

SECTION 22

Theological Systems and Hermeneutics

Over-Arching Theological Systems and Hermeneutics

NOTE: the following comparisons are drawn from Donald Hochner's work.

Dispensational Theology organizes history and theology around a series of dispensations, which are each different "economies" or arrangements decreed by God. Each dispensation begins with an offer of blessing by God, and ends with failure by man to meet God's conditions and a resulting period of Divine judgment.

1. The Dispensation of Innocence – Untested Holiness
2. The Dispensation of Conscience – Cain & Abel
3. The Dispensation of Government – Noah
4. The Dispensation of Promise – Abraham
5. The Dispensation of Law – Moses
6. The Dispensation of Grace or the Church
7. The Dispensation of the Kingdom

Some Characteristics of Dispensational Theology

- (1) Stresses a "literal" interpretation of the Bible
- (2) "Israel" always means only the literal, physical descendants of Jacob
- (3) God has 2 peoples with 2 separate destinies: Israel (earthly) and the Church (heavenly)
- (4) The Church was born at Pentecost
- (5) The Church was not prophesied in the OT but was a "mystery," hidden until the NT.
- (6) God's main purpose in history is national, physical Israel
- (7) The Church is a parenthesis in God's program for the ages.
- (8) Dispensationalism stresses a discontinuity between the OT and NT.
- (9) God's program in history is mainly through separate dispensations.
- (10) Some dispensationalists have said that OT sinners were saved by works.
- (11) Most teach that persons in the OT were saved by faith in a revelation peculiar to their Dispensation, but this did not include their faith in the Messiah as their sin-bearer.
- (12) Jesus made an offer of the literal Kingdom to Israel; since Israel rejected it, it is postponed.

- (13) The OT Law has been abolished for the Church, but not for Israel, who will be under the Law when the Church is taken away, and God returns to His original people – Physical Israel.
- (14) OT Laws are no longer in effect unless repeated in the NT.
- (15) The Millenium = the Kingdom of God. Pre-mil, Pre-trib usually.
- (16) The OT animal sacrifices will be restored in the Millenium (as a memorial).
- (17) The Millenium will fulfill the Covenant made with Abraham. Israel as a nation has a future.

Covenantal Theology

Covenantal Theologians organize all history and theology around several covenants, or arrangements between God and humans or the Son. They are:

1. Covenant of Redemption. This covenant occurred before creation.

- The Son - perfect obedience in death promised to the Father
- The Father - promised to the Son: 1) Holy Spirit given to the Church; 2) salvation to all believers; 3) exaltation of the son.

2. The Covenant of Works: Lasting from creation until the fall.

- Man's conditions - Adam must obey God
- God rewards obedience with eternal life, punishes disobedience with death

3. The Covenant of Grace: Lasting from the fall until the second advent.

- a. Man's conditions - saving faith issuing in obedience
 - b. God's response - salvation in all of its phases
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Characteristics of Covenant Theology

1. Always Calvinist. Usually five-point Calvinist.
2. Accepts both literal and figurative (spiritual) interpretation of the Bible.
3. 'Israel' may mean either physical descendants of Jacob, or spiritual Israel, depending on context.
4. God always had only one people, the Church gradually developed through the ages, in accordance with an Covenant worked out in eternity past between the "Three Persons of the Godhead."
5. The Church began in the OT (Acts 7:38) and reached fulfillment in the NT.
6. There are many OT prophecies of the NT Church.

7. Some OT prophecies are for national Israel, others for spiritual Israel.
8. God's main purpose* in history is Christ and secondarily the Church.

*God's main purpose is His own glory, Christ included because He is the glory of God, and then the church. The Church is the culmination of God's saving purpose for the ages.
9. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Christ, the Seed, and spiritual Israel which is "in Christ"
10. The eternal Covenant of Redemption was within the Trinity to effect election.
11. God made a conditional Covenant of Works with Adam as representative for all his posterity.
12. God made a Covenant of Grace with Christ and His people, including Adam.
13. God's program in history is mainly through related covenants, but all those covenants were derived from the eternal covenant that the Trinity made in eternity.
14. No man has ever been saved by works, but only by grace. (Eph 2:8-10)
15. All men who have ever been saved have been saved by faith in Christ as their sin-bearer, which has been progressively revealed in every age.
16. OT believers believed in the Gospel of Messiah as sin-bearer mainly by the sacrifices as types and prophecies.

17. The Holy Spirit has indwelt believers in all ages, especially in the present NT era, and will not be withdrawn.
18. Jesus made only an offer of the Spiritual Kingdom, which was rejected by literal Israel but has gradually been accepted by spiritual Israel.
19. Believers in all ages are all 'in Christ' and part of the Body and Bride of Christ.
20. The Law has 3 uses: to restrain sin in society, to lead to Christ, and to instruct Christians in godliness. The ceremonial laws have been abolished; the civil laws have been abolished except for their general equity; the moral laws continue.
21. OT laws are still in effect unless abrogated in the NT.
22. The Church is the Kingdom of God. They are usually Amil or Postmil; although a few are Premil or Preterist.
23. The OT sacrifices were fulfilled and forever abolished in Christ.
24. Christ fulfilled the Covenant to Abraham. Some believe in a future for literal Israel, most don't.
25. Christ alone sits on the throne in heaven. Saints rule under Him in Spirit.
26. Most embrace infant baptism, but the Baptist among them don't.