

Dispensational Theology Through Immersion in the Biblical Framework

Framework @ Fifty
Charlie Clough

JMT, March 2025

Outline

1. Dispensationalism consistently applies Progressive Revelation, Forward Reading, and Passage Priority
2. Dispensationalism holds to Biblically Derived Hermeneutics
3. Dispensationalism insists on the Distinction of Israel Established by Contractual Language
4. Dispensationalism upholds the Distinction of the Church Established by it's Mystery Nature
5. Dispensationalism amplifies the Glory of God in a Kingdom Inside History

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1. Dispensationalism consistently applies Progressive Revelation, Forward Reading, and Passage Priority

“Progressive revelation is the recognition that God’s message to man was not given in one single act but was unfolded in a series of successive acts.”

Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalist

Moses	Joshua	Stephen	Paul (to Jews)	Paul (to Gentiles)
				Creation
				Flood
				Noahic Covenant
Call of Abraham	Call of Abraham	Call of Abraham	Call of Abraham	
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	
Mt Sinai		Mt Sinai		
	Conquest	Conquest & Settlement	Conquest & Settlement	
		Election & Reign of King David	Election & Reign of King David	Death
		Golden Era of Solomon		Resurrection
			Birth of the King	
		Life of the King	Life of the King	
		Death of the King	Death of the King	Death of the King
		Resurrection of the King	Resurrection of the King	Resurrection of the King

Wellum says we ought to “...interpret Scripture in light of what it actually is as God’s unfolding revelation across time.”

“As texts along the storyline of Scripture are ultimately interpreted in light of the culmination of God’s plan in Christ, we begin to read Scripture in the way God intended and thus ‘biblically.’”

By ‘biblically’ he means, “The New Testament’s interpretation of the Old is definitive in interpreting the details of the Old but not in such a way that contravenes the earlier texts.”

Stephen Wellum, Progressive Covenantalist

Progressive Revelation, Forward Reading, and Passage Priority

To change the storyline with typological interpretation does not allow the OT texts to have what Michael Vlach called “passage priority.” In passage priority a later text cannot re-interpret an earlier text. Each text is to be interpreted within its own context. This is due to the implicit nature of progressive revelation.

“If no restoration was intended; if all was to be understood typically, or spiritually, or conditionally, then surely the language was most eminently calculated to deceive the hearers...”

George N. H. Peters

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Robert Thomas suggested two categories; "...the grammatical-historical sense of the Old Testament passage and the other in which the New Testament writer goes beyond the grammatical-historical sense in using a passage." He defines this latter usage as, "Inspired sensus plenior application (ISPA)."

Robert Thomas

“The inspiration of the Holy Spirit kept the New Testament writers from doing so. Thus the New Testament writers, while using rabbinic methodology, never changed the meaning of the Old Testament text.”

Arnold Fruchtenbaum

Dispensationalism holds to Biblically Derived Hermeneutics

- Literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment, literal plus typical, literal plus application, and summation (Fruchtenbaum, Cooper, Shurer)
- Direct, typological, applicational, and summary (Rydelnik)

Hosea would not have disapproved of Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 "...even if messianic nuances were not in his mind when he wrote that verse." If Carson were correct then our hermeneutics could not derive from the text and any hermeneutic we adopt is merely arbitrary with no final meaning achievable.

D. A. Carson

Chou has demonstrated persuasively that biblical authors were deeply involved in previous texts when they wrote their own texts so that “the prophetic hermeneutic becomes the apostolic hermeneutic and thus becomes our hermeneutic.” In other words, we learn from the biblical authors how to connect the dots and understand the text.

Abner Chou

Despite the modern tendency toward
accommodating and capitulating strategies to
cope with the purportedly strong but truly
vacuous arguments of scientism, Charlie
says...

Authors of the rest of the Bible continually refer to these chapters as literal, straight-forward history. From Genesis 1:1 and subsequent quotes of God's creative speaking the world into existence, John derives the Trinity (John 1:1-3). The six days of creation are reiterated at Mt. Sinai in an obviously literal way (Exod. 20:11). Jesus speaks of both accounts of man's creation as constituting one event (Matt. 19:4-6). Paul utilizes the distinct biological "kinds" as models for profound qualitative differences in God's eternal plan of salvation (I Cor. 15:21-47). An obvious symmetry exists between the miraculous origin of the creation and the miraculous recreation (Rev. 21-22). Many references exist showing that the people mentioned in Genesis 1-11 were considered real, historical persons by other biblical authors (Isa. 54:9; Matt. 23:35; 24:37-39; Luke 3:38; Rom 5:12-14; I Tim. 2:13-14; I John 3:12; Jude 11, 14-15).

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When God said, "To your descendants I will give this land" (Gen. 12:7) He meant Abram's ethnic descendants. When Abram and Lot separated and the Lord told him "look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever" (Gen. 13:14-15), He meant the space of land Abram looked at would be theirs forever. If non-dispensationalists claim God meant 'heaven' or insist the land promise has 'already been fulfilled,' it is certainly fulfilled in the most wildly imaginable way not associated with the actual words He used. God would have been teaching us that what one says does not have a correspondence to what is meant.

A covenant can only be fulfilled to the parties to whom the covenant was originally made. In defiance of this principle recognized absolutely universally among men (Gal. 3:15-16), non-dispensationalists make the church party to the covenant. This occurs under the theological covenant structure that creates the one people of God so that the church is viewed by Covenant Theologians as merely the “fruition” or “enlargement” of Israel and in the case of Christian Reconstructionism the “replacement,” in which Israel evidently forfeited their covenant blessings by crucifying their Messiah.

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In the wake of the death and resurrection of the King, Charlie highlights the magnitude of the ascension and exaltation of the King to the right hand of the Father. From this position far above His enemies (Heb. 4:14; Eph. 4:10) the Father and the Son would send the Spirit (Jn. 15:26) to begin a new work of the Spirit baptizing people into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). This 'surprise' feature in the plan of God awakens us to the fact that God has plans beyond Israel to bless Gentiles (Rom. 11:30ff).

This unique period of history where Gentiles share spiritual equality with Jews in the body of Christ was unannounced by the Old Testament prophets who merely saw a coming Jewish kingdom (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:1-10). Yet, Progressive Dispensationalists claim it was the subject of Old Testament prophecy and simply “not actualized” in the successive course of God’s unfolding plan. Covenant Theologians insist the church was “unrecognized” in the Old Testament, but in hindsight Israel was the church all along. Only dispensationalism gives full credence to the term “mystery” as something kept secret in God only now revealed (Col. 1:26-27; Eph. 3:5-6).

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At Creation, Charlie introduces the dominion mandate and divine institution of responsible labor, marriage, and family.

Man is uniquely crafted in God's image for a particular purpose (Gen. 1:26-28). Function follows form. The mandate to rule creation is a kingdom mandate that sets the stage for the *telos* of God's purpose for man (Ps. 8). This purpose does not vanish or change at the Fall. Instead the abnormality of a sin nature, personal sin, and death are introduced as obstacles that must be resolved within history to the Father's satisfaction. Where Adam failed in history Christ succeeded in history (Rom. 5:12-21). The end goal of a kingdom must also be inside history.

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Apologetically, dispensationalism is a fortress unparalleled. It rests on the consistent application of progressive revelation which teaches us to read forward and give each passage priority in its original context. Our hermeneutic is found within the text itself as we observe how New Testament authors quoted the Old Testament and duplicate their method. The distinctiveness of Israel is founded on contractual language that is not mere redemptive shadows or symbols. The distinctiveness of the church is founded on new mystery truths so it is not a mere extension, fruition, or replacement of Israel. The end goal is the glory of God manifested in a restored kingdom established by the One who came from outside of history into history and already lived as an immortal among mortals within history.

Such a climax to history within history out-shines theologies that view the climax as Christ's first coming and subsequent ethereal escape into a heavenly kingdom. Dispensationalism is the only way to play fair with the text, the only way to preserve all of God's purposes, promises, covenants and prophecies made to Israel and the church, and the only way to protect God's integrity. It is, indeed, the only way forward, and the Framework does everything that is needed to establish these essential features of Dispensationalism making it an ever-relevant tool in training the saints.



BEYOND
THE WALLS

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Progressive Revelation, Forward Reading, and Passage Priority

Dispensationalism follows the principle of “progressive revelation” which implies “forward reading” and puts a premium on “passage priority” which is fundamental to the structural formation of dispensational theology. Charlie’s Framework naturally teaches this forward momentum through the 22 events so the student, without even studying dispensationalism, naturally reads the Bible in a forward direction, respects passage priority, and sees the bigger picture of a future national restoration of Israel to her covenanted land.

Biblically Derived Hermeneutics

Dispensationalism teaches a *sensus plenus* (full sense) hermeneutic demonstrated by NT authors quotes of the OT establishing our hermeneutic from within the text itself so that the exegesis of the New Testament authors can be duplicated. Charlie's Framework calls attention to how Jesus and the apostles interpreted Genesis, thereby paving the way for the dispensational *sensus plenus* hermeneutic and setting the student up for proper interpretation of the word of God in a forward reading, unfolding narrative climaxing with the second coming and establishment of Israel's earthly kingdom.

The Distinction of Israel Established by Contracts

The literal language of Creation, Fall, and Flood motifs established unequivocally by later authors of those motifs sets the stage for understanding the language of Israel's unconditional and conditional covenants. Israel is a unique covenant people of God. Charlie's Framework calls attention to a covenant as a legal contract with certain parties that contain definite terms that can only be fulfilled to the original parties. No one enters into metaphorical, symbolic, or shadow contracts characteristic of poetry. The Abrahamic covenant, as the "drive-train of history," sets the student in forward reading mode producing excited anticipation as each new event unfolds and God's faithfulness to His covenants is observed.

The Distinction of the Church Established by its Mystery Nature

Dispensationalism's concept of the "church" as a 'surprise' feature in the plan of God awakens us to the fact that God has plans beyond Israel to bless Gentiles. This 'mystery' is previously unrevealed setting the church apart from Israel. The transitional nature of the book of Acts is quite natural in the wake of Israel's rejection of their Messiah. Spirit baptism is the decisive ministry of the Spirit that defines the nature of the church. Charlie's Framework highlights the Spirit who is a background player pointing to Christ who is building His body from heaven. The Spirit regenerates, indwells, and conditionally fills the believer as a basis for producing the sinless life of Christ as we abide in Him in preparation for ruling with Him as servant kings. The church's pre-Tribulational rapture with Christ is quite distinct from God's future destiny for Israel after the day of the Lord's judgment and second coming. The Frameworks removes all obstacles to understanding the plan of God by laying out the details plainly in chronological order.

The Glory of God Manifested in a Kingdom Inside History

Dispensationalism envisions a future climax of God's glory in the Messianic kingdom within history. An ethereal kingdom simply will not do. It is an unfinished vision of history that does not bring glory to God no matter how often it may proclaim it as "the chief end of man." Charlie's Framework introduces the dominion mandate and divine institutions of responsible labor, marriage, and family. Man is created in God's image for a purpose. Function follows form. The mandate to rule is a kingdom mandate that sets the stage for the telos of God's purpose for man. The seed promise sets the direction for resolution in motion. God will meet man. One from outside history will enter history and resolve the dominion mandate from within history. The glorified humanity of Jesus Christ is the first part of the new heavens and new earth establishing what is to be expected; first fruits are a guarantee of more to follow. Israel restored to her land. The church ruling with the Messiah over the nations. Yet glorification involves more than man and extends to nature. A whole new spiritual and physical world awaits in the Messianic kingdom.

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A Biblical Framework

- The Framework does everything that is needed to establish these essential features of Dispensationalism making it an ever-relevant tool in training the saints.