
CUTTING STRAIGHT

2009 GARBC CONFERENCE MORNING BIBLE HOUR

NOTES BY RENALD SHOWERS

I. An Ultimate Purpose for History

A. Covenant theology's purpose: The glory of God through the redemption of the elect.

Problem: This purpose is too limited or narrow. Although the redemption of human beings is a very important part of God's purpose for history, it is only one part of that purpose. God not only has a program for those who get saved, He also has programs for those who never get saved, nations, rulers, Satan, angels, and nature. All of these programs must be contributing something to His ultimate purpose for history. The ultimate purpose for history must be large enough to incorporate all of His programs, not just one of them.

B. Dispensational theology's purpose: For God to glorify Himself by demonstrating the fact that He alone is the sovereign God.

II. A Unifying Principle for History

A. Covenant theology's unifying principle: The Covenant of Grace

Problems:

1. The Bible does not refer to the Covenant of Grace.
2. Covenant theologians disagree concerning when the Covenant of Grace was established. Some claim the Covenant of Grace was established immediately after the fall of man; others claim it wasn't established until the Abrahamic Covenant.
3. The Covenant of Grace doesn't unify time before the fall of man with the time after the fall of man, or the time before the Abrahamic Covenant with the time after that covenant was established.

B. Dispensational theology's unifying principle: The sovereign rule of God.

The New Testament Greek word translated "dispensation" literally means "house dispensing" or "house managing." It "relates primarily to household administration" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. V, 151). The English word "dispensation" refers to "the divine administration or conduct of the world." Theologically it is "a religious order or system, conceived as divinely instituted, or as a stage in a progressive revelation, expressly adapted to the needs of a particular nation or period of time" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. III, 481).

III. A Proper Concept of the Progress of Revelation

A. Covenant theology's concept of the progress of revelation

Each new body of revealed truth is another stage in the progressive revelation of the nature of the Covenant of Grace or God's program of salvation, or a different way of administering the Covenant of Grace or God's program of salvation. According to this concept, covenant theology claims that the Mosaic Law was another stage in the progressive revelation of the

nature of the Covenant of Grace or God's program of salvation, or a different way of administering the Covenant of Grace or God's program of salvation.

Problems:

1. The Mosaic Law was not a way of salvation.
 - a. 2 Corinthians 3:7–9
 - b. Acts 13:38, 39
 - c. Romans 3:20, 28
 - d. Galatians 2:16
2. The Mosaic Law was contrary to grace.
 - a. Ephesians 2:8, 9
 - b. Galatians 5:4
 - c. Romans 4:15, 16
3. The claim that the Mosaic Law was another stage in the progressive revelation of the nature of the Covenant of Grace or God's program of salvation, or a different way of administering the Covenant of Grace or God's program of salvation violates the nature of covenants.

Once a covenant is established, nothing may be added to it (Gal. 3:15). If new things are added after its establishment, the nature of the covenant has been changed. It is no longer the same covenant. The Mosaic Law contained over six hundred new regulations that had not existed earlier.

B. Dispensational theology's concept of the progress of revelation

Dispensational theology states that each new dispensation, since it involves a new way of God administering His rule of the world, requires new revelation. And it requires it near the beginning of the dispensation so that mankind will know what the new way of God administering His rule and new responsibilities are.

IV. A Proper Recognition of Distinctions or Things That Differ

Generally speaking, covenant theology claims that distinctions after the fall of man are different administrations of the same Covenant of Grace.

Dispensational theology claims that distinctions are the result of God administering His rule in different ways at different periods of history.

A. Biblical covenants

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint
 - a. Abrahamic Covenant and Mosaic Law Covenant

Covenant theology claims that since the Abrahamic Covenant and Mosaic Law Covenant are stages in the progressive revelation of the nature of the Covenant of Grace, and since the Covenant of Grace is essentially the same throughout history, then the Abrahamic Covenant and Mosaic Law Covenant are essentially the same.

Problem: Paul indicated that these two covenants were not essentially the same (Gal. 3:18, 19).
 - b. Mosaic Law Covenant and New Covenant

Covenant theology claims that since the Mosaic Law Covenant and New Covenant are stages in the progressive revelation of the nature of the Covenant of Grace, and since

the Covenant of Grace is essentially the same throughout history, then the Mosaic Law Covenant and New Covenant are essentially the same.

Problem: The Scriptures indicate that these two covenants are not essentially the same.

- (1) Jeremiah 31:31–33
- (2) Hebrews 8:6–13
- (3) Romans 6:14

2. Dispensational theology's viewpoint

The Scriptures indicate that the Abrahamic, Mosaic Law, and New Covenants are not essentially the same. They are different ways of God administering His rule or executing His plans and purposes.

B. The gospel

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint

Covenant theology claims that since the Covenant of Grace, through which people get saved, is essentially the same throughout history, then there is a single gospel throughout history.

Problems:

a. The message of God that Abraham believed for salvation was not the same as the gospel message that Paul defined for salvation.

- (1) The message Abraham believed
 - (a) Genesis 15:4–6
 - (b) Romans 4:18–22

This message of God said nothing about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

(2) The gospel message that Paul defined for salvation. 1 Corinthians 15:1–4

b. The situation of the Old Testament prophets. 1 Peter 1:10–12

Peter's statement indicates that after the Old Testament prophets received and recorded God's revealed prophecies concerning the suffering and later glories of the Messiah that would provide salvation for mankind, they carefully searched and questioned those prophecies to try to understand what they were about. They didn't understand them. As a result, God revealed to them that those prophecies were not for them to understand. Instead, they were given for people of the future to understand after the Messiah would suffer and be glorified.

c. The gospel of the kingdom was not the same as the gospel message that Paul defined for salvation.

(1) They differed in content.

(a) The gospel of the kingdom content

Matthew 3:1–2

Matthew 4:17, 23

This gospel of the kingdom said nothing about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

(b) The content of the gospel that Paul defined. 1 Corinthians 15:1–4

The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It said nothing about the kingdom.

(2) They differed in commission.

(a) Christ gave a restricted commission to His apostles for the gospel of the kingdom. Matthew 10:5–7.

Go exclusively to Israel. Don't go to the Gentiles or Samaritans.

(b) Christ gave a universal commission to His apostles on the day of His ascension after His death, burial, and resurrection.

Mark 16:15

Matthew 28:19

Go to the whole world. Make disciples of all nations.

(3) After the apostles had been preaching the gospel of the kingdom to Israel for an extended period of time, the following things happened: The word “began” plus Peter’s negative reaction indicate that the gospel of the kingdom that they had been preaching exclusively to Israel said nothing about Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 16:21, 22).

2. Dispensational theology’s viewpoint

Salvation has always been by the grace of God through faith in the Word of God. God from His perspective has always forgiven people of their sins on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ. But the content of the Word of God believed in for salvation has not always been the same. Once Christ died and rose from the dead, the Word of God that people must hear and believe for salvation is the gospel Paul defined in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4.

C. The seed of Abraham

1. Covenant theology’s viewpoint

Covenant theology claims that the seed of Abraham, to whom God referred when He established the Abrahamic Covenant, is Abraham’s spiritual seed: all people of the true faith throughout history.

Problems:

a. Genesis 15:18

b. Genesis 15:13–16

God indicated what He meant by Abraham’s seed. He revealed that the expression “thy seed” referred to Abraham’s biological seed, the literal people of Israel (saved and unsaved), who would be enslaved in Egypt for many years, but then delivered from there through God’s great power to return to the Promised Land.

c. Genesis 17:7, 8

God also declared that the Abrahamic Covenant would be “an everlasting covenant” with Abraham and his seed “in their generations” and that He would give “all the land of Canaan” to Abraham and his seed “for an everlasting possession.”

d. Genesis 17:19–21

God declared that He would establish the Abrahamic Covenant with Abraham’s son, Isaac, and his biological seed, the people of Israel (saved and unsaved), for an everlasting covenant. But He would not establish it with Abraham’s other son, Ishmael, and his biological descendants. Ishmael was the father of the Arab people. Thus, the Abrahamic Covenant would not be established with the Arab people, in spite of the fact that many Arabs would get saved spiritually. This indicates that the seed of the Abrahamic Covenant does not refer to all people of the true faith throughout history.

2. Dispensational theology’s viewpoint

It is true that people who are saved through faith are spiritual seed of Abraham, who was a man of faith. But the seed of Abraham referred to in the Abrahamic Covenant refers to his biological seed, the literal people of national Israel (saved and unsaved).

D. The church

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint

Covenant theology claims that the church began during Old Testament times. Some believe that it began during the days of Adam. Others believe that it started when God established the Abrahamic Covenant with Abraham. Covenant theology describes the church as the continuing covenanted community of God's people throughout history. It consists of all people who have had the Covenant of Grace relationship with God regardless of the period of history in which they have lived. Thus, the church is the same in essence throughout history. Since Israel was a major part of God's people in Old Testament times, it was a major part of the church in the past. Thus, it was essentially the same as the New Testament part of the church.

Problems:

- a. Colossians 1:18, 24: Indicates that the church is the Body of Christ.
- b. 1 Corinthians 12:13: Reveals that it is Spirit baptism that builds the Body of Christ, the church.
- c. Luke 3:16: John the Baptist taught that Christ would baptize believers with the Spirit in the future.
- d. Acts 1:4, 5: Christ revealed that Spirit baptism would begin several days after His ascension.
- e. John 7:37–39: The apostle John explained that there was a certain sense in which the Holy Spirit would not be given to believers until after Christ would be glorified.
- f. John 14:16, 17: Christ told the apostles that the Spirit was “dwelling with” them while He was there, but that in the future the Spirit would be “in” them.
- g. John 16:7: Christ told the apostles that the Spirit would not come until after He would depart.
- h. Acts 2:1–4: Ten days after Christ departed to Heaven, the believers were baptized with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. At that time the Body of Christ, the church, began.
- i. Acts 11:15, 16: Peter explained what happened when he presented the gospel at Cornelius' home: “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.” Peter called Pentecost “the beginning.” The word translated “beginning” “denotes beginning in the exact sense” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. I, 479). Peter thereby indicated that the church began on Pentecost.
- j. Ephesians 2:13–16: Paul indicated that Christ's death made it possible for Jews and Gentiles to come together to make “one new man.” The word translated “new” refers to “what is new and distinctive as compared with other things,” “what is new in nature, different from the usual,” “new in kind” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, 447).
- k. Ephesians 2:19, 20: Paul taught that the church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and New Testament prophets. This indicates that the church did not exist before the apostles and New Testament prophets.
- l. Ephesians 3:3–6: Paul indicated that God did not reveal knowledge concerning the church until the time of the apostles and New Testament prophets.
- m. Acts 20:28: Paul declared that Christ purchased the church of God with His own blood. The word translated “purchased” means “acquire, obtain, gain for oneself” (Arndt and Gingrich *Greek Lexicon*, 655).

- n. Matthew 16:18: Christ said, "I will build my church." The future tense verb translated "will build" "denotes an eschatological act of Christ, a new authorization by God. The Messiah will build the new community" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. V, 139). The church wasn't in existence when he made that statement.
 - o. Ephesians 1:20–23: God raised Christ "from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, . . . and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body." Since a body cannot exist without its head, this indicates that the church did not exist before Christ ascended to Heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father (cf. Eph. 4:15, 16; Col. 2:19).
2. Dispensational theology's viewpoint
There is no revelation concerning the church in the Old Testament. The church did not exist in Old Testament times. It was born on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The church and Israel are not the same. God has two distinct purposes and programs for them. They will continue to be distinctive even in the future eternal state.

E. The Kingdom of God

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint
- a. Historic premillennialism
A small minority of covenant theology people hold to what they call historic premillennialism. By that they mean that they hold to chiliasm, the original eschatology view of the church before covenant or dispensational theology was developed. Chiliasm is the view that Christ will return in His second coming to establish and rule over a literal, political kingdom of God on this present earth for one thousand years. At least some advocates of this view express doubts concerning the role of the nation of Israel in that future kingdom of God.

Problem:

The Bible indicates that Israel will have a key role in the future kingdom of God. It will be the spiritual leader of the world.

- (1) Isaiah 2:1–4: Israel's capital city, Jerusalem, will be the spiritual and governmental center of the world.
- (2) Isaiah 61:6: The Gentiles will call the people of Israel "the Priests of the LORD" and "the Ministers of our God."
- (3) Zechariah 8:20–23: Gentiles will ask Jews to take them to Jerusalem to seek the Lord and to pray.

- b. Theonomy, dominion theology, Christian reconstructionism (a form of postmillennialism)

A minority, but vocal, group of covenant theology people claim that the Mosaic Law is binding upon all human beings forever. They believe that God has commissioned the church to not only spread the gospel worldwide for the salvation of the elect, but also to socially transform the entire world by taking control of every human institution, including government, and enforcing the Mosaic Law upon all of society. The church will thereby establish and administer the kingdom of God worldwide for an extended period of time, and then Christ will return in His second coming, end the present earth's existence, and begin the future eternal estate.

Problems:

- (1) The Bible indicates that the future kingdom of God will be established by Christ, not the church, after His second coming, not before His second coming (Matt. 24:29–31; 25:31–34; Rev. 19:11—20:4).
- (2) Paul indicated that the Mosaic Law was temporary. It would be done away when Christ would complete the work of redemption through His death (Gal. 3:19, 23–25; 2 Cor. 3:7–11; Eph. 2:15; Heb. 8:13).
- (3) God gave the Mosaic Law exclusively to Israel, not the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14).

c. Amillennialism

Historically the majority of covenant theology people have held to amillennialism, the view that claims there will not be a literal, political kingdom of God on this present earth for one thousand years. To their way of thinking, since the purpose of history for this present earth is the redemption of elect human beings, what would be the purpose of a literal, political kingdom of God on this present earth for the last one thousand years of its history? Advocates of amillennialism are divided into two groups.

- (1) The larger group claims that the future kingdom of God foretold in the Old Testament is a spiritual kingdom established through Christ's first coming. It is either the church or spiritual rule in human hearts. Since the Bible teaches that Christ would sit upon the throne of David when He would exercise rule over the kingdom of God, this group claims that He is seated on the throne of David now in Heaven. It thereby equates God's throne, where Christ took His seat when He ascended to Heaven, with David's throne.

Problems:

- (a) This amillennial view has the kingdom of God coexisting with Gentile world dominion, including the Roman Empire. Daniel 2 and 7 indicate that there would be no coexistence of the kingdom of God with Gentile world dominion, including the Roman Empire.
- (b) Several decades after Jesus ascended to Heaven and sat down on God's throne, He drew a clear distinction between God's throne, where He is seated now, and His throne that He will sit upon in the future (Rev. 3:21).
- (c) The Bible indicates that Christ will establish the kingdom of God in conjunction with His second coming, not His first coming (Matt. 24:29–31; 25:31–34; Rev. 19:11—20:4).
- (2) The smaller group of amillennialists claims that the future kingdom of God foretold in the Bible will not be established and exist until the future eternal state.

Problem:

Revelation 20:4—21:1 reveals the following sequence: Christ and His saints will administer God's kingdom rule over this present earth for one thousand years. Then Satan's final revolt will be crushed. Then the present Heaven and earth will pass away, and all the unsaved will be judged and assigned to their final judgment. Then the future eternal state will begin with the appearance of the new Heaven and a new earth.

2. Dispensational theology's viewpoint

The original form of government that God established for the earth was a theocratic kingdom, where God is the king, but His rule is administered by a representative. God appointed Adam as His representative to administer God's rule over the earth the way God wanted it administered. Satan, an exalted angel who prompted a revolt against God with the purpose of overthrowing Him and usurping His position as the sovereign God of

the universe, persuaded Adam to defect from God. As a result of Adam's defection, the theocratic kingdom was lost, and Satan usurped the rule of the world system and has dominated it ever since (Luke 4:5, 6; John 14:30; 1 John 5:19). This began a spiritual war between God and Satan that gives us the key to understanding the ultimate purpose of history. Satan's purpose of history is to overthrow God and usurp his position as the sovereign God of the universe. God's purpose, the ultimate purpose of history, is to glorify Himself by demonstrating the fact that He alone is the sovereign God. The Scriptures reveal that there are certain things God must do in order to accomplish that purpose. First, He must crush Satan and rid him and his rule from the world system. Second, God must restore His theocratic kingdom to the earth, where once again He will have an Adam, the incarnated Jesus Christ, as His representative administering God's rule over this earthly province of God's universal kingdom for the last age of its history (1 Cor. 15:45). This is why the restoration of His earthly, political, kingdom of God rule to this earth for its last millennium of history is absolutely critical. If that doesn't take place on the same earth that began with that theocratic kingdom of God rule, then Satan will defeat God within the scope of this present earth's history.

F. Hermeneutics (methods of interpretation)

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint

Covenant theology recognizes that the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the Bible is normal. Attention is focused on historical background and grammar to determine the correct meaning of a passage. And words are given the common, ordinary meaning that they had in the culture and time that the passage was written. But covenant theology uses a second method of interpretation especially for Biblical passages dealing with prophetic events of the future, the nation of Israel, and the future kingdom of God. In these areas covenant theology uses the allegorical or spiritualizing method. That method gives words different meanings than they had in the culture and time in which the passage was written. For example, according to this method, the word "Israel" does not have to mean the nation of Israel. It could mean the church. According to this method, the promises of future blessing for Israel do not have to be fulfilled with the nation of Israel. Instead, they are to be fulfilled with the church.

Problem:

Thus far the prophetic Scriptures that have been fulfilled have been fulfilled in accord with the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, not the allegorical method. This seems to indicate that God intends all prophetic passages to be interpreted according to the historical-grammatical method of interpretation.

2. Dispensational theology's viewpoint

The historical-grammatical method of interpretation must be followed consistently throughout all of Scripture in order to avoid error. The use of the allegorical method of interpretation allows a person to make the Bible say whatever he or she desires.

G. Christians and the Mosaic Law

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint

Covenant theology teaches that Christians today are not under the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law, but they are under the moral aspect (the Ten

Commandments) of the Law. The moral aspect of the Law presents the eternal, moral absolutes of God, which are unchangeable. Thus, if a person is not under the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law, that person is unrelated to the eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes of God. Thus, only two alternatives are open to the Christian: either be under the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law or be lawless.

Problems:

- a. Although the Mosaic Law had three divisions—civil, ceremonial, and moral—the Bible indicates that it was indivisible by nature.
 - (1) Galatians 3:10
 - (2) Galatians 5:3: Paul was asserting that submission to only one part of the ceremonial aspect of the Law obligated a person to keep every aspect of the Law.
 - (3) James 2:10: James was claiming that the breaking of only one part of the Mosaic Law made a person guilty of breaking the entire Law. The only way that could be true was if the Mosaic Law was an indivisible unit.

The fact that the Mosaic Law was an indivisible unit by nature implies that the Christian who places him- or herself under its moral aspect is obligated to keep every aspect of the Law (civil, ceremonial, and moral).
- b. Since God's moral absolutes are eternal, they have been in effect throughout all of history. Thus, they were in effect before God instituted the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai. This means that prior to Mount Sinai, God administered His eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes in ways other than through the Mosaic Law. It also means that God's eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes can be in effect without the Mosaic Law being in effect. The Mosaic Law was only one particular way of God administering His moral absolutes to one nation, Israel, during one period of history (from God's meeting with Israel at Mount Sinai to the cross of Christ).
- c. Before the Mosaic Law was instituted, there were people who lived righteous lives in conformity with God's moral absolutes: Abel (Heb. 11:4), Enoch (Heb. 11:5), and Noah (Gen. 6:9). It should be noted that God placed Noah and Job (who lived without the Mosaic Law) in the same category of righteousness as Daniel (who lived under the Mosaic Law; Ezek. 14:14, 20). This indicates that people can be related to the eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes of God without being under the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law. It also indicates that it is possible for people to be free from the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law without being lawless.
- d. The fact that God has administered His eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes in different ways at different times is demonstrated by the following examples: Under the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law God, required the death penalty for Jews who worshiped idols or committed adultery (Exod. 22:20; Lev. 20:10). But since the death of Christ, God has not required the death penalty for people guilty of these sins (1 Cor. 6:9–11). The moral absolutes have not changed, but God's way of administering those moral absolutes has changed.
- e. The Scriptures indicate that God's Mosaic Law way of administering His eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes has been replaced by the grace way of administering them. Thus, Christians are not under the Mosaic Law way, but under the grace way that Christ provided through His redemptive work.
 - (1) John 1:16, 17: John wrote that of Christ's "fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

- (2) Romans 6:14: Paul stated, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."
- (3) Romans 7:4–6: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."
- (4) Galatians 5:18: "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law."
- (5) Ephesians 2:15: Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

2. Dispensational theology's viewpoint

The Mosaic Law was God's external way of administering His eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes exclusively with one nation, Israel, for one period of history, from Mount Sinai to the death of Christ. As a result of Christ's redemptive work, God has provided a superior internal way of administering His eternal, unchangeable, moral absolutes with all believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

H. Replacement theology (Supersessionism)

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint

Covenant theology claims that because Israel as a nation rejected Christ in His first coming, God has forever rejected Israel as a nation. He will save individual Jews, but He has no present or future program for Israel as a nation. The Abrahamic Covenant, with its land and other promises for the nation, has been abrogated or annulled by Israel's unbelief. God has replaced national Israel with the New Testament church. Thus, the church today is the Israel of God and inherits blessings that God ordained for the nation of Israel. This means that modern day Israel has no right to exist as a nation in the Middle East. It has no rightful claim to the land.

Problems:

- a. God established a unique relationship with the nation of Israel (Deut. 7:6).
- b. David indicated that God's unique relationship with Israel is permanent (2 Sam. 7:23, 24).
- c. God promised to give ownership of the land of Canaan to Abraham and his biological descendants, Isaac, Jacob, and the people of Israel.
 - (1) Genesis 12:7
 - (2) Genesis 13:14, 15
 - (3) Genesis 15:7
 - (4) Genesis 15:18
 - (5) Genesis 17:7, 8
 - (6) Genesis 17:19
 - (7) 1 Samuel 12:22
 - (8) Psalm 94:14
 - (9) 1 Chronicles 16:13–18
 - (10) Jeremiah 31:37
 - (11) Acts 3:12–15, 25, 26

(12) Romans 11:28, 29

2. Dispensational theology's viewpoint

In spite of Israel rejecting Christ in His first coming and opposing the gospel to this present day, God has not rejected the nation of Israel as His unique people. He has a present and future plan for that nation. He intends it to play a key role in the fulfillment of His purpose of history.

God has not replaced Israel with the church. The church is not God's Israel today. God made all the promises or commitments in the establishment of the Abrahamic Covenant. There is no Biblical record of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or the people of Israel making any promises or commitments in the establishment of that covenant. The only way that the people of Israel could break or abrogate that covenant is if they violate promises or commitments that they made when it was established. The fact that God alone made all the promises or commitments indicates that the covenant remaining in effect between God and the nation of Israel and its promises being fulfilled depends totally upon God being faithful to His word.

I. Preterism

The term "preterism" is derived from the word "preterit." The basic meaning of "preterit" is "past." It denotes past action or event.

1. Covenant theology's viewpoint

Preterism is a view of a number of people in the covenant theology camp.

Preterists teach that much, if not all, prophecy related to the second coming of Christ has already been fulfilled in the past. They argue that major prophetic portions of Scripture (such as the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation) were fulfilled in events related to the Jewish war against Roman rule that began in AD mid-60s and culminated with the Roman crushing of the Jewish revolt, the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem, the second temple, and Israel's existence as a nation state. They claim that this was the "great tribulation" that Christ referred to in Matthew 24:21 of His Olivet Discourse, and that it involved Christ coming to judge the generation of Jews who had rejected Him in His first coming. Moderate preterists claim that it was "a" second coming of Christ, not His ultimate second coming. Extreme preterists insist that it was "the" second coming of Christ.

Preterists believe they are compelled to take such a view because Matthew 24:34 and its parallel passages say that "this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." They argue that literal interpretation requires the understanding that the "great tribulation" and its related coming of Christ had to take place in the first century AD before the generation that was alive when Christ delivered the Olivet Discourse passed away.

The issue: What did Christ mean by the expression "great tribulation?" Was He referring to the Jewish war against Roman rule that culminated with the AD 70 Roman destruction of Jerusalem, the second temple, and Israel's existence as a nation state? If so, then the preterists are correct. Or was Christ referring to something altogether different that would occur at a different time in the future? If so, then the preterists are wrong in their interpretation.

Problems with preterism:

- a. Jesus indicated that the distress during the "great tribulation" would be so intense that there never would be anything to equal it from "the beginning of the world" to

the time of Jesus' discourse, or ever would be (Matt. 24:21). Through the use of a double negative, He emphasized the absolute impossibility of there ever being anything to equal it. This indicated that it would be even worse than the Noahic flood, when all of mankind except eight people were eliminated. Surely the flood was far worse than what happened to the people of Israel from the mid-60s to 70.

- b. Jesus indicated that if this time of unparalleled trouble were allowed to continue indefinitely, "no flesh," not just Jewish flesh, would be saved from death (Matt. 24:22). The only flesh that was perishing from the mid 60s to AD 70 was Jewish flesh, not "all flesh."
- c.. The destruction of AD 70 was not worse than the destruction of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel as a nation state in 722 BC or the destruction of Jerusalem, Solomon's temple, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah as a nation state in 586 BC.
- d. Even if Jesus' reference was limited exclusively to the mid-60s to 70 destruction of Jewish flesh, the destruction of Jewish flesh during that time was not worse than that of the Holocaust of World War II. During the Jewish war (Josephus), which ended in AD 70, 1,356,460 Jews were killed. By contrast, some 6,000,000 Jews were killed in World War II.
- e. Jesus indicated that "immediately after" the great tribulation, cosmic disturbances would take place in the universe (Matt. 24:29). There is no record of that happening immediately after AD 70.
- f. Jesus indicated that after the cosmic disturbances, "the sign of the Son of man [shall appear] in heaven" (Matt. 24:30). There is no record of that happening shortly after AD 70.
- g. Jesus indicated that His coming would take place after the great tribulation, not during the great tribulation (Matt. 24:29, 30). By contrast, preterism seems to indicate that His coming was during the Roman crushing of the Jewish revolt against Roman rule.
- h. Revelation 1:7 states, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him."
Compare Matthew 24:30: "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."
Christ's second coming will be a very visible event. He will appear. Every eye will see Him. There is no record of a visible appearance of Christ during the Jewish war that began in the mid-60s and involved the destruction of Jerusalem, Herod's temple, and Israel as a nation state in AD 70.
- i. Jesus indicated that in conjunction with His coming on the clouds of Heaven, He would send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet to gather together His elect people from all four directions of the world (Matt. 24:31). There is no record of anything like that taking place either during the Jewish war from the mid-60s to 70 or after AD 70.

2. Dispensational theology's viewpoint

These nine problems indicate that Christ's use of the expression "great tribulation" was not a reference to the Jewish war against Roman rule that culminated with the AD 70 Roman destruction of Jerusalem, the second temple, and Israel's existence as a nation

state. Instead, it was a reference to something altogether different that would occur at a different time in the future. Thus, the expression “this generation” was not referring to the generation that was alive when Christ delivered the Olivet Discourse. Instead, it referred to the generation that will be alive on earth when all the future things that Christ talked about in the Olivet Discourse will take place.