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I. Introduction:

In analyzing the theological systems that predominate today, it is important that we remain as objective as possible. We do not want to misrepresent what others believe. We do not want to engage in ballistic brick-throwing and unloving polemics against Christian peoples who hold differing theological opinions.

Never do we want to "write someone off" and deny that they are our Christian brother or sister because they organize their "belief-system" differently than we do, provided they profess that Jesus is the Christ and have received Him by faith. Christian unity is not uniformity of thought or ideology. We seek a unity of love despite diversity of opinion, understanding, interpretation or theological explanation. Our unity is in Christ, not in theological constructions.

Covenant theology and Dispensational theology often view themselves as opponents at opposite extremes of the theological spectrum, shooting arrows across a great theological chasm. There is indeed a great diversity of opinion, as we have tried to delineate, but from another perspective they are both camped in the same ditch.

Dispensational theology begins its application of presuppositions in Genesis 12-17 with the expectation of a literal and physical fulfillment of an unconditional covenant with Abraham. Covenant theology also focuses the application of its presuppositions on the "everlasting covenant" of God with Abraham in Genesis 17. Isn't it interesting that both theologies seem to commence with epistemological premises about the fulfillment of promises to Abraham? Should not our theology commence with divine activity prior to Abraham?

II. Dispensational Theology

The first three covenants (Edenic, Adamic, & Noahic) were given to mankind. The Abrahamic, Mosaic, Land, Davidic & New covenants were given to Israel and not the

Gentiles. The gentiles are blessed within a number of the covenants. For each covenant, man fails and is judged by God in mercy.

“Under all the dispensations and covenants is God ultimate plan for salvation by Jesus imputed righteousness by His death and resurrection by God's grace. The alternate to dispensational theology is replacement theology which teaches that God is through with Israel and Jesus will not be king on an earthly throne for 1,000 years.”ⁱ

Dispensational theology is probably the most popular theological understanding in America at this time, even though it has a more recent origin than Covenant theology.

“The development of Dispensational theology dates back to the nineteenth century in Britain. J.N. Darby (1800-1882), an Irish lawyer, sought to explain the uniqueness of the Christians' spiritual condition "in Christ." To explain the radical difference in Christian "benefits" from that afforded to peoples in all prior times, Mr. Darby employed the division of time into distinct "dispensations." Harry Ironside, a later proponent of Dispensational theology, noted that "until Mr. J.N. Darby...it (the dispensational idea of a postponed kingdom) is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon through a period of sixteen hundred years." Darby's novel idea of distinguishing "dispensations" of time became the basis of a new theological system known as "Dispensationalism."”ⁱⁱ

Some of the prominent features of Dispensational theology include distinct dispensations of time, the dichotomy of Israel and the Church, and the unconditional covenant of God with Abraham, to be fulfilled physically and literally for the Jewish people in the future Davidic/millennial kingdom. Upon these basic presuppositions the system of Dispensational theology is constructed.

“The Dispensationalist divides time into distinct "dispensations." The consistent distinguishing of these periods of time is referred to as "rightly dividing the word of truth" (a misuse of II Tim. 2:5 as translated in the KJV). The concept of "dispensations" is taken from the Greek word *oikonomia*, from which we get the English word "economy." The Greek word meant "stewardship, management, administration or arrangement." Based on the less than accurate KJV translation of *oikonomia* as "dispensation" in I Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25, the early formulators of Dispensational theology defined a "dispensation" as "a period of time with a test that ends in failure," and began to divide all history accordingly. A more complete Dispensational definition of a "dispensation" might be "a period of time wherein (1) a distinctive idea of revelation is given by God, (2) a specific test of obedience is given based on that revelation, (3) man fails the test of obedience, (4) God judges man for his disobedience, and then establishes another dispensation." These dispensations do not build upon one another, but are regarded as totally distinct and separate from one another.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Dispensationalists are not agreed as to the number of dispensations of time wherein God deals with men in different ways. At least three dispensations are required for the theological system to provide the contrasts necessary; these are the dispensation of law, the dispensation of grace, and the dispensation of the millennial kingdom. According to Dispensational theology, Israel constitutes God's "earthly people" and Christians are God's "heavenly people." The "earthly people" of Israel received a literal promise from God in the unconditional covenant to Abraham. God only makes covenants with the Jews, and He had promised the Jews that He would establish the Davidic Kingdom on earth. Jesus came to earth for just that purpose, to establish the earthly Davidic Kingdom for the Jews, but they rejected Him.

“God therefore postponed the re-implementation of the Kingdom until Jesus comes again to set up the millennial kingdom, which will be the fulfillment of the "new covenant" promised to the Jews. The period of the postponed kingdom, the "dispensation of grace," is a parenthetical time period wherein God's primary purpose is interrupted and held in abeyance. The Church is not to be identified with God's kingdom and was unforeseen by all of the Old Testament prophets whose prophecies never refer to the Church age. The Church, which is primarily for Gentiles, began on Pentecost, and there are many "mysteries" concerning God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ so as to "call out" a "heavenly people" whose destiny is to be seated with Christ on the throne in the New Jerusalem of heaven. Meanwhile the primary futuristic focus is on the return of Jesus Christ to reestablish the realm of the earthly Davidic Kingdom in Palestine during the 1000 year millennial period which fulfills the promised "new covenant," the "dispensation of the kingdom." (Some Dispensationalists will allow that the "new covenant" may have a double application: a spiritual application for the church and a physical application for Israel.) The return of Christ is "imminent," expected at "any moment." It will be preceded by the "rapture" in order to remove the Church and keep Israel and the Church separated.”^{iv}

The definitive disparity between Israel and the Church is foundational to the theological dis correspondence and historical discontinuity of Dispensational theology. Their affinity for espousing divine privileges for Israel has earned for them the tag of "Christian Zionism."

There is an intense continuity of thought among dispensationalists. It is not difficult to ascertain the guiding presuppositions of this system. In answering the question "What is the sine qua non of dispensationalism?" Dr. Charles Ryrie says:

"A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct . . . a man who fails to distinguish Israel and the Church will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions."

Dispensationalists employ "a consistently literal principle of interpretation." This principle "is at the heart of dispensational eschatology." And finally, Dispensationalists assert that God's purposes center in His glory, rather than in the "single purpose of salvation." (Dispensationalism." Today [Moody 1965]. pp.44-48)."^v

III. Covenant theology:

"The doctrine of the covenant was one of the theological contributions that came to the church through the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Undeveloped earlier, it made its appearance in the writings of Zwingli and Bullinger, who were driven to the subject by Anabaptists in and around Zurich. From them it passed to Calvin and other Reformers, was further developed by their successors, and played a dominant role in much Reformed theology of the seventeenth century when it came to be known as covenant, or federal, theology."^{vi}

Covenant theology emphasizes the similarity between the Old Testament and New Testament.

"There is one plan of God. There is one people of God and there is one kingdom of God. After fall, salvation is always by grace through faith. Very important is the relationship and connection between Adam and Jesus (Romans 5), how the sin of the former and the obedience of the latter affected the human race."^{vii}

New Covenant Theology (NCT) is a biblical approach to understanding God's unfolding plan of salvation. The focus of this approach is the work and person of Jesus Christ with emphasis on what God has accomplished and fulfilled in Christ for the elect. The Lord Jesus is the grand theme of both the New and Old Testament Scriptures which unifies all of the Bible as evidenced in Ephesians 1:7-10:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

The primary premise of new covenant theology is that the New Covenant as mediated by Christ is a brand NEW covenant, which totally replaces the Old Covenant: (*Hebrews 8:6-13*)

The Old Covenant was a covenant that God established with the ancient Nation of Israel only. The terms of this covenant were the Ten Commandments or Tables of Stone:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant--the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:27-28)

In addition, the Old Covenant was a legal, conditional covenant with Israel that demanded perfect obedience in order to receive the promised blessings: (*Exodus 19:3-6*)
The primary function of the Old Covenant was a ministry of death.

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! (2 Corinthians 3:6-9)

The Old Covenant was historically time-bound and was a Pedagogue that the Israelites were obligated to obey perfectly until the promised seed of Abraham (Jesus Christ) would arrive:

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. (Galatians 3:24-25)

The New Covenant is a new and better covenant. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant, which is founded on better promises:

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6)

The New Covenant is made up of a totally regenerate membership since Christ has died only for His people (the elect) who receive the complete benefits of His reconciling work (*Heb. 8:10-12; Heb. 7:25*). Jesus Christ kept the terms of the Old Covenant perfectly and earned all the blessings for His people: (*Galatians 4:4-7*) (*Hebrews 1:1-3*)

Thus, all Christians are under the authority of the New Covenant which is governed by the New Testament Scriptures: (*Ephesians 2:19-20*)

The Old Covenant has been perfectly fulfilled in Christ and done away. God's law is still binding on the believer in the New Covenant era, but God's righteous standards are contained in the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses: (*1 Corinthians 9:20-21*)

(*Galatians 6:2*)

In addition, NCT views the nation of Israel as a picture of the people of God but not the real people of God:

(*Hebrews 10:1*) (*1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 11*)

Thus, the nation of Israel is mainly the Unbelieving people of God who are rejected by God as a covenant nation: (*Matthew 8:5-12*)

While a remnant of the nation of Israel were true believers, New Covenant era believers are now the True people of God since Jesus has purchased all those in the New Covenant: (*1 Peter 2:4-10*)

In NCT, the Ten Commandments are NOT the essence of the "Moral Law" but are seen as a Unit applying only as the terms of the entire Old Covenant with Israel. The Christian,

then, is no longer bound by the terms of the Old Covenant. The Law of Christ is the objective standard for the New Covenant believer.

IV. Comparison of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.

DISPENSATIONALISM

- Two separate purposes
- Israel: Future earthly purpose
- Law/Grace opposed
- Law postponed to future
- Redemptive history chopped up
- Assume literalism, avoid New Testament use of Old Testament
- Read the Old Testament without New Testament

COVENANT THEOLOGY

- One covenant of grace
- Israel: Present political model
- Law/Grace fused together
- Law carried over into the New Covenant
- Redemptive history flattened
- Assume one covenant avoid historical covenants
- Read the N. T. into the Old Covenant^{viii}

V. Promise theology

Promise Theology tends to combine the best features of Dispensationalism and Covenant theology.

“Dispensationalists errs in reading the Old Covenant without taking into account the New Covenant. The basic relationship between the old Testament and New Testament is promise and fulfillment. In the old Testament God promised to send Messiah; in the New Testament Jesus appears on the scene. Many of God’s prophecies and promises were fulfilled during Jesus’ earthly ministry. Salvation is always by grace, through faith. In the Old Testament, faith is in the promised

future Messiah; in the New Testament, faith is in Jesus Christ. It is to note that the promise given to Abraham is an eternal promise (Gen. 13:15; 17:7-8, 13, 19; 48:4).

Important features of promise theology will include the premises that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Messianic promises in the Old Testament, that all of God's redemptive and salvific actions are centered in and expressive of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and that God continues to act in grace as the dynamic life of the risen Lord Jesus is lived out in Christians.”^{ix}

The Bible does not commence with Abrahamic promises. The Bible does not begin at Genesis 12 or 17. Neither should our theological explanation.

Immediately after the fall of man into sin, recorded in Genesis 3:1-7, God began to make "promises" of the Messiah He would send to remedy the death consequences of man's sin and restore the spiritual presence of God in man. The first Messianic promise is found in Genesis 3:15 when God promised that "the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent." Messianic promises precede and supersede Abrahamic promises! Messianic promises are universal in their application and spiritual in their fulfillment, rather than racially, nationally or religiously exclusive in physical, militaristic and geographic fulfillment. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Messianic promises of the Old Testament, including those given to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15 and 17. The Old Testament believers, including Abraham, "died in faith, without receiving the promises" (Heb. 11:13,39), but for new covenant Christians "as many as may be the promises of God, in Jesus Christ they are Yes," affirmed and fulfilled (II Cor. 1:20). Jesus Christ is the central "key" to understanding all of God's promises, all of God's dealing with man, and all of the Biblical record.

I will be focusing on five major elements in explaining the promise Theology and hence what I believe and why.

1-The first element of the promise to be considered is that of the offspring, or "seed" as the word "zera" is translated in several versions. This element was particularly significant in view of the fact that Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children at the time the promise was given (Gen. 17:17). The earnest of this aspect of the promise was given to them by God in the birth of their son Isaac (Gen. 21:1-3).

The promise given to the patriarchs, a promise that involves the blessings of multitudes, was to function through Abraham's offspring, and through them that promise would be realized. This is emphasized particularly in Gen. 22:18, "and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed..."

The offspring seem clearly to be the physical descendants of Abraham yet, when the concept of the offspring is traced through the old and new testaments. For example, in the new testament the word "sperma" (seed, offspring) refers to the physical descendants of Abraham (Like 1:55; John 8:33, 37; Acts 7:5-6; Heb. 11:18), but the Apostle Paul included within the concept those who are Abraham's offspring by faith (Rom. 4:13-18); 9:6-8; Gal:7,23-29. In Acts 3:25-26, Peter affirmed that Christ is the offspring (sperma) through whom the blessing of the promise is mediated, and in Gal. 3:16 Paul argued that the word seed (Zera), used in the Genesis accounts of the promise, is not a grammatical plural and thus refers to Christ. He said, "the promises were spoken to Abraham and his

seed. The Scripture does not say and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed meaning one person, who is Christ.

So we have two dimensions in the way in which the new testament understands the Genesis accounts of the promise of the offspring: the concept of the individual offspring, who is Christ; and the concept of corporate offspring, which includes, along with the physical descendants of Abraham, all the people of faith.

The offspring of Abraham is the focal point of the current conflict. The ongoing struggle in the Middle East is a direct result of the animosity between the descendants of Ishmael (physical line) and Isaac (the spiritual line). While there is no record of Ishmael and Isaac ever fighting each other, Gen. 16:12 does record God's prophecy regarding Ishmael "*He will be against everyone, and everyone will be against him.*" Today struggle is between those who call themselves the descendants of Ishmael and those who call themselves descendants of Isaac-descendants of two brothers.

Abraham is the father of all true believers: (Gen. 12:2; Gen. 13:16; Gen. 17:5, 17), Christians like wise regard Abraham the promises made to him referred ultimately to not his physical offspring, the Jews, but rather to his spiritual offspring, that is, all those who have the same kind of faith that Abraham had. The very choice of Isaac as the son through whom the covenant, God had made with Abraham was to be fulfilled, shows that God was not thinking of his physical offspring. If he had, he would have chosen Ishmael, the first son born to Abraham, but he chose Isaac to show that he intended the blessings of the covenant to become effective for those who were spiritual and true in faith towards him. For it is recorded in both the Jewish scriptures (Gen. 16:12) and the Christian scriptures (Gal. 4:29) that Ishmael was a decidedly unspiritual man (one born of the flesh as opposed to Isaac who was born of the spirit). Abraham an example and prototype of the true religion to come (Acts 15:21; Heb. 6:14).

2-The elements of the Davidic promise (2Sam. 7) are strikingly similar to those of the Abrahamic promise. Like Abraham, David is promised that his name would be great (V.9; cf. Gen. 12:2). The nation is promised security in its own land (V.10; cf. Gen. 12:7). David is promised offspring (vv. 11-12; cf. Gen. 12:2). Kings are to descend from him (vv. 12-16; cf. Gen. 17:6,16). David is conscious of the Lord's blessing (v.29; cf. Gen 12:2 'and I will bless you'). God is the Israelites' God and they are his people by faith to those who believe (V.24; cf. Gen.17:7-8). Like the Abrahamic promise the Davidic promise is eternal (vv.13, 16, 24-25,29; cf. Gen.17:7) It is the extension of divine blessing to Gentiles.

The prophet Jeremiah saw the fulfillment of the Davidic promise in a "righteous Branch" raised up by the Lord to David (23:5). The Branch is connected with the Davidic dynasty in Jeremiah 33:20-21, where the prophet says that if God's covenant with day and night may be broken, "then my covenant with David my servant...can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne" Jeremiah established the theological continuity between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants: I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the star of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore" V.22. The everlasting covenant of Ezekiel, like the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34, also promises

forgiveness of sin (16:63). And, as the law was to be placed in the heart, according to Jeremiah, so in Ezekiel's covenant a new heart and a new spirit were promised (36:27). The fulfillment of this great promise is vividly declared in the new covenant in Jesus' own words: "this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins". Sins are fully forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

3-The division of the Scriptures between Old Testament and New Testament, meaning old covenant and new covenant, with the dividing point being the incarnation and redemptive mission of the Messiah, evidences the centrality of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The calculation of history in the calendar of the Western world which separates the era of B.C. and the era of A.D. is based on the center-point of history in Jesus Christ. What further dividing of time or the Book needs to be made? None! Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promises, the prophecies, and the types of the Old Testament. He is the Messiah. He is the Savior. He is God! All of the creative, redemptive and salvific activities of God center in and are expressive of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

4-Christianity is not just a study of the historical foundation or the theological formulations of a particular religious phenomena. God in Christ continues to function in grace as the dynamic life of the risen Lord Jesus is lived out in Christians who have received Jesus Christ to live in them by faith. Christianity is not a belief-system of epistemological categories. Christianity is not a morality-system of ethical conformity to behavioral regulations or ecclesiastical recommendations.

Christianity is not a book-religion for educational acquisition of divine knowledge. Christianity is life - the ontological reality of the life and Being of Jesus Christ in the Christian. "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27); "Christ is our life" (Col. 3:4); "Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20); "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). God has not offered us some salvific "benefits" because of Christ's sacrifice, or some spiritual "commodities" which we can acquire, possess and "apply," and which will suffice to assure us of our heavenly destiny. God has made Himself available to us in Jesus Christ so that by Christ in the Christian, deity might once again indwell humanity to be the basis of our spiritual identity and the activation of our behavioral expression by His grace in order to exhibit His character unto His glory, the purpose of our creation in the first place (Isa. 43:7). Christianity is the dynamic of the life of the risen Lord Jesus Christ - His Being in action. Nothing must be allowed to dominate our theological considerations that would detract from the centrality of Jesus Christ!

5- The Person and work of Jesus Christ provides sufficient perspective and explanation for all interpretation of the Scriptures and subsequent development of Christian theology. The promise theology emphasis recognizes both historical continuity and discontinuity, as well as theological correspondence and discorrespondence.

There is an obvious historical continuity from God's dealing with the physical nation of Israel to the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, "born under the Law (Gal. 4:4), as a Jew (John 4:9), identified with Abraham (Matt. 1:1) Jesus was well aware, though, even during His redemptive mission on earth, that the connection with the physical people of

the Jews was to be expanded to include peoples of all races in "the world" of mankind. God's choosing of the Israelite people in the Old Testament was to serve as a preliminary and pictorial pre-figuring of the universal "people of God" in the new covenant. The race-specific nation of Israel was to be a pointer toward the spiritual "new Israel" of new covenant Christianity, wherein racial generation would no longer be a criterion (Rom. 2:29; 9:6; 11:26; Gal. 6:16). Christians in the Church of Jesus Christ would become the "people of God" (Titus 2:14; I Peter 2:9), citizens of God's spiritual kingdom (Eph. 2:19; Col. 1:13). The historical foundation of God's dealing with the Israelites in the Old Testament is essential for Christian understanding. Otherwise Christianity is suspended in mythical and mystical subjectivism. We must not repudiate the historical continuity between the Old and New Testament. Likewise, we must maintain an awareness of theological correspondence. The one God who is the Creator of all things, who is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the God who "so loved the world that He gave His son" (John 3:16) and was incarnated in Jesus (John 1:1,14) in order to become our Savior and our life. A singular divine objective is evident throughout God's dealings with man. God desires to see His character manifested by His grace in human behavior unto His glory, and this can only be accomplished by the personal, expressive Word (John 1:1,14) of Jesus Christ making God's image (Gen. 1:26,27; II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) visible through man.

^xMost of the above information was taken from The covenants of promise P.17, 18,19.

In the end, the one central phenomenon that sorts out all of the continuity and discontinuity of the history of God and man, and the correspondence and discorrespondence of theological content, is the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The focus of Christian theology is not to be on legal covenants, sociological peoples, historical dispensations or racial nations, but on Jesus Christ, and that not only as an historical figure or as a theological formulation, but on the personal indwelling of His life and Being in Christians. The primary objective of God in dealing with fallen mankind is not to develop an "elect people" or to develop a "kingdom for Israel," but to restore the divine presence in man by the indwelling of Christ in the Christian, and that in order to allow God to be glorified by the expression of His all-glorious character within the behavior of man.

It was Promised in Eden:	<i>"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" (Gen. 3:15).</i>
It was Proclaimed to Abraham:	<i>"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you," (Gen. 12:3).</i>
Like the Abrahamic promise the Davidic promise is eternal. It is the extension of divine blessing to Gentiles.	<i>(vv.13, 16, 24-25,29; cf. Gen.17:7)</i>

This is the new covenant of the Messianic age where the Law of God would be written upon the hearts of men.

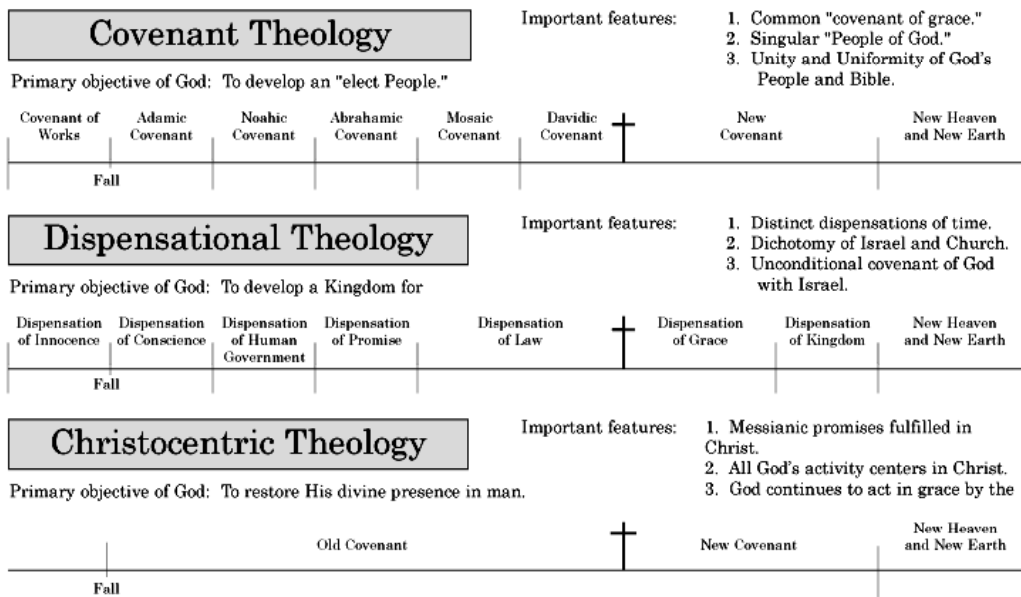
"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jer. 31:31,33).

It was Fulfilled in Christ:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us -- to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace," (Luke 1:68-79).

VI.

Comparison of Theological Systems



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VII. Conclusion

Christians today need to be discerning so they can recognize the man-made "grids" of interpretation that color and taint and bias so much of Christian instruction today. Surely we do not want to be blind followers who have failed to develop our own "reasoning

about God" in accord with inspired Scripture? Paul prayed for the Philippians Christians that their "love might abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that they might approve the things that are excellent..." (Phil. 2:9,10). Such would be my prayer for Christians today.

It is not the intent of this study to propose another theological system in competition with any others. The world of sinful mankind does not need another system; they need the Savior, Jesus Christ. The solution to the problems of fallen mankind are not in the compilation of logical truths, but in the receiving of the One who is the Living Truth (John 14:6) - Jesus Christ. Thus it is proposed that our "reasoning about God," our theology, should be the Promise One.

As Christian peoples in different places and at different times have different "reasoning," it is important to reiterate again that theological understanding and concurrence should not be a "test of fellowship" among Christian peoples. We must not revere theological systems. The systematization of ideologies into well-defined theologies produces additional "-isms" which capture men's imaginations and cause them to interpret Scripture and their relationship with God through a colored lens, an imperfect "grid." Those who have received the risen and living Lord Jesus Christ by faith can and must remain one in the "unity of love" despite different theological reasoning. This can be accomplished by allowing Jesus Christ to be the center of our thinking, our theology and our lives.

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- ^x .*The covenants of promise* P.17, 18,19.

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