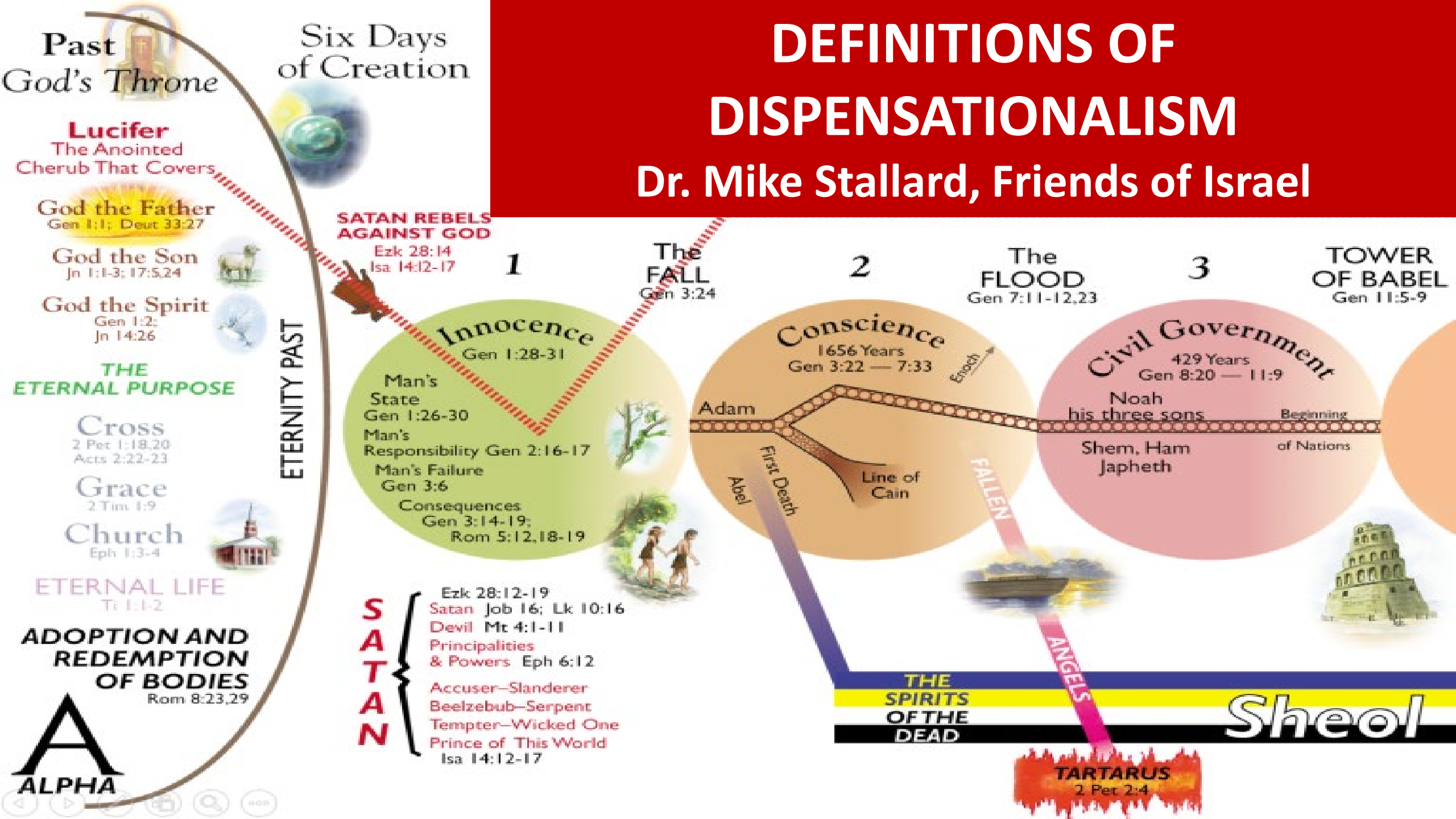


# DEFINITIONS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Dr. Mike Stallard, Friends of Israel



# Preliminary Observations

- ✓ Dispensationalism represents biblical teaching taken at face value
- ✓ Most features of dispensationalism can be found in the early church
- ✓ Modern dispensationalism represents a rediscovery of the Jewish perspective of the Bible

# Five Proposed Definitions of Dispensationalism

1

Dispensationalism as a  
theology highlighting  
dispensations

# DISPENSATIONALISM'S VIEW OF DISPENSATIONS



**CHURCH AGE IS A PARENTHESIS  
IN GOD'S PLAN WITH ISRAEL**



**UNITY IN GOD'S OVERALL MULTI-FACETED PLAN**

# Positives about this definition...

- It highlights where the movement gets its name
  - ✓ The term *dispensationalism* appears to first be used in the 1930s
- The word *dispensation* is a biblical term
- It is the popular understanding of the term

# In popular understanding...

Dispensationalism is a system of biblical interpretation popular with Protestant evangelicals and fundamentalists.

Dispensationalists divide biblical history into different periods, called **dispensations**, in which God covenanted with humanity in particular ways.

[Encyclopedia.com](https://www.encyclopedia.com)

# Positives about this definition...

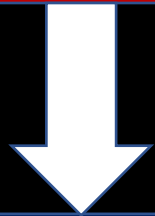
- Many covenant teachers appear to view it this way
  - ✓ G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith For Study Classes*
  - ✓ John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*



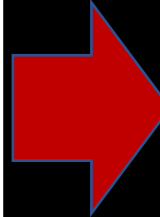
# Positives about this definition...

- Many dispensational teachers appear to view it this way
  - ✓ John Hannah
  - ✓ John Walvoord – “Dispensationalism is an approach to the Bible that recognizes differing moral responsibilities for people, in keeping with how much they knew about God and His ways.” (*BibSac* 2001)

**Dispensationalism  
as belief in  
dispensations**



**Everyone is a  
dispensationalist!**



**Remove the divisive  
“D-word” from the  
debate**

**Focus on two issues:**

- 1. Literal hermeneutics**
- 2. Distinction between  
Israel and the Church**

# Problems with this definition...

- It may not fully do justice to the modern history of dispensationalism
- Every covenant theologian since John Calvin has believed in dispensations making the simple approach of saying dispensationalism = belief in dispensations an inadequate definition

2

Dispensationalism as  
an Israeli-flavored  
view of history

# Positives with this definition...

- It honors Israel's central role in the timeline of biblical history
- Dispensationalism does have a unique philosophy of history

# Problems with this definition...

- It only gives a partial view of the central features of dispensationalism
- It could give the wrong impression that dispensationalism views the Church as God's secondary "Plan B"

3

Dispensationalism as  
a descriptive list of  
abiding concerns

# Some notes on this approach...

- This is the way that many progressive dispensationalists define dispensationalism
- It is the idea that there is no sine qua non, no essentials, just a loosely bound list of concerns that mark off the historical movement of dispensationalism



# What makes the list of abiding concerns?

- Authority of Scripture
- **Dispensations**
- Uniqueness of the Church
- **Practical significance of the Universal Church**

- Significance of biblical prophecy
- Futurist premillennialism
- A national future for Israel

# Positives with this definition...

- The list of abiding concerns contains valid beliefs held by dispensationalists
- This view has flexibility which allows for anomalies within the history of dispensationalism

# Problems with this definition...

- Following this approach could I ever define “orthodox Christianity”?
- Historically there seems to be a substantial set of core beliefs held by the dispensational tradition

# 4

Dispensationalism as  
belief in the future of  
national Israel

# Positives with this definition...

- This definition goes to the heart of one of the major beliefs of dispensationalism
- It clearly rejects replacement theology in its very definition

# Problems with this definition...

- Many Christian Zionists exist who have no connection to dispensationalism – how do we handle the differences?
- This approach is both too broad and too narrow at certain points
- Dispensationalism is more robust and detailed in its history

# 5

Dispensationalism as a reflection of essential hermeneutical and doctrinal concerns

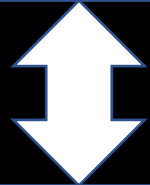
# Ryrie's *Sine Qua Non* or Essentials

- Consistent literal interpretation
- Distinction between Israel and the Church
- Doxological unifying theme of the Bible



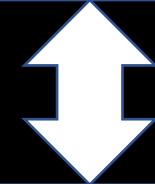
# Which “literal” interpretation?

Literal  
interpretation at  
the level of an  
expression



Opposite is  
figurative

Literal interpretation  
as grammatical-  
historical  
interpretation



Opposite is  
allegory



By “consistent” literal interpretation Ryrie meant that we interpret prophecy literally (grammatical-historical) just like the rest of the Bible.

# OSWALD T. ALLIS (Amillennialist)

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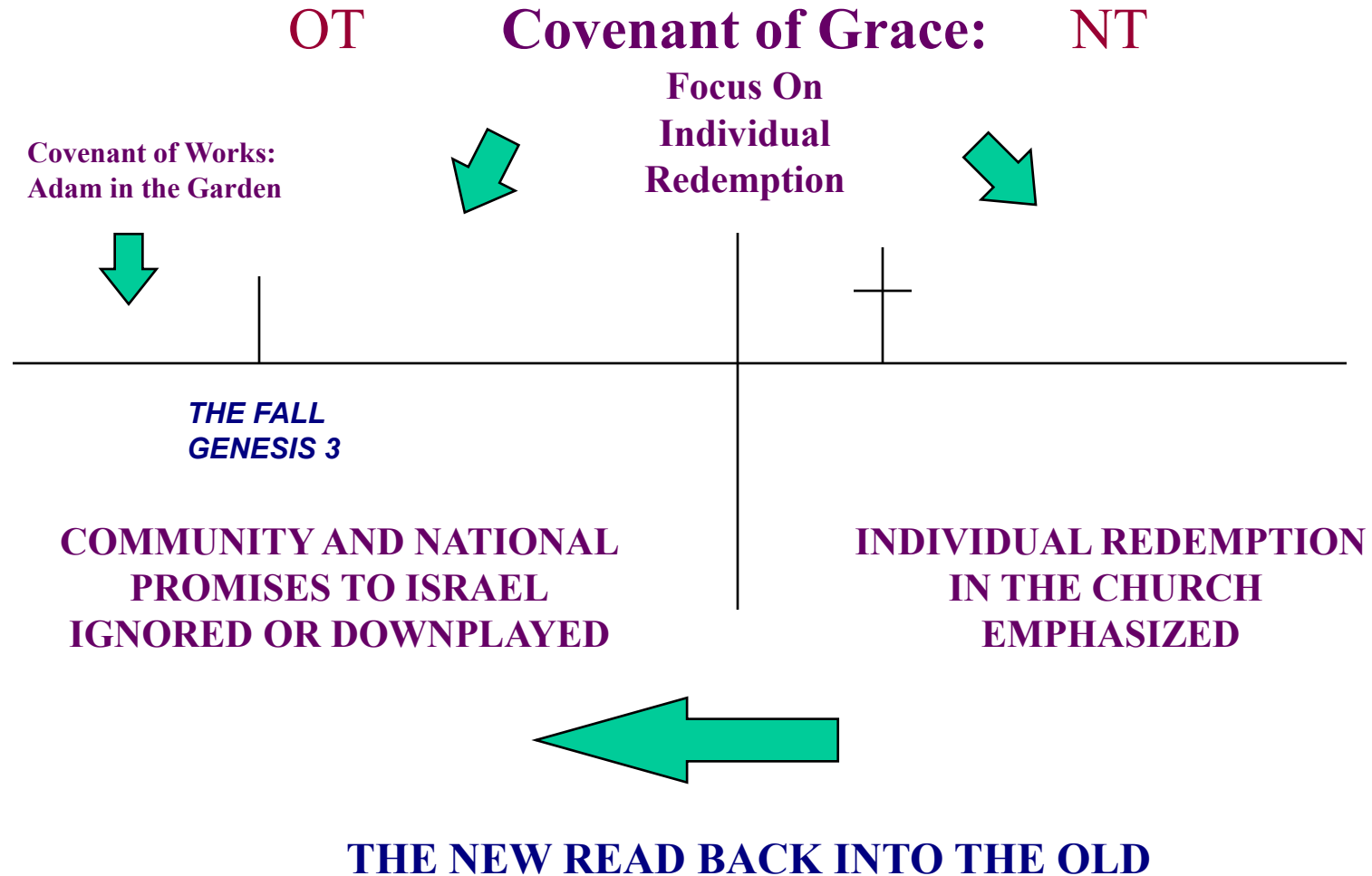
Literal interpretation has always been a marked feature of Premillennialism; in Dispensationalism it has been carried to an extreme. We have seen that this literalism found its most thoroughgoing expression in the claim that *Israel* must mean *Israel*, and that the Church was a mystery, unknown to the prophets and first made known to the apostle Paul.

# OSWALD T. ALLIS (Amillennialist)

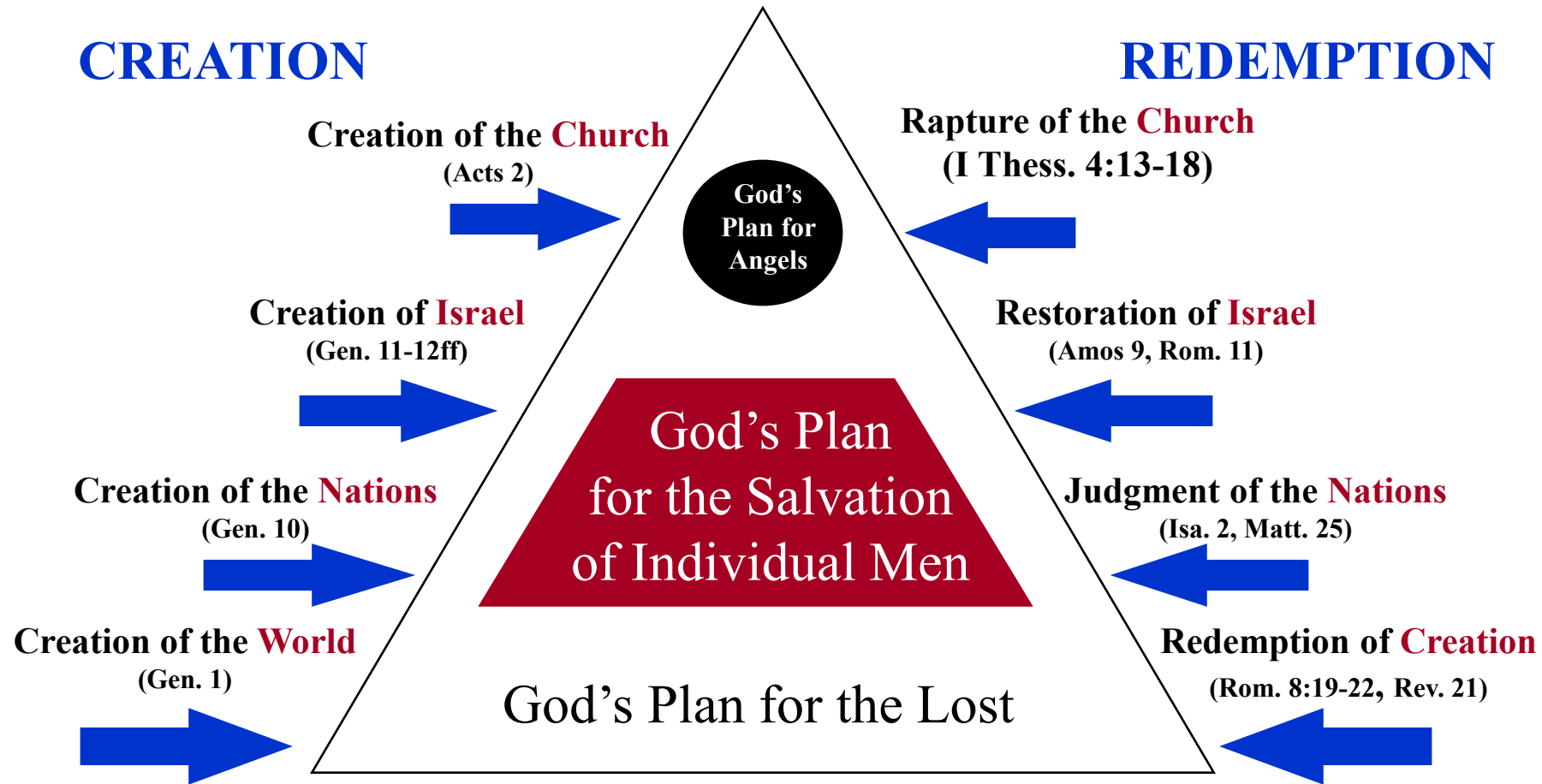
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Now if the principle of interpretation is adopted that *Israel* always means *Israel*, that it does not mean the Church, then it follows of necessity that practically all of our information regarding the millennium will concern a Jewish or Israelitish age.

# THE FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL REDEMPTION IN COVENANT THEOLOGY



# THE FOCUS ON THE GLORY OF GOD IN DISPENSATIONALISM



# Positives with this definition...

- Taking the Bible as God gave it and meant it for the original audience is always a good idea
- The OT has an autonomy for its own interpretation
- It allows for the significance of the progress of revelation for Bible interpretation
- It describes the modern historical movement of dispensationalism with a measure of precision

**The Future of  
Israel  
(1856)**



Emile Guers: 1794 - 1882

**GENEVA**

- ✓ **Literalism**
- ✓ **Diversity of classes and privileges in the entire body of the redeemed**
- ✓ **The literal value of the word *day* in prophecy**



**Dr. John Walvoord**



**What is the most  
important issue  
facing  
dispensationalists  
today?**