



GOD'S GLORY
REVEALED IN CHRIST



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Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of
THOMAS R. SCHREINER

DENNY BURK | JAMES M. HAMILTON JR. | BRIAN VICKERS
e d i t o r s

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God's Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of Thomas R. Schreiner

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Dedication

For Tom Schreiner



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Foreword: In Appreciation of Thomas R. Schreiner

by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Where the Christian church is found faithful, faithful teachers are found. In the Old Testament, priests were honored for faithful instruction. In the New Testament, the most important office in the church is the teaching office. As Paul instructed Timothy, “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2 ESV¹).

Where Professor Tom Schreiner is found, faithful teaching is found. One of the greatest privileges of my life is to teach and serve among some of the leading Christian scholars of our day, and Tom Schreiner is in the highest rank among them. He is the very model of a Christian teacher and scholar.

Tom became a Christian at age seventeen, partly through the witness of the woman who would become his wife, Diane. He received a call to ministry soon thereafter, and he has been engaged in answering that call for his entire adult life. His educational ambitions took him to Western Oregon University for his undergraduate work, then on to Western Conservative Baptist Seminary for his master of divinity and master of theology. He would receive his doctor of philosophy from Fuller Theological Seminary. Like his education, Tom’s first academic post was in the west, at Azusa Pacific University.

Later he would teach New Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary before joining the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1997, where he has now taught for more than twenty years.

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At the same time, Tom has been deeply involved in the preaching ministry of the local church, serving as elder in three churches over the same span that took him to three academic postings. For most of those years, Tom's academic context was the theological seminary, explicitly committed to the teaching of preachers and pastors.

There is only one excuse for a preacher to teach in a theological seminary and to devote his life and energies to theological education. It all comes down to the fact that God invests unique gifts of intellect and scholarly vocation in some ministers of the gospel. God then grants these men the stewardship of scholarship in order that future generations of Christians will be more faithfully taught by their preachers. That calling has defined Tom Schreiner's life, and Tom defines that calling in our times.

The ideal of the Christian scholar reaches back to the apostles themselves and continues through towering figures such as Jerome and Augustine in the church's early centuries. Those two massive models of Christian scholarship have nourished the church for more than a millennium. Both were exegetes of Holy Scripture. Both were models of devotional dedication to the church. Both have exerted an influence that continues to this day.

The same is true of Martin Luther and John Calvin, the most significant among the Reformers of the sixteenth century. In *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation*, E. Harris Harbison would remark: "The truest way, then, to describe the meaning of the Reformation, is to say it originated in a scholar's insight, born equally of spiritual struggle and hard intellectual labor."²

Luther and Calvin loom large as we think of the Christian scholar in the service of the church. Both were master exegetes. One of Martin Luther's greatest achievements would be his translation of the New Testament into German. The expositional sermons and commentaries of both Calvin and Luther remain in print today, readily available in good English translations. Why? The answer can only be that the power of their scholarship and preaching continues to nourish the church five centuries after the start of the Reformation—in scholarship, teaching, and preaching.

Tom Schreiner is the living refutation of any claim that the highest level of Christian scholarship cannot be accomplished while deeply involved in the life and ministry of the local church. Tom has authored at least fifteen major books and dozens of academic articles, each a work of scholarship. His *New Testament Theology* and *Romans*, his commentary in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series, are representative of the gift of scholarship that Tom has given to the church.

² E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation* (Scribner, 1956), 121.

Tom's scholarship is confessional. He teaches within a confessional school and he is clear about his personal convictions. Like Luther and Calvin, Tom Schreiner is committed to the theology of the Reformation. Of course, he would prefer to say that he is first committed to the theology of the New Testament, and rightly so. He is a Baptist, an evangelical, a Protestant, and a model of Reformed scholarship and teaching. He is not a controversialist, but he does not run from controversy when the issues at stake are important.

The respect of his academic peers was evident when he was elected to serve as president of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2014. His investment in other scholars is extensive. His doctoral students now serve throughout the world of theological education. He is, in effect, a teaching legend in his own time.

One of the highest compliments students pay to teachers is to talk about them—with respect and affection. Students talk about Tom Schreiner that way all the time. They leave his classroom and talk about the lecture and discussion. They pick up on his language and his verbal cues. They love his humor and his eagerness to teach. They know the personal respect for students that Tom brings to every classroom. They return that respect by their acknowledgement that when in Tom's classroom, they are in the presence of a master teacher.

I came to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as president in 1993—twenty-five years ago as I write this. I was assigned a monumental challenge. My charge was to return Southern Seminary to its confessional identity. My ambition was even more monumental. With all my heart, I wanted to build Southern Seminary into the most faithful theological seminary that could serve the church. I needed professors who would share that same challenge and stewardship and would see such a mission as a grand adventure. I needed scholars of the top rank, and I needed them quickly.

Early in that effort, I knew that my hope was for Tom Schreiner to teach at Southern Seminary. In 1997, that hope was realized. For that fact, I am more thankful than I know how to express. Tom and many colleagues came and joined in this great effort, which God has tremendously blessed.

As I grow older, my appreciation and love for these colleagues grows only stronger and richer. Over the decades, you get to know each other deeply. I have seen Tom as a husband, tenaciously loving his cherished wife Diane and showing that love in the aftermath of a horrible accident. I have seen Diane show her abiding and cheerful love for her husband. I am so thankful to see them now, both healthy and loving life as grandparents.

I have seen Tom as father, and I have seen his love for Daniel, Patrick, John, and Anna—and I have seen his pride in them, their spouses, their callings, and their children.

I have seen Tom as colleague, caring deeply for those with whom he shares this great calling.

I often think and speak of Augustine's argument that the Christian teacher must be driven by three loves—love of God, love of truth, and love of students. Tom Schreiner is a living example of those three loves. Thus, he is a living example of the Christian teacher and scholar at work. I am highly honored to write this foreword to a book that honors this teacher and that high calling.

*"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.
Persist in this, for by so doing you will save
both yourself and your hearers."*

1 Timothy 4:16 (ESV)



**WHOLE BIBLE APPROACHES
TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**





Chapter 1

A Progressive Dispensational Understanding of Scripture as a Whole

by Bruce A. Ware

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest delights of my life is my friendship with Tom Schreiner. We met during our years in seminary, both attending Western Seminary (Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, back then) in the mid- to late-seventies, in Portland, Oregon. Tom was an amazing student. I'm convinced that the worst day of the semester for him was the first day of classes when professors would pass out the course syllabi—worst, not because of the work that needed to be done, but because none of it was done yet! Tom is highly disciplined and he couldn't wait to get going on completing what had been assigned. It was common for him to complete the semester's assignments for all his classes several weeks before the term ended, giving him time to read other recommended materials. I also admired his devotion to the languages in seminary. He read Greek on a regular basis with the most difficult and demanding Greek professor on campus, and when he decided to stay on for a master of theology, he chose to write his thesis on the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah, thus requiring a greater mastery of Hebrew.

We became friends over our years at Western, but neither of us knew then how intertwined our lives would end up being. Following Western, we both decided independently to pursue our PhD studies at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. Those years together were bonding since we were clearly more conservative than most at Fuller, and it prompted us to think about and

discuss the many issues we were facing. Shortly thereafter, in God's kind providence, we taught together at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and then, after several years apart, we both felt God's call to teach at Southern Seminary, where we've been together again for over twenty years.

We are devoted friends, though we disagree on a number of issues on which we both have strong convictions. And it just so happens that one of those issues is the subject of this chapter. Shortly after his days at Western, Tom began moving away from the dispensationalism that we had been taught at Western to a more covenantal perspective, whereas I continued to embrace a fundamentally dispensational understanding, albeit with some significant adjustments from what we were taught. Tom finds closer affinities with new covenant theology and progressive covenantalism; I remain committed to some of the core ideas in dispensationalism while favoring the realignments made in progressive dispensationalism.

Just one more word of introduction before sketching some features of the progressive dispensational view I've embraced. It would be hard to overestimate the influence in my own thinking (particularly on this issue) of the theology of George Eldon Ladd. During my MDiv years at Western Seminary, Ladd was usually portrayed negatively as that harsh critic of dispensational premillennialism. While Ladd was applauded for his strong defense of premillennialism (historic), his criticism of dispensationalism tended to overshadow the positive features of his contribution, and we were discouraged, as students, from exploring Ladd's larger theological view. Following the completion of my MDiv, in the months prior to starting my ThM program (in the summer of 1978), I decided to read Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament* for myself.¹ I cannot express adequately how monumental this book was to my developing theological understanding. I was awestruck by the insight God granted to Ladd, and in particular, I saw the beauty and importance of the already/not yet understanding of much of biblical prophecy and of eschatology, more broadly.

What became clear to me over that summer is that Ladd's inaugurated eschatology² can actually be thrust into the service of dispensationalism such that weaknesses and problems with the traditional dispensational model can be overcome while retaining the heart and core of dispensational distinctives and commitments. This realization stood contrary to what I had been taught, since in classic dispensationalism every aspect of the promises made to Israel

¹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

² The term "inaugurated eschatology" is sometimes used as a helpful descriptor of the already/not yet understanding that the fulfillment of some of Scripture's prophecies are at first inaugurated, i.e., fulfilled in part (already), and then only later, perhaps not until the new creation, are their fulfillments fully consummated, i.e., fulfilled in their completeness (not yet). For an insightful discussion of inaugurated eschatology, see Anthony A. Hoekema, "Inaugurated Eschatology," part 1 in *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 3–75.

in the Old Testament were seen to be fulfilled completely only after the church age, in the millennium and the eternal state. There just wasn't a place for the notion of the fulfillment of those promises in a partial way now in the church while we await the fullness later. I'll spell this out more fully shortly, but I think it important to acknowledge at the outset the formative role Ladd's New Testament theology had in the development of my "modified"³ dispensational understanding.

In what follows, I would like to sketch briefly what, in my view, commends progressive dispensationalism as a compelling framework for understanding both the redemptive historical flow of biblical revelation and the Bible taken as a whole. As we'll see, the changes I've incorporated into my version of progressive dispensationalism find significant affinities with aspects of covenantalism, particularly progressive covenantalism, yet I continue to favor this modified version of dispensationalism I've developed and taught now for over thirty-five years. In the relatively short space of this chapter, I will focus attention on the hermeneutics of progressive dispensationalism. I'll discuss four hermeneutical observations which are central to the way in which progressive dispensationalism both interprets particular texts and sees how the whole Bible fits together. As these points are discussed, comment will be made regarding just where progressive dispensationalism stands in relation to classic dispensationalism, classic covenantalism, and progressive covenantalism.

ASPECTS OF THE HERMENEUTICS OF PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

It is important to discuss briefly four hermeneutical observations which are essential to progressive dispensationalism. The first and second are shared by both traditional and progressive forms of dispensationalism (albeit with some modifications in the progressive dispensational view), but the third and fourth show departures from the strict, classic dispensational understanding.

³ For years, I referred to my own view as merely "modified dispensationalism," indicating particularly the role that Ladd's inaugurated eschatology played in the changes I made to the traditional dispensational view. In time, the movement of progressive dispensationalism arose, led most directly by Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock. I resisted this name at first. "Progressive" had connotations of superiority over what preceded, it seemed to me. Then, it came clear to me that the word "progressive" was used to identify and embrace the concept of progressive revelation, which is at the heart of any dispensational approach. As I continued to read their proposal, I concluded that my own view was close enough to theirs to adopt also this name. For the most influential writings on progressive dispensationalism, see Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); and Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2017).

The Plain Sense of Scripture

First, both traditional and progressive forms of dispensationalism have been committed to understanding the teaching of Scripture in its natural, normal, plain sense.⁴ Since God has given his revelation in and through human language, we should seek to interpret that revelation according to its plain and natural meaning as derived from its grammatical/syntactical construction and its historical/cultural situatedness. This certainly is not all that needs to be said about correctly interpreting the Bible, but this is bedrock and essential to all correct interpretation. Whether what is written in Scripture is standard prose or poetry or figurative or apocalyptic, the goal is the same, viz., interpreters are responsible to endeavor to determine what the author has meant from what he has said.

Perhaps an example will help. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of a day of the future restoration of the people of Israel, writing, "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them" (Ezek 37:24 NASB⁵). While there are metaphorical elements here, the plain and natural meaning of the passage is apparent. The reference to King David is shorthand for God's promise in 2 Samuel 7 of the coming son of David who would reign over his kingdom forever. David himself has long been dead, but the promise to David is alive and well, to be fulfilled in this future son of David. And this king will "shepherd" his people, not as a literal shepherd of literal sheep, but metaphorically this Shepherd/King will care for his people and lead them to pastures of satisfaction and security. Furthermore, God's people will, in this day, be marked by their faithfulness and obedience to their Shepherd/King. They will no longer stray in stubborn rebellion or negligence to God's statutes. They will be the obedient and faithful people of God as God has often promised they one day would be. And finally, those spoken of here are none other than the ethnic, cultural, and national (see 37:22) people of Israel. These descendants of Abraham,

⁴ One sometimes sees the term "literal hermeneutic" used in dispensational literature to convey this same notion. I'm avoiding the term "literal hermeneutic" simply due to the misunderstanding that sometimes accompanies its use. For dispensationalists, "literal" (as in "literal hermeneutic") refers to what the author actually intended or meant by what he said, and this is also captured by talking about the natural, normal, plain sense of a particular text. At other times, however, "literal" may be used to stand in contrast to "figurative" or "metaphorical" types of speech. But this is not what is intended by the word "literal" when it is used as a general descriptor as in the term "literal hermeneutic." Dispensationalists have always understood there to be great numbers of figures of speech in the Bible, but the "literal" meaning of those figures of speech would be just that which the author intended to convey or meant to communicate through that figurative language. Even with this explanation, I still think it best to avoid the word "literal" as a general term describing the overall hermeneutic of dispensationalism, and instead reserve the word "literal" for those occasions when it stands in contrast with figurative or metaphorical uses of language.

⁵ Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960,1962,1963, 1968,1971,1972,1973,1975,1977,1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Isaac, and Jacob, those whom God has chosen from among all the nations of the world (Deut 7:6; 14:2), will be transformed into the obedient people of God.

So, whether the language of revelation includes literal, straightforward prose and declaration, or whether it contains metaphorical expressions and figures of speech, the interpreter is responsible to endeavor to understand what the author meant by what he said. The plain, natural, normal sense of the text—whether conveyed in literal or figurative language—should be sought.

Progressive Revelation

Second, dispensationalists—both traditional and progressive—hold that particular biblical passages must be understood within the historical and revelatory framework in which that biblical revelation was given. Here, the notion of “progressive revelation” is central to all of dispensationalism—not merely the notion that God gave us his revelation in deposits of that revealed truth over protracted historical periods of time, but more importantly that when a new deposit of revelation was given, these newly given commandments, laws, promises, etc., would necessarily affect just how God would regulate the affairs of his people. Progressive revelation, then, conveys a progressive unfolding manner in which God relates to his people, in terms of what he expects of them, what they are promised, and how exactly they shall live before him as his chosen people. As new revelation is given, while some aspects of previous requirements and promises continue and while others come to an end,⁶ inevitably there are new aspects of God’s promises to his people and new expectations and laws that they now are to embrace. These periods of new revelation, marked then by new ways in which God administers the affairs of his people, are referred to as “dispensations.” Just how many of these dispensations there are (e.g., seven in classic dispensationalism, which is disputed variously in progressive dispensationalism) is far less important than that there are clearly identifiable dispensations, marking the progression not only of God’s revelation to his people, but marking their new understandings of who they are, what they are to do, and what God has promised to them.

The hermeneutical implications of observing that God’s revelation is given progressively, and through his progressively given revelation God regulates the

⁶ For example, when new revelation comes to Abraham (Genesis 12 ff.), the previous commandment to Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16–17) has come to an end. While that commandment/prohibition was extremely important for the period of the revelation of God to Adam, it did not pertain to anyone else following the fall into sin and God’s sending the couple from the garden of Eden. On the other hand, the promise made to Noah (Gen 9:1–17) that God would never again destroy the whole earth through a flood continues. When new revelation is given, then, some aspects of previous revelation end while others continue, all while new revelation is given with its own distinctive features.

affairs of his people in ways appropriate to the distinctives of the dispensational period in which they live, are quite significant. Perhaps the most important implication that marks dispensationalists from traditional covenant theology is the simple observation that promises made to Israel under the old covenant actually relate to ethnic, national Israel, and hence, those promises must be fulfilled with the people to whom they were given, i.e., ethnic, national Israel. As you can see, the first and second hermeneutical observations thus far given are both relevant here. Since the plain and normal meaning of these promises involves what God pledges he will do to and for ethnic, national Israel (first hermeneutical observation, above), and since those promises relate to a time when God was dealing with his chosen people Israel, who were chosen from among the nations of the world and stood in contrast to the other nations of the world (the second hermeneutical observation considered here), the fulfillment of these promises, then, would require God's reestablishing the nation of Israel as his own, with Messiah reigning as their king, in the land of promise given to them, all to fulfill the plain sense of what God promised to the very people who were the people of God when the promise was given, viz., to ethnic, national Israel.

Consider again a text we looked at earlier, now with a bit larger context. The prophet Ezekiel writes,

Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.' (Ezek 37:21-28 NASB).

As one considers the plain, natural meaning of this text, and when one considers the subjects to whom these magnificent and glorious promises were given, the conclusion is clear. God has pledged himself to ethnic, national Israel, that he will restore them as a nation, that he will reestablish them in their land, that the coming Son of David will reign as king over them, that they will be remade to be the righteous and obedient people of God, and that all this will be done as a testimony to the nations of the world that God is indeed Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, who has been faithful to fulfill the promises he has made to save, restore, and transform his chosen people, Israel. Amen!

And of course, if one wonders whether the scope of these promises might have been fulfilled with ethnic, national Israel during the period of the Old Covenant itself, the answer is a resounding no. Even with the return from exile, and with the rebuilding of the temple and wall in the post-exilic period, and the revival that took place under Ezra, these promises stand far short of being fulfilled. Yes, they are in their land, but Israel requires military, material, and financial support from a pagan nation to survive. And yes, they have fine leaders in Zerubbabel or Nehemiah, yet neither of these was the anticipated Son of David who was promised to reign over them as king. And yes, they returned to the law in repentance and faith (Ezra 8–10), yet this lasted only briefly and they turned again to their idolatry and flagrant disobedience (see Neh 13:23–28 and Mal 3:8–15). So, when will the fulfillment of these promises take place? They did not happen during the time of the Old Covenant itself. And now we have a time when Israel is cut off (Matt 21:42–43; Rom 11:17, 19–21, 25) and the gospel is spreading from Jerusalem to all of the Gentile nations of the world (Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). There must be a time yet future in which these promises to ethnic, national Israel are fulfilled. In a very significant sense, then, the dispensational view is grounded on the promises of God made to Israel, as understood by employing these first two hermeneutical observations.

Human and Divine Authorship

Third, while progressive dispensationalism is committed to discerning the plain and natural meaning of texts of Scripture (first hermeneutical observation, above), this is sometimes complicated by the fact that all of Scripture is dually authored. Our doctrine of inspiration assures us that whereas all of Scripture is genuinely written by human authors who convey the meanings they intend through the language and expressions they choose, Scripture is simultaneously directed by the Spirit of God (2 Pet 1:20–21) such that all that the human authors write likewise accords exactly and fully with what God wanted written. Hence, the singular intended meaning of a text may best be thought of as complex, not simple; as thick, not thin. Given that God does not

violate the integrity of the human authorship of Scripture as the Spirit moves them to write what they do, it cannot be the case that the meaning intended by the human author and the meaning intended by the divine author would conflict. But rather, it may well be the case, and arguably sometimes is, that the intended meaning of the human author, while affirmed and included in the meaning of the divine author, is likewise surpassed in fullness by what the divine author intends.⁷

The new covenant of Jer 31:31–34 provides a case in point. Clearly the intended meaning of the human author (Jeremiah) was to convey that “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah” (31:31 NASB) would be the recipients of God’s promised new covenant. And no doubt this is likewise the intended meaning of the divine author. Indeed, there will come a day when ethnic Jews, the people of Israel, will be brought into the fullness of God’s restorative work through their Messiah and they will all “know the Lord” (cf. Rom 11:26). But we know from references to the new covenant in the New Testament that Gentile believers in Christ are likewise brought into the reality of new covenant transformation (e.g., Hebrews 8–10). When one considers what Jeremiah said in the new covenant promise of Jer 31:31–34, there simply is no hint that this promised future covenant would apply to any beyond the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The intended meaning of the human author, it would seem, is restricted to Israel. Yet, notice that Jeremiah does not say that *only* Israel will be included. So, while the human author spoke of the new covenant as being made with Israel, the divine author intended this *and more!* God may do more than his promise explicitly states, but he cannot (because he will not) do less or other. So, the intended meaning of the human author is restricted (applying it to Israel alone), while the divine author intends to apply the new covenant to Israel *and* to Gentiles who will become circumcised of heart through faith in Christ (Rom 2:28–29), even though only the fulfillment with Israel is explicitly announced in Jeremiah’s text.

This notion of a “thick” understanding of some of the promises of God, in which a larger divine intention may be present that surpasses (while including and never conflicting with) the explicit promise as stated in the Old Testament, is one of the places where progressive dispensationalism has embraced a needed corrective to a strict traditional dispensational hermeneutic. Readers may be aware that in the mid-twentieth century, leading dispensationalists argued that there had to be two new covenants. After all, since the new covenant of Jer 31:31–34 was made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”

⁷ Graham A. Cole, *The God who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of the Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 89, helpfully comments in regard to a number of Old Testament prophecies, that “such Old Testament texts take on a legitimate depth of significance that may not have been apparent to the original writer.”

in the Old Testament, then it simply could not apply to the New Testament multi-ethnic, multi-national church. Therefore, the new covenant announced by Jesus (Luke 22:20), repeated by Paul (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6), and referenced in Hebrews (8:8; 9:15; 12:24) must refer, instead, to a different “new covenant.”⁸ The strict separation between Israel and the church required that only Israel be in view in the new covenant expressed by Jeremiah. But given that 1) there is no indication whatsoever in the New Testament that the new covenant there is different from the new covenant of Jeremiah 31, and 2) Jeremiah 31 is quoted by Hebrews as being fulfilled both with saved Jews and Gentiles who comprise the church,⁹ there is no sustainable case for two new covenants.¹⁰

Progressive dispensationalism, then, holds that while the explicit promise of the new covenant is given to Israel, God has intended, and deemed it good and gracious, to include also Gentiles who come to him through faith in Christ. Yet, this does not preclude the promise being fulfilled with Israel, for indeed the day will come when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26) and so enter fully into the reality and experience of the new covenant through their faith in Christ. While the intention of the human author in Jeremiah 31 focused only on God’s promise to enact the new covenant with his people, the Jews, God’s intention all along had been to do just this, and more! We (Gentiles who believe in Christ) get in as well, and this was God’s intention from the outset, fulfilling in an unanticipated way what he long ago had promised in the covenant made with Abraham—“in you [Abraham] all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3).¹¹

Inaugurated Eschatology

Fourth, the progressive dispensational view gladly embraces the inaugurated eschatology of George Eldon Ladd, and as articulated and held by so many evangelicals in our day.¹² Although the “already and not yet” is nowhere

⁸ See, for example, Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 4:325, 7:98–99; and Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 105–125.

⁹ See esp. Heb 12:23–24 where the new covenant is said to include both the “church of the firstborn” along with “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” indicating both saved Old Testament Jews and New Testament members of the church are recipients of new covenant promises.

¹⁰ For further discussion on why the two-new-covenant theory fails, see Homer A. Kent Jr., “The New Covenant and the Church,” *Grace Theological Journal*, Vol 6 (1985): 297–98.

¹¹ For further discussion of the important place of the new covenant in a broader progressive dispensational understanding, see Bruce A. Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in Blaising and Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, 68–97.

¹² See the fascinating discussion in Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947); and the intriguing development of the significance of the broad embrace of inaugurated eschatology as discussed by Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004).

explicitly taught in Scripture, its validity and verification comes in how it illumines so many biblical prophecies. One of my favorite examples comes from Jesus's quotation of Isa 61:1–2 in Luke 4:18–19. Whereas Jesus stops quoting from the Isaiah passage with the words, “to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19 NASB), and then announces, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21 NASB), the text of Isa 61:2a reads, “To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God” (NASB). Clearly, the Son was sent in his first coming not to bring the vengeance of God on the earth but to bring salvation, as John tells us in his Gospel, “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17 NASB). Therefore, the only way rightly to understand the fulfillment of the Messianic promise of Isa 61:1–3 is that the Spirit-anointed Messiah would come first securing God's gracious favor in salvation from sin, and then this same Messiah will come again executing the vengeance of God upon continuing sinful rebels. Although two comings of Christ are not explicitly taught in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of this and several other prophecies requires just this. The “favorable year of the Lord” is now; the “day of the vengeance of our God” is not yet.

What relevance does this hermeneutical observation have for progressive dispensationalism? Just this: Because much Old Testament prophetic teaching should best be seen as fulfilled in an already/not yet fashion, this provides a framework that fits within a modified dispensational model for understanding how some of the promises made to Israel might be fulfilled now, in the church, in a preliminary and partial manner, while the fulness of those promises await their complete fulfillment, not only with the church but with the people of Israel as well. Therefore, the strict *continuity* of traditional covenantalism (all the promises of Israel are fulfilled in the New Testament church which is the new Israel) and the strict *discontinuity* of traditional dispensationalism (none of the promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church but all await a future fulfillment with a restored Israel) are not our only options.¹³ Instead, we can see how the New Testament church may be the recipient of the blessings of promises made to Israel, through faith in Christ, and yet New Testament believers enter into them now in only partial ways. But also, there will come a day when the “not yet” aspects of those promises will be fulfilled in their completeness, and this will involve not only the church entering into the fulness of those blessings, but the final realization of these promises will be fulfilled with the very people to whom those promises were explicitly made, viz., with ethnic, national Israel.

¹³ On issues of continuity and discontinuity, one of the most helpful volumes is John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1988).

A very important New Testament passage here is Eph 2:11–16:

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (NASB)

Notice that Paul indicates that Israel (the physically circumcised) had a tremendous advantage over the Gentiles (the physically uncircumcised).¹⁴ Israel exclusively was given God’s covenant promises such that their hope was grounded in what God had specifically and directly given to them that he had not given to the other nations of the world. Although their salvation likewise would be by grace alone, in Christ alone, at least they had the promise of God granted specifically to them that they would be the recipients of all that would be required to make them, in the end, God’s forgiven and transformed people. But what about all the rest of the inhabitants of the world (i.e., the Gentiles)? Their condition was extremely dire, in contrast. Since they were not part of the commonwealth of Israel, they were not among those who had been given these covenant promises of a future and certain salvation. As a result, they had absolutely no hope and faced both a present and a future in which they would live every day in despair, without God.

And then comes the glorious shift of Eph 2:13 (which parallels somewhat the earlier “But God” shift of Eph 2:4). Paul writes of these Gentiles, “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). And here is the point we are to make. Although Gentiles were not given the promise of the Davidic covenant, or the promise of the new covenant—these were given exclusively to the people of Israel—nevertheless, God has devised a means by which these otherwise hopeless Gentiles who were far off might enter into the reality of these covenants of salvation, hope, and restoration. How? Through faith in Christ, the promised Messiah, Son of David, and the mediator of the new covenant. Through Christ, Gentiles

¹⁴ See also Rom 3:1–2; 9:4–5, for other expressions of the advantage Israel had in being made God’s people and given God’s covenant promises.

would be granted access to the benefits of those covenants that were not theirs, that were not made with them. But in Christ they now become sharers fully in everything that those covenants have promised such that they, with believing Jews, both experience equally (cf. Gal 3:28) the fullness of what is theirs in Christ.

But seeing that Gentiles are granted, by God's grace and through their faith in Christ, incorporation into the covenants of promise made with Israel, are we then to conclude that God will not fulfill the promises of his covenants also with those to whom he directly and specifically made these covenants? Absolutely not! Surely this is what stands behind Paul's discussion in Romans 9–11, that God will be faithful to his promise to Israel, and that we may be assured that the day is coming when "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). As we saw before, God may do more than his explicit promise stated, but he cannot do less or other. The salvation of the Jews will occur displaying, among other things, the glory of the faithfulness of God to his Word. He will not fail to keep every promise he has made, and this requires the future salvation of the Jewish people.

The contribution of inaugurated eschatology to this progressive dispensational hermeneutic, then, is vital. On the one hand, it provides a way of accounting for the present fulfillment of the promise of the new covenant, in this age, with the church, and yet we all realize that this fulfillment is both preliminary (it's just the beginning) and partial (there's much more to come, in the end). The fulfillment at present is inaugurated but not yet consummated. On the other hand, it also accounts for the future completion of the fulfillment when we in the church are made fully like Christ and enter into the endless joy of those who "know the Lord." But it will also mean the fulfillment of these promises with Israel herself who alone was the recipient of these covenant promises when they were made. Everything God promised Israel will be fulfilled with Israel. They too will know the Lord. They too will be made like Christ. They too will receive full forgiveness and Spirit-empowered transformation through faith in Christ. The truthfulness and faithfulness of God assures that this will take place.

And in addition, one more dimension of the fulfillment of these promises with Israel should be included. They will, as Ezekiel 37 asserts, be reconstituted as the nation of Israel, in their land, obediently following the Lord, with Messiah reigning over them as King. Even though the day will come when the reign of the Greater David (Jesus) will encompass all of the earth, still—even in the new creation—the center of this reign is the capital of Israel, Jerusalem. And since God promised to put on display among all the nations of the world that he has reconstituted his people again as one nation (Ezek 37:21–22, 28), surely he will do just what he has promised. Since the new creation will be

a place where all the nations of the world enter and bring their glory with them (Rev 21:24, 26), it is not difficult to see that Israel likewise will be a nation among the nations present. She, too, will bring her glory into the new Jerusalem, and in her case, this glory is especially brilliant. She will display, among all the rest of the nations of the world, that Yahweh, the God of Israel and Savior of his people, has been true to his promises. There she is. The redeemed of the Lord, the chosen covenant people of God, those through whom Messiah has come to bring salvation and the covenant blessings of Israel to the nations. Though believing Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ and share equally in all the riches of what Christ has merited for them, yet she will display a distinctive glory by which the faithfulness of God, and the truth of his word, will shine forth for all to see.

Concluding Remarks

These four hermeneutical observations are what drive the progressive dispensational view I have adopted, and they provide for me compelling reason to accept and commend this model. Much could be added (indeed, needs to be added) to give a more complete and satisfying explanation. For example, one may wonder about the place of typology here. Briefly, I would simply say that biblically grounded typological linkages in Scripture fit well with a progressive dispensational understanding, in that the divine author intends at times to reveal through some person, or event, or institution that the type prefigures what God has ordained to occur in greater measure later, in the anti-type. Still, this all fits nicely within the four hermeneutical points stated, providing greater depth and richness to the progressive revelation God has given us. Others might wonder how a redemptive-historical understanding of Scripture fits with progressive dispensationalism. Again here, I believe it fits beautifully with its emphasis on the progression and development of God's redemptive purposes that run through the biblical narrative. But I believe that the redemptive-historical approach, on its own, lacks what the notion of progressive revelation adds, viz., that God purposes to establish particular requirements, and give particular promises, and regulate the affairs of his people in particular ways, in various periods (dispensations) of that revelatory history. So, a redemptive-historical approach is compatible with a full understanding of progressive revelation, but both are needed, I believe, to give a fuller picture of what God is doing in the progressive unfolding of his truth to his people. Yet others might wonder how progressive covenantalism and progressive dispensationalism compare and contrast. It seems to me that there is much in common between these two systems, even though (as their names indicate), each is birthed from its own mother—covenant theology and dispensationalism,

respectively. Yet, both have “come to the middle” in many respects and see both areas of continuity and discontinuity in the relationship between Israel and the church. Yet, it does seem to me that progressive covenantalism is inclined to think of the church as largely the “new Israel” in ways that diminish the ongoing reality of the rejected nation of Israel in the present age, which will be saved and restored in the end, owing to the promise of God to them. Also, the progressive dispensational view has a larger place for what the salvation of Israel means—not only their salvation from sin and entrance into the new covenant, but also their restoration as a nation, in fulfillment of what God promised them, to the greater glory of his name.

In the end, the progressive dispensational view seeks to honor the revelation God has given, endeavoring to understand what God has declared he will do, and to believe that since God has said this, it must be true and his promises will be fulfilled. It is a wonder for us all that God has chosen a people for his name, through whom he has brought salvation to the world. Even where we struggle to see clearly all the details, may we never forget the glory of this good news, and may our hope always be in the character of God who speaks truthfully and never fails to do what he has promised.