienced before the personal advent of Christ and the personal advent of the Holy Spirit. This grows out of the insistence on making Israel to be the Church and then putting Israel and the church both under the same covenant.

2. Neither of these systems really has a true New Covenant replacing an Old Covenant where both covenants relate to the same redemptive purposes of God for his one true people. This is why Hebrews 8 does not fit either system.

(A) Dispensationalism must push the 'New Covenant with the house of Israel' in Hebrews 8 into a future millennium. This passage cannot refer to the present time and the Church in that system of theology.

(B) Covenant theology insists that the New Covenant in Hebrews 8 really is not a new and distinctly different covenant but merely a new administration of the same covenant that Israel was under.

3. Neither of these systems sees the true relationship of Israel and the Church. Both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology insist on bringing the physical aspect of Israel as a nation into the New Testament either directly or indirectly.

(A) Covenant Theology finds its basic structure of the Church in the OT Scriptures and merely adds the Gentiles to what already existed. It ignores the NT Scriptures that teach a whole new thing was created and established at Pentecost on a totally new foundation (Eph. 2:14–22).

(B) Dispensationalism fails to see the Church as the true fulfillment of God's one eternal purpose. Covenant Theology on the other hand fails to see the uniqueness and newness of the Church as the Body of Christ.

I suggest that the reader go back over the chart on pages 114 and 115 and keep asking the basic questions. "Is the Church really the goal that God has been working toward since the entrance of sin? Is she the true fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and David? Is she the true Temple, the true House of God, and the true Holy Nation made up of Kings and Priests?"

Next, compare the two columns of specific points of comparison as they relate to the nation of Israel and the Church. If the differences are

carefully noted, it seems impossible that Israel can be the *Ekklesia* of Christ which he purchased with his blood; and if the similarities are clearly seen, it seems impossible to miss the fact that the *Ekklesia* of Christ is the true Israel of God, and as such, is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and repeated in all of the prophets.

It should be abundantly clear that the unconditional promise that God made to Abraham has nothing at all to do with plural 'seeds.' It can have nothing to do with physical Jews and Palestine or with the children of believers and their salvation. God unconditionally promised Abraham that his seed would be the Messiah. The seed promised to Abraham is Christ! God promised to save and keep all those who were chosen in Christ to be the objects of the Father's unconditional love and grace.

There is only one really vital question: "Are you personally in Abraham's seed and an heir with him according to the promise?" The answer has nothing at all to do with your family lineage or what religious rite or ceremonies were performed on you. It has to do with whether you are in Christ. It has to do with the power of the Holy Spirit revealing Jesus Christ to your heart in saving grace and power.

Appendix 1

Covenant Theology

All of the following quotations are taken from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.⁴³ This is the most widely accepted and revered document to come out of the Reformation. This source represents both the historical and the present view of consistent Covenant Theology. Recently there have been great differences of opinion on what the Confession actually means and how it is to be worked out, but to my knowledge no Presbyterian group has challenged the Confession itself in the area of covenants, the law, or the church.

Basic presupposition: Covenants are the key to understanding and unifying all of Scripture.

1. Man is *always* in covenant relationship with God.

The distance between God and the creature 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*^a [emphasis mine] (Chapter VII, Section I).

^a Isa. 40:13–17; Job 9:32, 33; I Sam. 2:25; Ps. 113:5, 6; Ps. 100:2, 3; Job 22:2, 3; 35:7, 8; Luke 17:10; Acts 17:24, 25.

2. The whole of Scripture is covered by two covenants. The first is the 'Covenant of Works' made with Adam in the garden prior to his fall. The second is the 'Covenant of Grace' made with Adam immediately after his fall.

The Covenant of Works:

The *first covenant* made with man was a *covenant of works*,^b wherein *life was promised* to Adam, and in him to his posterity,^c upon *condition* of perfect and personal obedience^d [emphasis mine] (Chapter VII, Section II).

^b Gal. 3:12. ^c Rom. 10:5; 5:12–20. ^d Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10.

The Covenant of Grace:

⁴³ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Inverness: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1976).

Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [covenant of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second,^e commonly called the Covenant of Grace: whereby he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved;^f and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit. to make them willing and able to believe^g [emphasis mine] (Chapter VII, Section III).

^e Gal. 3:21; Rom. 8:3; 3:20, 21; Gen. 3:15; Isa. 42:6. ^f Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:16; Rom. 10:6, 9; Gal.3:11. ^g Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 6:44, 45.

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel;...ⁱ (Chapter VII, Section V).

ⁱ II Cor. 3:6–9.

3. The *promised blessing* in the covenant of works was *life*, and Adam was given the ability to ‘earn’ this promised blessing of life by his obedience to the terms of the covenant.

... life was *promised* to Adam ... upon *condition* of perfect and personal *obedience* [emphasis mine] Chapter VII, Section II).

God gave to Adam a law, as a *covenant of works*, by which he bound him and his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; *promised life upon the fulfilling*, and threatened death upon the breach of it; *and endued him with power and ability to keep it*^a [emphasis mine] (Chapter XIX, Section I).

^a Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:17; Rom. 2:14, 15; 10:5; 5:12, 19; Gal 3:10, 12; Eccles. 7:29; Job 28:28.

4. The *content* of the covenant of works that Adam was to obey in order to earn life was the ten commandments, “commonly called [by *no* writer of Scripture] the *moral law*.”

This law [given to Adam as a covenant of works], after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in *ten commandments*, and written in *two tables*:...^b [emphasis mine] (Chapter XIX, Section II).

^b James 1:25; 2:8, 10–12; Rom. 13:8, 9; Deut. 5:32; 10:4; Ex. 34:1.

5. The *proviso* of the covenant was “perfect, entire, exact, and personal obedience” for a *probationary period*. Both Chapter 7, Section 2, and Chapter 19, Section 1 speak of Adam being put “under the covenant of works” and his being promised to be rewarded with life upon fulfilling the covenant’s conditions.

6. Adam, by his sin (his failure to obey the covenant of works and earn life), forever *lost the opportunity to earn life by works*.

Man, by his fall having made himself *incapable of* [earning] *life by that covenant* [by meeting its terms and earning the blessing of life it promised], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace;... [emphasis mine] (Chapter VII, Section III).

Question: Do the Scriptures *ever* represent the tragedy of Adam's fall as "losing an opportunity to *earn* life," or do they represent the fall as *Adam losing the life and righteousness that he already had* by virtue of the fact that he, Adam, was created righteous in the image of God? Nowhere are we told Adam failed to *get something* that he *did not have*. It always speaks of his *losing something that he already had*. (Compare the Heidelberg Confession where the whole idea of a covenant of works is conspicuous by its absence.)

The so-called covenant of grace is in reality the message of the gospel of grace. This 'covenant,' or actually the gospel of grace, enables sinners today to secure, by faith, what Adam would have earned if he had kept the covenant of works. Nowhere do the Scriptures suggest such an idea or comparison.

Since there is only one unchanging covenant of grace (the basic assumption of Covenant Theology), some very logical deductions follow:

1. There can be only one Church; therefore the nation of Israel has to be one with the Church today.

2. The visible signs, seals, and forms of worship change under the new administration, but the one and same covenant is unchanged and still in force.

3. Since the 'moral law' (Tablets of Stone) expresses the nature of God, those tablets are the one unchanging canon of conduct that governs the one people of God in all ages. Christ (in the Sermon on the Mount) and the Apostles (in the Epistles) reaffirm the authority of the moral law (Tablets of Stone) and show us the true meaning of the unchanging moral law written on those covenantal tablets. Neither Christ nor his Apostles add any 'higher laws' to the one unchanging moral law written on the Tablets of Stone. The Ten Commandments must be the highest standard of morality that was ever given.

4. Since Israel is the Church and is under the same covenant as the Church today, then children of believing parents must still be considered a part of the Church and should be signed and sealed in baptism as covenant children. Under the new administration of the one and same covenant only the covenant sign changes, and baptism replaces circumcision. The Sabbath has to be part of the one unchanging moral law, but the day is changed from the seventh to the first, etc. All that changes is the administration of the one and same covenant. The visible signs and seals change, but not the covenant. There can only be one covenant with two administrations of grace.

If this concept can be shown to clearly contradict the New Covenant Scriptures, then the whole system upon which the concept is built is destroyed. That is Covenant Theology!

Appendix 2

Dispensationalism

The following material (except as noted) is condensed from the book: *Major Bible Themes*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, revised by John F. Walvoord.⁴⁴ I use this source because Lewis Sperry Chafer is recognized as one of the most influential early leaders of Dispensationalism in this country. He was the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. John F. Walvoord, the retired second president of the same seminary, is probably the best representative of Dispensationalism as it is understood today. Since Dispensationalism does not have a universally accepted creed, this particular book would represent the most widely accepted authority of the past (Chafer) and the present (Walvoord). All the emphasis is mine unless otherwise stated.

Walvoord emphasizes the importance of Dispensationalism:

In the study of Scripture, it is most important to understand that [1] scriptural revelation falls into *well defined periods*. [2] These are *clearly separated*, and the recognition of these divisions and their divine purposes constitute one of the *important factors in true interpretation of the Scriptures*. [3] These divisions are termed “dispensations,” and in successive periods of time different dispensations may be observed.

It is probable that the recognition of the dispensations sheds *more light on the whole message* of the Bible than *any other aspect of biblical study* (p. 126).

Chafer and Walvoord define the word dispensation as follows:

A dispensation can be defined as a stage in the progressive revelation of God constituting a distinctive stewardship or rule of life. Although the concept of a dispensation and an age in the Bible is not precisely the same, it is obvious that *each age had its dispensation* (p. 126).

Scofield defines the word *dispensation* this way:

⁴⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, revised by John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974)

A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God.⁴⁵

The different dispensations are essential if all men are to be proven truly guilty before God. The various testing periods are necessary in order to “stop every mouth.”

Man's relationship to God is not the same in every age. It has been *necessary to bring fallen man into divine testing*. This, in part, is *God's purpose in the ages*, and the result of the testings is in every case an *unquestionable demonstration* of the *utter failure and sinfulness of man*. In the end, *every mouth* will be stopped *because* every assumption of the human heart will be revealed as foolish and wicked by centuries of experience (p. 127).⁴⁶

Each dispensation, therefore, begins with man being divinely placed in a new position of privilege and responsibility, and each closes with the failure of man resulting in righteous judgments from God. While there are certain abiding facts such as the holy character of God which are of necessity the same in every age, there are varying instructions and responsibilities which are, as to their application, limited to a given period (p. 127).

In the dispensations God has demonstrated *every possible means of dealing with man*. In every dispensation man fails and only God's grace is sufficient. In the dispensations is fulfilled God's purpose to manifest His glory, both in the natural world and human history. Throughout eternity *no one can raise a question* as to whether God could have given man another chance to attain salvation or holiness on his own ability.⁴⁷ *A knowledge of the dispensations* is, accordingly, the *key to understanding God's purpose in history* and the unfolding of the Scripture which records God's dealing with man and His divine revelation concerning Himself (p. 136).

Here are the basic principles of Dispensationalism:

In studying the seven dispensations, certain principles are essential to understanding this teaching. Dispensationalism is derived from *normal*, or

⁴⁵ C.I. Scofield, ed., *The First Scofield Reference Bible*, (Westwood: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1986), p. 5.

⁴⁶ Paul shows that all men are, without exception, guilty before God (Rom. 1:18–3:19) without any references to or need of dispensations.

⁴⁷ Could not someone in the second or third dispensation plead that he did not have much of an opportunity as someone with the added revelation of the fifth or sixth dispensation? Was not the argument of the rich man in Luke 16:27–31 based on this very premise?

literal, interpretation of the Bible. It is impossible to interpret the Bible in its normal, literal sense without realizing that there are different ages and different dispensations. A second principle is that of progressive revelation, that is, the fact recognized by nearly all students of Scripture, that revelation is given by stages. Third, all expositors of the Bible will need to recognize that later revelation to some extent supersedes earlier revelation with a resulting change in rules of life in which earlier requirements may be changed or withdrawn and new requirements added. For instance, while God commanded Moses to kill a man for gathering sticks on Saturday (Num. 15:32–36), no one would apply this command today because we live in a *different dispensation* (p. 128).

Most, not all, Dispensationalists hold to seven dispensations. Following is Chafer and Walvoord's outline:

B. Dispensation of *Innocence*: Age of Liberty. [Begins at Gen. 1:26, 27 and ends at Gen. 3:6] (p. 129).

C. Dispensation of *Conscience*: Age of Human Determination. [Begins at Gen. 3:7 and ends at Gen. 8:19] (p. 129).

D. Dispensation of *Human Government*: Covenant with Noah. [Begins at Gen. 8:20 and ends at Gen. 11:9] (p. 130).

E. Dispensation of *Promise*: Covenant with Abraham. [Begins at Gen. 11:10 and ends at Exodus 19:2] (p. 131).

F. The Dispensation of the *Law*: [The nation of Israel] [Begins at Exodus 19:3 and ends at Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost] (p. 133).

In one sense the dispensation of the law ended at the cross (Rom. 10:4, 2 Cor. 3:11–14; Gal. 3:19, 25). But in another sense it was not concluded until the day of Pentecost, when the dispensation of Grace began. Although the law ended as a specific rule of life, it continues to be a revelation of the righteousness of God and can be studied with profit by Christians in determining the holy character of God. The *moral principles underlying the law continue*, since God does not change; but believers today are not obliged today to keep the details of the law, as the *dispensation has changed* and the rule of life given Israel is not the rule of life for the church. Although many applications of the law may be made, a strict interpretation relates the Mosaic law to Israel only (p. 134).

G. Dispensation of *Grace*: [The Church] [Begins at Acts 2 and ends at the Rapture of the Church].

The dispensation of grace was directed to the church alone,...

Under grace, however, failure also was evident as grace produced neither worldwide acceptance of Christ nor a triumphant church...

The dispensation of grace ends with the rapture of the church, which will be followed by the judgment of the professing church (Rev. 17:16). The age of grace is a different dispensation in that it concerns the church comprising Jewish and Gentile believers. By contrast, the law of Israel was for Israel only, human government was for the entire world, and conscience extends to all people. In the present dispensation, the *Mosaic law is completely canceled* as to *immediate* application, but continues to testify to the holiness of God and provides many spiritual lessons by application,... Although all dispensations contain a gracious element, the dispensation of grace is the *supreme manifestation* both in the fullness of salvation received and in the rule of life (p. 135).

H. Dispensation of the *Kingdom*: [The Millennium] [Begins with the second coming of Christ ... and] ends with the destruction of the earth and heaven by fire and is followed by the eternal state (Rev. 21–22) (p. 136).

The dispensation of the kingdom begins with the second coming of Christ (Matt. 24; Rev. 19) and is preceded by a period of time including the Tribulation, which to some extent is a transitional period (p. 136).

In the millennial kingdom, divine grace is also revealed in *fulfillment* of the *New Covenant* (Jer. 31:31–34), in salvation (Isa. 12), in physical and temporal prosperity (Isa. 35), in abundance of revelation (Jer. 31:33–34), forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34), and in the regathering of Israel (Isa. 11:11–12; Jer. 30:1–11; Ezek. 39:25–29) (p. 136).

The dispensation of the kingdom differs from all preceding dispensations in that it is the *final form of moral testing*. The advantages of the dispensation include a perfect government, the immediate glorious presence of Christ, universal knowledge of God and the terms of salvation, and Satan rendered inactive. In many respects the dispensation of the kingdom is *climatic* and brings to consummation God's dealing with man (p. 136).

Appendix 3

Covenant Theology's "Two Administrations of One Covenant."

Some time ago I discussed the basic theme of this book with a group of Reformed ministers that was about equally divided on the subject of Covenant Theology, Dispensationalism, and the view that I hold. Several of those who held strongly to Covenant Theology insisted on using the term *covenant of grace* as if it had the authority of a verse of Scripture. They made no attempt to prove their assertions from Scripture texts. They kept speaking in terms of logic and theology. I finally said, "We agree that the Bible is structured around *two* covenants. However, the two covenants that you keep talking about, namely, a covenant of works with Adam in the garden of Eden and a covenant of grace made with Adam immediately after the fall, have no textual basis in the Word of God. They are both theological covenants and not biblical covenants. They are the children of one's theological system. Their mother is Covenant Theology and their father is logic applied to that system. Neither of these two covenants had their origin in Scripture texts and biblical exegesis. Both of them were invented by theology as the necessary consequences of a theological system."

Then one brother asked, "Where are the Bible texts that establish the two covenants that you feel are the two major covenants in the Scripture?"

We looked up Hebrews 8:6–13 where the Holy Spirit clearly states a New Covenant replaces an Old Covenant. I pointed out that these verses speak about two distinct and different covenants, and the old, or first one, has nothing to do with Adam in the Garden of Eden. The Old Covenant is specifically identified as the law covenant made at Sinai with Israel. The New Covenant that takes the place of the Old Covenant is the covenant that Jesus ratified on the cross with his atoning blood and which we remember at the Lord's Table. It is impossible to push the New Covenant back to Adam when he fell.

I then said, "This passage in Hebrews clearly speaks about the two major covenants in Scripture. It just as clearly identifies one of these covenants as the law covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai "when

he took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt;" and yet this system will not even admit that Sinai is a legal covenant, let alone admit that it is the first or Old Covenant that is replaced by the New Covenant. The Scripture always identifies the legal covenant made at Sinai as the Old Covenant and also always contrasts it with the New Covenant established by Christ. This whole section in Hebrews is built entirely on the comparison of a New Covenant that is better than an Old Covenant that it replaces."

The brother immediately said, "But there is only *one covenant* with *two administrations*. Sinai cannot be a separate legal covenant. There can be no legal covenants made with the church, and Israel is the redeemed church. The foundation of the system of Covenant Theology is the fact that there is only *one covenant* with two different *administrations*. There simply is no possibility that Sinai was a legal covenant."

I replied, "You just said it all. The basic foundation blocks of your theology cannot be established with specific texts of Scripture. The non-biblical terminology that you keep using grows out of your system of theology instead of texts of Scripture. Why will you not discuss the actual words that the Holy Spirit used in Hebrews 8:6–13? Why do you insist on using theological terms that are not found in the Word of God and keep refusing to discuss the actual terms that are consistently used by the Holy Spirit in the Word of God?"

"It is impossible for you to read into these texts of Scripture in Hebrews the terms that you keep using, and it is just as impossible to get out of the verses the theological concepts that you hold concerning *one covenant with two administrations*. In fact these particular verses clearly contradict your view by specifically comparing two *different covenants*. Let us look at the actual texts of Scripture themselves and see if the Word of God will allow for the one covenant/two administrations view that you admit is the foundation of your whole system of theology. Let me read a few verses from the book of Hebrews and substitute the word *administration* for the word *covenant*, since that is what you say the word really means, and see how it fits."

I then read the following verses and substituted or added the appropriate words: "But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also the Mediator of a better *administration of the one covenant of grace* ... For if that *first administration* of the *one*

covenant of grace had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a *second administration of the same covenant of grace* ... I will make a *new administration* of the *same covenant* with the house of Israel ... not according to the *administration* that I made with their fathers ... Jesus has become the Surety of a better *administration* of the *same covenant* ..." Hebrews 7:22; 8:6–10 (adjusted to fit Covenant Theology).

I pleaded with the man to attempt to read either the terms "one covenant with two administrations," or the theological meaning of those terms, into the whole eighth chapter of Hebrews. Of course, he could not and would not even try. Why will men who sincerely hold to 'verbal' inspiration insist on using terms that are not found in Scripture in the first place, but also cannot be made to fit into Scripture? In the case of Covenant Theology, their terms often force the Scripture to say the exact opposite of what it clearly does say! Do they really believe that the Holy Spirit would deliberately say "covenant" when he did not mean covenant? Would he move men to write about a contrast between two different covenants, a new and an old, when there was really only *one* covenant?

We then turned to Galatians 4:24, 25 where the Holy Spirit specifically speaks about the *two* covenants:

... which things are symbolic. For these are **the two covenants**: the one from **Mount Sinai** which gives birth to bondage, which is **Hagar**-for this Hagar is **Mount Sinai** ... (Gal. 4:24, 25 NKJV).

These texts not only fail to mention *either* of the two covenants that these men were insisting was the foundation of all Scripture, but also they *do* clearly identify one of the two major covenants in Scripture as the law covenant given at Sinai to the nation of Israel. The men refused to discuss the texts and kept repeating, "But Sinai cannot be a legal covenant. There is only one covenant with two administrations." And I kept repeating, "What do these texts of Scripture mean? Please, please, tell me what the words in these texts mean."

The whole argument in Galatians 3–5 and Hebrews 8–10 clearly proves that there are two distinctly different covenants around which the major part of Scripture is built, namely, the Old Covenant made at Sinai with the nation of Israel which was based on works and obedience, and the New Covenant established at the cross based on grace and faith.

These brethren would not deny clear Bible texts so they said nothing. I then said, "Now that I have given you two biblical passages to clearly prove my view, you give me *one text of Scripture* that proves your 'covenant of grace' with its 'two administrations' that you keep talking about.

There was dead silence for several minutes. Finally one man said, "Well, we do not exactly have a specific text of Scripture."

We moved on to the next point!

By the way, Professor John Murray in his later writings disagreed with many modern Covenant Theologians concerning a supposed covenant of works with Adam. He even chided them for using the phrase 'covenant of works' in connection with Adam and also for attempting to connect the Mosaic covenant with Adam in any way. Murray also admitted that one of the favorite texts used by Covenant Theologians as their key proof text to prove a covenant of works with Adam does not prove that at all. I have yet to read a modern Covenant Theologian, besides Murray, that admitted this! Earlier writers did not use Hosea 6:7 the way modern writers do.

This administration [Adamic] has often been denoted **the Covenant of Works** ... It is not designated a covenant in Scripture. Hosea 6:7 **may be interpreted otherwise** and does not provide the basis for such a construction of the Adamic economy ... It should never be confused with what the Scripture calls the **Old Covenant** or first covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; 2 Cor. 3:14; Heb. 8:7, 13). The first or Old Covenant **is the Sinaitic**. And not only must this confusion in denotation be avoided, but also any attempt to **interpret the Mosaic covenant in terms of the Adamic institution**. The latter could only apply to the state of innocency, and to Adam alone as a representative head. The view that in the Mosaic covenant there is a repetition of the so-called covenant of works, current among covenant theologians, is a grave misconception and involves an **erroneous conception** of the Mosaic covenant ... (From: *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 4, pp. 49, 50, Banner of Truth).

It amuses me to hear modern writers quote John Murray as the final authority on Covenant Theology and in the same breath deny that the law covenant at Sinai was the first or Old Covenant. Most of Murray's devotees vehemently defend what Murray himself calls an "erroneous conception of the Mosaic covenant." When I quoted the above statement of John Murray to the pastors mentioned earlier, they said nothing.

There is absolutely no doubt that John Murray believed that the "first or Old Covenant is the Sinaitic."

I recently read a pamphlet by a Reformed Baptist pastor insisting that the so-called covenant of works and the covenant of grace are the foundation stones for understanding Scripture. The author never mentioned the two covenants in Galatians 4 or Hebrews 8; and worse yet, neither of the two covenants that he was talking about are ever mentioned in Scripture. Here is the way the booklet begins:

Genesis 3:15 "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Genesis 3:19 "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

...In Genesis chapter three we observe two covenants in action. Two very different covenants are in force at the same time...⁴⁸

The very first page assumes as a fact what cannot be established with texts of Scripture. Nowhere in the booklet does the writer attempt any textual exegesis for either of the two covenants that he observes to be at work in Genesis. Can you find two covenants in action in the texts which the author quoted? This is the typical method used by Covenant Theologians. They just assume there are two covenants in Genesis without any textual evidence. This is exactly what the Dispensationalist does with his charts.

Why do men insist on ignoring the two major covenants (Old and New) that the Holy Spirit continually speaks about, and then proceed to build a whole system of theology on two covenants never once mentioned by any writer of Scripture? And remember, in order to do this, they have to read verses like those from Hebrews 8 and refuse to let the word *covenant* mean covenant. These men must say, "I know the Bible says 'New Covenant,' but it really means 'new *administration* of the *same* covenant.'" Covenant theology insists on putting the word covenant in Genesis where the Holy Ghost has *not put it*, and then they

⁴⁸ Walter Chantry, *The Two Covenants, Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace*, (Carlisle, Published by Grace Baptist Church)

refuse to let the word covenant really mean covenant when the Holy Spirit *does use that specific word* in passages like Hebrews 8. Amazing!

I left Dispensationalism simply because I could not find its basic presuppositions in the Word of God. Writers would make statements that were not actually in the texts of Scripture, but these things had to be true simply because the system demanded it. Later, when I began to honestly study the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and look up every proof text, I was just as horrified as when I honestly investigated Dispensationalism. As a Baptist, I expected to find the texts on infant baptism to be totally irrelevant, but I did not expect the same thing to be true of the proof texts used to prove the whole covenant concept as well as the Confession's view of the law.

Covenant theologians are forced into inventing the terms 'covenant of works' and 'covenant of grace' simply because they fail to see the uniqueness of God's dealings with Israel as a special nation put 'under law' as no other nation ever was before or ever will be again. According to this system of theology, Israel (the Church in the Old Testament) simply must be under the same covenant that we (the same Church in the New Testament) are under. One cannot put believers (and Israel is "the redeemed people of God") under a legal covenant. The system just will not allow for that. Most Covenant Theologians, in order to be consistent with their system, must deny the clear biblical fact that the covenant Israel was put under at Sinai was really a conditional and legal covenant of works. Their system demands that Sinai be a covenant of grace since there can be "no law covenants made after Genesis 3:15."

We wholeheartedly agree that God had a gracious purpose in putting the nation of Israel under the law as a covenant, but that fact cannot change the law covenant into a covenant of grace. The law, as a covenant, was intended to be the "needle that pierced the conscience so that the thread of the gospel could follow and heal." However, to be able to accomplish that ministry of death, the law had to have the teeth of a true legal covenant with the power of life and death. If the Decalogue could not make men feel lost in sin and condemned by God, then how could it prepare the sinner for the gospel? And how could it accomplish such a ministry without having the authority of a covenant of life and death?

Covenant Theology consistently confuses God's eternal *purpose* in electing grace with the specific and different covenants that God made,

in time and *history*, with specific people or nations. They are forced to bleed the word covenant of its biblical meaning and make it impossible to give the word a uniform definition. They will sometimes let it mean covenant and other times insist it cannot mean covenant but means administration. They then force the word covenant into places where it does not belong.

Covenant Theology literally builds its whole system on two deliberate mistakes. It puts two covenants into Genesis 2 and 3 even though those chapters never mention either of the two covenants. The two unproven covenants then become the *foundation of the whole system of covenant theology*! If there is no covenant of works with Adam in the garden whereby Adam could have *earned* eternal life by his *obedience*, then there is no covenant theology. If God did not make a formal covenant of grace with Adam immediately after the fall, then the system of theology set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is without any biblical foundation. These are not wild statements. Any honest and knowledgeable Covenant Theologian will readily admit to what I have just said. He knows that his whole theological system hangs on the two major covenants which he calls "the covenant of works with Adam before he fell" and "the covenant of grace made with Adam after he fell." (See the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter VII, Sections II and III).

The Covenant Theologian also knows (but is slow to admit) that both of his major covenants are *biblical-theological* covenants and are not derived from specific texts of Scripture. Both of these non-textual covenants are the "good and necessary consequences deduced" from the very system that they are *supposed to support*! The covenant of works and the covenant of grace are the foundation blocks of the very system that is used as the basis for deducing, as good and necessary consequences, the very same two covenants used as the foundation that it is trying to establish. This is circular reasoning at its worst.

The word covenant cannot mean covenant in Hebrews 8 even though the Holy Spirit says "covenant." There must be two covenants in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 even though the Holy Spirit does not mention either one of them, and there can only be one real covenant in Hebrews 8 even though the Holy Spirit says there are two. Such 'interpretation' is essential when one starts a system of theology with basic presuppositions that have themselves been deduced by logic as the

necessary consequences of the very system one is trying to prove. However, such interpretation is both non-biblical and illogical. One cannot use the so-called biblical-theological method to deduce two non-textual covenants from a system of theology that is built four square on accepting as facts the two covenants that one is trying to prove.

Once one reads the two non-biblical covenants into Genesis 2 and 3, he is forced to deny that the biblical Old and New Covenants spoken of in Hebrews 8, 2 Corinthians 3, and Galatians 3 and 4 are actually two distinctly different covenants. Of theological necessity, these two covenants simply must be two different administrations of the same covenant. Covenant Theology must then commit its second deliberate error. After forcing two non-biblical covenants into Genesis 2 and 3, it must now delete from Scripture the true *biblical* covenant of works (the Old covenant) made at Sinai and turn it into a covenant of grace, and they must also delete the biblical covenant of grace (the New covenant) established in the blood of Christ and turn it into a new administration of the same legal covenant that was given to Israel at Sinai. From this point on, the Covenant Theologian will use the non-biblical phrase 'covenant of grace' as if he were quoting a text of Scripture.

When a Covenant Theologian uses the term 'covenant of grace,' what he really means is the '*gospel* of grace,' or God's one and only method of saving men. This is why he calls the promise of the seed in Genesis 3:15 and 12:3 the covenant of grace. He means that God has always saved men by one method, and that method is by grace through faith. On this point we are in total agreement. We do not question for a moment the truth that men have always been saved by grace alone. The Bible calls that the gospel. Why do Covenant Theologians insist on calling it the covenant of grace? Why distort Acts 2:39, and its clear declaration of the one gospel message to all men, into a supposed covenant of grace with Christian parents?

The answer to these questions is easy. The biblical word *gospel* will not do for the Covenant Theologian what the non-biblical phrase 'covenant of grace' will do. If he says, "God preached the gospel of grace to Abraham and promised to save him by faith and also promised to save all of his children who would also believe the gospel," he is speaking biblically and we will agree with him. However, such biblical terminology gives him no grounds to baptize a 'covenant child.' Even

Hodge could not find justification for infant baptism without inventing non-biblical terminology (see page 109).

When the Covenant Theologian is speaking about the *gospel* of grace, he is using biblical terminology, but when he speaks of the *covenant* of grace, he is speaking in purely theological terms with no textual proof. Why not stick with biblical terminology and avoid confusion? Why add to the Word of God things that are not there? Why make Paul's statement that "God preached the gospel to Abraham" mean "God put Abraham under the covenant of grace"? Nothing is gained by ignoring biblical words and substituting theological terms. However, a lot of confusion and error would be avoided if everyone used the same terms that the Holy Spirit put into the Scripture. *Why distort the Scriptures that clearly state that "God preached the gospel to Abraham," and try to make it say that God put "Abraham under a covenant of grace"?*

A Covenant theologian seeks to establish his basic presuppositions without using specific texts of Scripture simply because he has no clear texts to use. He must load a word or phrase with the preconceived concepts of his system and then use the loaded word or phrase as if he were quoting an actual text of Scripture. Check how often the *Westminster Confession of Faith* uses the phrase 'commonly called' to establish a point, instead of quoting a Bible verse. They do not use a verse of Scripture simply because they have no verse to use. The truth they are seeking to establish did not grow out of texts of Scripture but out of their theological system. By using the phrase 'commonly called,' they admit, "We do not have a text of Scripture, but theologians use this phrase all the time."

Several other statements found with annoying repetition in the writings of Covenant Theologians are, "The standards of our church declare..." or, "The framers of our Larger Catechism correctly state..." I am amazed at how often writers will assume that they have actually proven their point simply because they have quoted the Confession or Catechism! If what they are trying to prove is really Scriptural, then why

not use Scripture texts to prove it? Why not say, "As the Holy Spirit said...", and then quote the Word of God?⁴⁹

The fact that God preached the gospel to Abraham does not mean that he was under a covenant of grace any more than the fact that the whole city of Nineveh heard the gospel would mean that God put them under a covenant of grace. The clear truth that God has always saved men by grace through faith, and it is a clear truth, in no way proves that Israel as a nation was under a covenant of grace. Hebrews 3:15–4:2 proves beyond question that the nation of Israel alone was under the great *privilege* of having the *gospel promises*. However, most of them died in unbelief and went to hell. It is one thing to be under the preaching of the gospel of grace, but it is quite another to be under the grace promised in the gospel. *No one under grace ever perished!* To be under a covenant of grace and to be secure forever in Christ are one and the same thing in the Scriptures. The Word of God knows nothing of people perishing in hell who were under the covenant of grace.⁵⁰

Israel was under unique *privileges* that no other nation had. They had the gospel preached to them as no other nation. The legal covenant at Sinai was given to Israel alone:

The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made **not** this covenant with **our fathers**, but with **us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day**. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire... (Deut. 5:2–4).

The second giving of the Ten Commandments (Old Covenant) then follows (Deut. 5:7–21). The NT Scriptures are crystal clear that the

⁴⁹ We should note that a Presbyterian treats his Confession and Catechism in this manner because he is a part of a 'confessional church.' He has knowingly committed himself to those documents as authoritative over his conscience. A Baptist may never do the same thing. A Baptist may have a Confession of Faith, but he will never treat it as authoritative over his conscience in the manner that a Presbyterian does. This is the cornerstone of the Baptist theology of 'Liberty of Conscience.' Sad to say, some Reformed Baptists today have become thorough-going creedalists and they are defending debatable doctrines with their creeds instead of with the Word of God.

⁵⁰ Some of my Covenant Theology friends will tell me that I do not understand the 'inner and the outer' aspects of the covenant. How can I unless "some man show me" *from verses of Scripture*?

primary function of that legal covenant was to act as a 'schoolmaster' to convict Israel of their sin unto justification (Gal. 3:24, 25; Rom. 5:20; 7:1–11). The covenant of law was the handmaid of the gospel of grace to the nation of Israel, and as such, was one of the greatest blessings that God gave to them. However, there is a great difference between a gracious *purpose* and a *covenant* of grace. There is no grace in the Law Covenant made at Sinai when it says, "do or die," but it was very gracious of God to give it. The law covenant served the purpose of grace by killing any hope of salvation by works. The NT Scriptures are very clear that this was the very purpose God had in mind when he put Israel under law (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:24). The confusion caused by trying to turn the legal covenant at Sinai into a covenant of grace becomes glaringly evident when one tries to understand what Paul meant by insisting that the primary God-ordained function of the law was death by conviction of sin (2 Cor. 3). The contradictions among Covenant Theologians interpreting Paul's view of law are astounding. Just read their many and conflicting views on what Paul meant in Romans 6:14 when he said "You are not under the law, but under grace."

It is amazing to me that Covenant Theologians cannot see that the law could not accomplish the purpose of preparing sinners for grace unless it had true *covenantal status*. Without the sword that threatened a just death for *breaking the covenant*, the law was only good advice. How can a law that is a 'gracious rule of life to a redeemed people' prepare lost sinners for salvation? At the end of the day, Covenant Theology winds up misunderstanding the purpose and function of the law in *both* covenantal dispensations. It totally confuses God's *purpose* of grace with a mythical *covenant* of grace. The first is biblical and can be demonstrated textually. The second is purely theological and can only be established by logic. The first, God's gracious purpose, is one of the keys to understanding the unity of the Word of God. The second, a covenant of grace made in time and history, is a key manufactured by logical necessity that will lock one into a theological mold that leads to the disasters that happened over and over again in church history.

Appendix 4

An Exposition of Acts 2:39 and Infant Baptism.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39).

Consider a few obvious objections to using Acts 2:39 as a proof text for infant baptism:

1. Peter is speaking to *unbelievers* and not to *Christian parents*. He is telling convicted sinners how to be saved, not giving believing parents the assurance that their children are in the covenant. The *you* in the phrase “the promise is unto you” are *unbelievers* asking what they must do to be saved. In the very next verse, Peter exhorts these unsaved people to “Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). How can an exhortation to lost sinners to trust Christ be turned into a promise to Christian parents that their children are in a special covenantal relationship with God?

2. The ‘promise’ in Joel that Peter is quoting is “whosoever shall call on the Lord shall be saved” and it can in no way be connected to infant baptism. (Romans 10:13 where Paul also quotes Joel 2:32 and shows that the promise spoken of in Joel, and quoted by Peter, is the promise of the gospel to all unbelievers whether they are Gentiles or Jews.) Here is a classic illustration of what I said earlier concerning biblical terminology versus phrases such as “covenant of grace.” Peter’s declaring the promise of the gospel of grace to unbelievers cannot be turned into God’s making a covenant of grace with Christian parents, and yet this is exactly what Covenant Theologians do with this text.

3. The children of believers have no more unique promise in this text than do those who are afar off (the heathen). Peter understood the gospel promise of *whosoever* in Joel to include *three distinct* groups. The promise that “whosoever shall call on the Lord shall be saved” is given to the following persons:

A. To *you*, unconverted and convicted sinners; and the *same* promise is;

B. To *Your children*, if they will repent and believe; and likewise the same promise is;

C. To *All who are afar off* in heathen Gentile lands, if they will also repent and believe the same gospel.

Let us look again at the comparison of Joel's prophecy and Peter's interpretation:

Joel 2:32	Acts 2:38–40
And it shall come to pass	The promise is unto
<i>that whosoever</i> shall call upon the LORD	You , and to your children , and to all that are afar off ,
shall be delivered	shall receive Spirit (v. 38) shall be saved (v. 40)
and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call	<i>even as many</i> as the Lord our God shall call

Notice how clearly Peter interprets the words *whosoever* and *as many*. What Peter is declaring is this: just as all men without exception (covenant children included) are guilty lost sinners who need to be saved, so all men without exception (covenant children included and no non-covenant children excluded) are freely invited in the one gospel of grace to believe and be saved. Peter is showing that the gospel message is now to all men without exception and not just for the Jews. There is now only one category of lost people before God. No one is physically either inside or outside of a special covenantal category by birth. There is only one gospel message, and that one message is for all men without distinction or exception. There are not unregenerate 'pagan' children and unregenerate 'covenant' children with different promises for each group. There is one gospel for all lost sinners.

4. The last phrase "even as many as the Lord our God shall call" must be applied to all three categories mentioned in the text. Peter is saying, "as many as God shall call from among *you*, shall call from among your *children*, and shall call from among the *heathen afar off*." It is the sovereign effectual call of God in *all three categories* that determines the true objects of the promise. The one and only thing that determines whether a person is either in or under grace is the eternal election of God, and the only thing that proves it in time is the effectual

call of the Holy Spirit. Being under a covenant of grace has nothing at all to do with physical birth. We must not destroy the universal offer of the gospel of God's free grace by turning it into a supposed covenant of grace given exclusively to Christian parents and their seed. We also must not overthrow the doctrine of sovereign election by making the physical children of believers to be in a special spiritual category before God through physical birth and baptism.

A birth certificate proving one was born in the right home does not make one a covenant child. I repeat, this text of Scripture promises just as much to a pagan child who is afar off as it does to a so called covenant child born in a Christian home. The promise in Acts 2:39 is given equally to the pagans, to the hearers, and to their children.

5. The people addressed in Acts 2:39 are still unbelievers in 2:40, and they themselves get converted and baptized in 2:41. It is exegetically impossible to make Acts 2:39 refer to Christian parents. Such a gross misuse of a text of Scripture is only possible by totally misunderstanding the promise made to Abraham and his seed

It is not accidental that hyper-Calvinism and a strong 'covenant seed' concept go hand in hand. It is impossible to think and speak in terms of covenant children and non-covenant children and not wind up with two different gospels, one for the covenant child that includes "God loves *you*" for sure, and one for the pagan child that cannot include "God loves *you*" until we are first sure that they are one of the elect.

I think it can be proven historically that one of the major problems created by using Acts 2:39 as a proof text for infant baptism is that it confuses the message of the gospel of grace to all men. The 'Seed' in Acts 2 is neither natural Jews nor children of believing parents. The Seed in this whole chapter is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the true Seed to whom the promises were made, and the message of this chapter, and especially verse 39, is that the promise to the seed has been fulfilled—the Messiah Redeemer has come—believe in him and be saved *whoever you are*.

The gospel of grace is to be preached to whosoever believeth, not just one nationality or group and their physical children. There is no such thing as a covenant community inclusive of all physical children now that the prophecy of Joel has been fulfilled. No one group any longer has any special claim or privilege because of birth. There is only one status

before God—*guilty*, regardless of who your parents are, and there is only one gospel message to every guilty sinner—*repent* and *believe*. This is the one message we must preach to the children of believers as well as the children of unbelievers.

This is what Peter is declaring in Acts 2:39! Do not destroy the universal offer of the gospel by twisting these words into a promise to Christian parents only!