

Dispensationalisms Demise

[Hebrews 8](#), Part 2

In our last study we looked at Hebrews 8 and its place in the argument of the epistle as a whole and its contribution to the subject of the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

There are a number of problems that arise in Hebrews 8 concerning eschatology, particularly our understanding between Israel and the Church. I think it is important to examine this subject very carefully. Hebrews 8 is probably one of the most fundamental chapters in all of the New Testament concerning this problem of the relationship between Israel and the Church. How does Hebrews 8 apply to this subject? That is what we want to look at today. Specifically, how the New Covenant relates to the Church.

I tried to restrict my comments last week to the exposition of Hebrews 8 as it fit into the argument of the superiority of Christ's priesthood. His argument in chapter 8 is less direct than it was in chapter 7. He appeals to the covenant on which Christ's priesthood is based. His argument is this: By just so much as the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant, the priesthood of Jesus Christ is better than that of Aaron. Verse 6 gives us the thesis:

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV) *But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.*

Now, I want to look at Hebrews 8 theologically, not of the nature of the New Covenant, not of the role the New Covenant plays in Hebrews, but the application; the fulfillment of the New Covenant. The question we want to ask and hopefully answer this morning is this, "In whom is the New Covenant being, or to be fulfilled? In and by whom are the promises of verses 10-12 fulfilled?"

Hebrews 8:10-12 (NKJV) *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 11 "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. 12 "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

Verse 8 is the key phrase in the issue:

Hebrews 8:8 (NKJV) *Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;*

It is clear from this verse that the New Covenant was made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The problem that emerges here is the fact that, apparently, our author is applying the New Covenant from Jeremiah 31 to the church.

The text of Hebrews 8 seems to be clear enough when you look at it. The New Covenant of which Jesus Christ is the mediator is NOW in force for Christian believers, therefore, he argues why would you be tempted to revert to the Old Covenant and the priestly mediation of Aaron? It seems

to be clear, and yet this presents a major problem for the school of theology called "Dispensationalism".

I would guess that most of you have been schooled in dispensationalism as I was. And most of you at one time approached and interpreted the Bible dispensationally. What is dispensationalism? What does it mean as far as we are concerned with Hebrews 8 and the New Covenant?

The school of theology called "Dispensationalism" came into being during the 19th century, about 160 years ago. So, as a theology it is relatively new. Of all the things which dispensationalism teaches, the fundamental teaching of the system is that there is **a distinction between Israel and the Church**. According to dispensationalism, God has two differing peoples, who each respectively have differing covenant promises, different destinies and different purposes. Membership in Israel is by natural birth. One enters the church by supernatural birth. Dispensationalists view Israel and the church as having distinct eternal destinies. Israel will receive an eternal earthly Kingdom, and the church an eternal heavenly Kingdom. Irrespective of anything else that may be found in the system, if one rejects the Israel / Church distinction, one ceases to be a dispensationalist.

Darby, the father of dispensationalism, stated the distinction in the clearest of terms, "The Jewish nation is never to enter the church." Ryrie considers this the most important dispensational distinction and approves the statement that, "the basic premise of dispensationalism is the two purposes of God expressed in the formation of two peoples who maintain their distinction throughout eternity."

Lewis Sperry Chafer, who is probably the most famous exponent of dispensationalism, defined it this way: "The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes; one is related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism (the people of Israel). While the other purpose is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity (the church). Hence the distinction between Israel and the church and God's purposes and promises for each."

Charles Ryrie writes, "This distinction is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a man is a dispensationalist and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive test." He then concludes, "The essence of dispensationalism is the distinction between Israel and the Church."

The problems that dispensationalists have with Hebrews 8 is clear, is it not? If Israel and the Church are two differing peoples of God, with two differing covenant promises, how can the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31, which is clearly made with Israel and Judah, be applied to or fulfilled in the Church? By teaching that Israel is "set aside" during the church age, dispensationalism clearly implies that the promises made to Israel are also "set aside" during that period.

Dispensationalism teaches that the church is a **parenthesis** in God's dealing with Israel. They teach that because Israel rejected Christ, God stopped his clock, so to speak, and is presently dealing with the Church. But he will in the future return to his dealings with Israel. This is how they deal with all the time passages of his "soon" coming. God has stopped his time clock and will not start it again until he goes back to dealing with Israel.

I believe that the Bible teaches the essential continuity of Israel and the church. The elect of all the ages are seen as one people, with one Savior, one destiny. This continuity can be shown by examining a few Old Testament prophecies with their fulfillment. Dispensationalists admit that if the church can be shown to be fulfilling promises made to Israel, their system is doomed.

Ryrie writes, "If the church is fulfilling Israel's promises as contained in the new covenant or anywhere in the Scriptures, then [dispensational] premillennialism is condemned." (Ryrie, THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE NEW COVENANT TO PREMILLENNIALISM [unpublished Master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary 1947), p. 31])

Let's look at a few promises made to Israel and their fulfillment in the Church.

Promised to Israel:

Hosea 2:23 (NKJV) *"Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; Then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!'"*

Fulfilled in the church:

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NKJV) *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Promised to Israel:

Amos 9:11 (NKJV) *"On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old;*

Fulfilled in the church:

Acts 15:14-18 (NKJV) *"Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15 "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 16 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.' 18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works.*

In the same manner, there are many Old Testament passages referring to Israel that are in the New Testament applied directly to the church.

Spoken to Israel:

Joel 2:28-32 (NKJV) *"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. 30 "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. 32 And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.*

Applied to the church: **Acts 2:1, 16-21**

Spoken to Israel:

Exodus 19:6 (NKJV) *'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'*

Applied to the church:

1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV) *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

Spoken to Israel:

Ezekiel 37:27 (NKJV) *"My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

Applied to the church:

2 Corinthians 6:16 (NKJV) *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."*

Spoken to Israel:

Leviticus 19:2 (NKJV) *"Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.*

Applied to the church:

1 Peter 1:15-16 (NKJV) *but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

Spoken to Israel:

Jeremiah 31:31 (NKJV) *"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;*

Applied to the church;

Luke 22:20 (NKJV) *Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.*

The New Covenant is particularly problematic for the dispensationalist, as Jeremiah 31 is undeniably addressed to Israel. The New Covenant is the very heart of the Gospel, yet, if the church is fulfilling the promise given to Israel under the New Covenant, dispensationalism is dead.

This is the force of the problem. If God has two differing peoples, Israel and the Church with differing covenant promises, how is it that the author of Hebrews applies the New Covenant and its blessings, which are clearly said in verses 8-10, to be with Israel to the church?

In what sense can these Israelitish covenant promises be fulfilled in and by Christian believers if in fact God has two differing peoples and two differing purposes? It would seem that the interpretation, which I suggested in our last study, would destroy the dispensational distinction between Israel and the church, and undoubtedly it does. As a consequence of this, there has been suggested by dispensational scholars different ways to deal with this problem. I would like to look at a few of them.

First of all, there is the suggestion of John Nelson Darby, the father of dispensationalism (Dispensationalism originated among the Plymouth Brethren in the early 1830's. John Nelson Darby, educated as a lawyer and ordained Anglican priest, was one of the chief founders of the Plymouth Brethren movement, which arose in reaction against the perceived empty formalism of the Church of England.)

Darby suggested that the New Covenant is not in any sense operative in this age, that the New Covenant will be fulfilled only in the future millennium to the restored nation of Israel. How he attempts to deal with Hebrews 8 is a very interesting study. He will contend that, at most, there are some side benefits which accrued to the church from the New Covenant, but literally speaking, the New Covenant is future in its application and fulfillment. That is not a very popular view today even among dispensationalists.

The **second** view is called the "**two covenant view**". This view holds that there are two New Covenants presented in the New Testament. One for Israel and one for the Church. L.S. Chafer appears to be the originator of this idea which is held by John Walvord and was once held by C. Ryrie, who has since changed his view. This view, essentially, would divide the references to the New Covenant in the New Testament into two groups: The references in the gospels and in Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 10:29 and 13:20 would refer to the New Covenant with the church; Hebrews 8:7-13 and 10:16 would refer to the New Covenant with Israel. This sounds like what partial preterists do to the second coming verses.

Why is it in reading Hebrews 8 someone would contend that there are two rather than one New Covenant? Why is this view in existence? What is the motive for its emergence? Listen once again to Chafer, "There remains to be recognized a heavenly covenant for the heavenly people, which is also styled like the preceding one for Israel a "new covenant." It is made in the blood of Christ (cf. Mark 14:24) and continues in effect throughout this age, whereas the new covenant made with Israel happens to be future in its application. (Here's the key DBC) To suppose that these two covenants - one for Israel and one for the Church - are the same is to assume that there is a latitude of common interest between God's purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church."

The reason or motive for reading into this passage two New Covenants instead of one is the desire to keep separate God's purpose and promises for Israel, his earthly Old Covenant people, and the Church, his heavenly New Covenant people. I think this view was born of controversy rather than sound exegesis. It is not extremely popular today, but it is still held by some.

A **third** view is that of Scofield. This view is more generally held than the other views. According to this view, there is one New Covenant with a two-fold application. It is applied spiritually in some sense to the church in this age, but it will be applied more fully and more literally and more exhaustively to Israel in the future millennium Kingdom.

Listen to a comment from J. D. Pentecost, "If the church fulfills this covenant, she may also fulfill the other covenant made with Israel, and there is no need for an earthly millennium." The whole argument for an earthly millennium is so God can fulfill his promises to Israel, his earthly people. The whole argument for an earthly millennium is built from one chapter in Revelation which is a

highly figurative book. This third view also tends to perpetuate the dichotomy between Israel and the church.

Ryrie, in his early writings, makes this significant statement, "If the church does not have a new covenant, then she is fulfilling Israel's promises, for it has been clearly shown that the Old Testament teaching on the new covenant is that it is for Israel. If the church is fulfilling Israel's promises as contained in the new covenant or anywhere else in the Scriptures, then [dispensational] premillennialism is condemned. One might well ask why there are not two aspects to the one new covenant. This is the position held by many premillennialists, but we agree that the amillennialist has every right to say of this view that it is a practical admission that the new covenant is fulfilled in and to the church." (Ryrie, THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE NEW COVENANT TO PREMILLENNIALISM [unpublished Master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary 1947], p. 31)

IN WHOM IS THE NEW COVENANT FULFILLED?

I believe that the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is **NOW** in operation in this age according to the teaching of the New Testament. It is a covenant of which Christ is the mediator, of which Christians are ministers, and of which the Lord's Supper is the commemorative ordinance; the sign to remind us of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who died in order to bring the blessings of that covenant to all who believe in Him. In defense of this thesis that there is but one New Covenant, that of Jeremiah 31, and that it is now operative in and for the Christian church, I want to appeal to several arguments:

1. The New Covenant Was Inaugurated by the Blood of Jesus Christ.

Luke 22:20 (NKJV) *Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.*

Jesus here refers to the New Covenant. In the mind of the disciples at this time there could have been no other reference in view but the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. There is no reference to another New Covenant in the Old Testament. There is no indication in the gospels that another New Covenant was in view. Surely the hope of Israel and these disciples was the fulfillment of the New Covenant promise in Jeremiah 31. Look at the parallel account in:

Matthew 26:28 (NKJV) "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Our Lord seems to be saying that the blood shedding of his death was that act where-by the New Covenant with its glorious blessings is established. It is in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of his death that the promises of Jeremiah 31 are fulfilled - the remission of sins.

2. Paul Applies the New Covenant to the Church.

1 Corinthians 11:25 (NKJV) In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Paul is telling the Corinthian church that the Lord's Supper, which Christ established for the church, is the memorial of that covenant and the blessings which it brings.

3. Paul Tells the Corinthian Church That They Are Ministers of the New Covenant.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (NKJV) Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

In verses 7-18, Paul engages in a lengthy contrast between the Mosaic Covenant and what it could not accomplish and the New Covenant and that which it has accomplished. Paul says we are all ministers of the New Covenant if we are believers. Paul is obviously referring to the New Covenant mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:25, which is the New Covenant mentioned in Luke 20:20, which is identical to the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. Paul told the first century Corinthian Christians that they were ministers of the New Covenant, and it is very hard to be ministers of a New Covenant that is not in operation. To be a minister or servant of the New Covenant simply means that we have the responsibility to proclaim to the world that this New Covenant is here, it is operative, and the blessings which it promises are available to those who have faith in the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is its mediator.

4. When We Read Other Portions of the New Testament, We Discover That the Promised Blessings of Jeremiah Are Ours, Right Now.

We know from Ephesians 1 that we have forgiveness of sins:

Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

We know from Romans 8 that we have the Holy Spirit abiding in us:

Romans 8:15 (NKJV) For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

We know from many texts that we have the knowledge of God, which the New Covenant promised.

5. Hebrews as a Whole:

Our author is exhorting believers to hold fast, and our resource to endure is the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ in his person and work is superior to all that which has preceded him. The Covenant which he mediates is better. The whole thrust is how much better is Christ and what he has done. Why go back to shadow and type. If the New hasn't come, the author has nothing to argue from. But the New Covenant has come, and therefore, why would you want to go back to the inferior covenant of Moses?

To deny the present validity of the New Covenant is essentially to deny the priesthood of Christ, because, according to chapter 8, our Lord's priesthood and its superiority is based on the fact that the covenant by which it is regulated is superior to the old.

6. At the Time of the Writing of Hebrews Christ Was the Mediator.

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV) But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

"He 'is' also Mediator" - present tense! It doesn't say he "will be" the Mediator.

7. The Better Covenant "Was" Established:

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV) But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

At the time of the writing, it "was" established. It was in effect then and it is now.

8. He Is the Mediator of the New Testament:

Hebrews 9:15 (NKJV) And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

By virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the sins not only of us but also the Old Testament saints have forever been put away. This verse gives us a direct argument against the two New Covenant theory. Isn't it odd that it is the church's New Covenant, according to this verse, which covers the sins of Old Testament Israel rather than their own New Covenant?

9. In Hebrews 8 the New Covenant Is Contrasted with the Old Covenant Which Is the Covenant of Moses.

If there are two New Covenants, one for Israel and one for the church, and if the Old Covenant which corresponds to Israel's New Covenant is that of Moses, what is the church's Old Covenant? How can the church have a New Covenant if it doesn't have a corresponding Old Covenant? There is but One New Covenant.

10. In Hebrews 10 He Is Discussing the Sacrifices of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He Says in Verse 15 that the Holy Spirit Is a Witness to "Us" - First Century Christians.

Hebrews 10:15-17 (NKJV) But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,

Then in verses 16-17, he quotes Jeremiah 31 again and specifically applies it to believers in the first century.

Hebrews 10:16-17 (NKJV) "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Believers, the New Covenant is operative now and has been since its inauguration at Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ is its Mediator, we are its ministers, and the Lord's Supper is its commemorative ordinance.

How does this bear upon the relationship between Israel and the Church? We cannot reconcile these arguments, which I have brought forth today with the question of Israel and the church, as long as we persist in drawing a dichotomy between the two.

My understanding of the people of God in the New Testament can be illustrated by a funnel turned on its side. The small opening represents Old Testament Israel and the large opening represents the Church. Are Israel and the church separate? No! The Church is the true Israel of God.

Matthew 16:18-19 (NKJV) "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Jesus was not prophesying some completely different body of believers cut off from the Old Covenant people. Who were the people to whom He spoke these words? Who made up the early church? Jews made up the nucleus. When God prophesied in Jeremiah 31 that He would inaugurate a New Covenant with the house of Israel and Judah, He did that very thing with the believing remnant of Israel. Who was in that room in Luke 22:20 when Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant? Jews! They played a very important function in redemptive history. Not only were they the believing remnant of Old Testament Israel who accepted Christ, but they were also the nucleus of the emerging church and those to whom the promises of Israel were fulfilled.

Point: Those disciples who made up the nucleus of the emerging church stand in direct continuity with Old Testament Israel. We are not to think that the church is a temporary interruption in God's prophetic purpose for Israel. It is, in fact, the progressive continuation of that purpose. The church is not some new, entirely different, and distinct covenant body of people but rather the maturation of the believing remnant of Israel.

Romans 11:17-20 (NKJV) And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

What I want you to see here is that there is only **one olive tree**, there is only one root. The natural branches, which stands for ethnic Israel, have been broken off because of their rejection of Jesus Christ. But the unnatural branches, which are the Gentiles, have been grafted in. God did not go out and plant another tree, He put us in the one olive tree of true Israel.

Romans 11:17 (NKJV) And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

We, Gentiles, were grafted in with them, Israel, and with them partake of the root of the olive tree. Believing Gentiles have been admitted as citizens into the commonwealth of Israel. We partake of their promises and blessings.

Galatians 3:16 (NKJV) Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

The promises were to one Seed, who was Christ. Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham.

Galatians 3:26-29 (NKJV) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

If you by faith belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed and an heir according to the promise. It doesn't matter whose blood you have in your veins but whose faith you have in your heart. It is covenant, not race, that makes one a Jew.

Who is a true Jew? Is it ethnic background that makes you a Jew? NO! Many people today still consider the Jewish people as a race, but there is no Jewish race today. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the nation of Israel (after the flesh) was scattered throughout the earth and lost all tribal relations. This scattering was made immutable due to the fact that all tribal genealogical records were destroyed with the Temple in A.D. 70. The simple fact is that there is no existing Jewish race.

Millions of 21st century Christians have allowed themselves to be robbed of one of the most precious and vital beliefs of historical Christian teaching, namely, that the church is the true Israel of God and the ONLY Israel through which God's eternal purpose is to be consummated.

I believe that Hebrews 8 clearly teaches that believers are the true Israel of God. God has only one purpose throughout the ages - to redeem a people for himself.

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on May 20, 2001. [Tape #198](#).

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