



## **Week Two: Hermeneutics and the Theological Systems**

(Dispensationalism vs. Covenantalism)

**HERMENEUTICS** – Principles of interpreting Scripture in order to understand the author's original intention and meaning.

Key principles of Dispensational hermeneutics

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, or you'll have nonsense.

Literal – give each word its normal, ordinary, customary meaning.

Grammatical – determine meaning by grammatical considerations.

Historical – determine meaning by taking into consideration the author's historical context.

The New Testament may add light to Old Testament passages, but does not override or reverse the original intent of the Old Testament writers. Thus we have the distinction before Israel and the Church.

**COVENANT THEOLOGY** – a theological system developed by Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) and Herman Witsius (1636-1708) in an effort to unify the Bible under two or three covenants. These covenants are not spoken of directly in Scripture

The covenant of works – God put Adam on probation with the promise of eternal life for obedience and death for disobedience.

The covenant of grace – God's promise of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The covenant of redemption – the eternal, pre-creation agreement between God the Father and God the Son in which Christ would be the Redeemer and Head of the elect.

Problems:

Tends to spiritualize Old Testament prophecies, replacing promises to Israel by applying them to the church. This is called "replacement theology" or "supersessionism." Thus there will be no future fulfillment of national promises to racial Israel.

Covenant theology leads to one of three eschatologies: historic Premillennialism, Amillennialism, or Postmillennialism.

## **DISPENSATIONAL (FUTURISTIC PREMILLENNIAL) THEOLOGY**

Dispensationalism developed in the nineteenth century as a school of biblical interpretation consistently employing normal hermeneutics throughout Scripture. Like any theological system, Dispensationalism has been refined and corrected over the past couple centuries. Some early Dispensationalists posited two ways of salvation (law and grace). Some have linked the carnal Christian doctrine, antinomianism, and a no-Lordship salvation with Dispensationalism. Still others have said the Sermon on the Mount has no relevance today; it applies only the millennial kingdom. At its heart, Dispensationalism seeks to understand what Old Testament authors meant or intended (authorial intent) without reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament, based on historical-grammatical hermeneutics. Dispensationalism focuses mainly on eschatology and ecclesiology, not soteriology or theology proper.

This is why Dispensationalism sees a distinction between Israel and the Church and believes God will keep His promises to Israel found in the Old Testament prophets. John Feinberg explains:

*Nondispensationalists begin with NT teaching as having priority and then go back to the OT. Dispensationalists often begin with the OT, but wherever they begin they demand that the OT be taken on its own terms rather than reinterpreted in the light of the NT."*

Here are six essential beliefs drawn from chapter one of *Christ's Prophetic Plans*:

- The New Testament does not cancel out the authors' clear meanings of Old Testament passages.
- Israel is not a type of the church.
- Israel and the church are distinct – the key to futuristic Premillennialism. The Church is not "spiritual Israel." Israel is used 73 times in the New Testament and always refers to ethnic Jews. Galatians 6:16 is speaking of believing Jews within the Church – "the Israel of God." See Romans 9:1-6 and 11:25-27.
- While Jews and Gentiles are one in the Church, this does not rule out or abnegate God's promises to national Israel and her role in the future millennial kingdom under Christ.
- God will save and restore a remnant of Israel as a nation with a unique identity and function among the nations during the future millennial kingdom on earth.
- While all believers in the church age are "sons of Abraham" based on Galatians 3:7, 29, this does not make the church "spiritual Israel" nor does it cancel out God's promises to a future remnant of Jews who will make up the nation of Israel in the millennial kingdom.

**SUMMARY** Dispensationalism, or futuristic Premillennialism, results from:

- Normal interpretation of Scripture resulting in...

- Understanding God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament and the events of Revelation 4ff. as future...
- And therefore distinguishing between God's plan for the nation of Israel and God's plan for the New Testament Church.