

“CONTINUITY TO DISCONTINUITY”  
“A SURVEY OF DISPENSATIONAL & COVENANTAL THEOLOGIES”  
by Benjamin L. Merkle (Lexham Press, 2020)

A recent reading and study of a book written by Benjamin L. Merkle, which bears the above stated title, leads to a conclusion that our ECLI Hermeneutics teachings with respect to the theories or roles in theology of *Discontinuity and Continuity* have been far too simplistic, and do not begin to do justice to the theological/hermeneutical/scriptural exegesis issues raised by the overriding question as to what parts of the Old Testament (“OT”) have any continuing implications for New Covenant/New Testament Christians. For example, can New Covenant Christians simply disregard all of the OT, Mosaic Law? By way of further example, what is the relationship between the OT Ethnic Nation of Israel and the Church?

We have always taught that two systems which some theologians use for trying to determine what parts of the OT carry over into the NT and, therefore, are either binding upon or have implications for Christians, who are under the New Covenant are:

-*Continuity*: All parts of the OT, which are not expressly refuted or altered by the NT authors are carried over into the NT and are binding upon, or have significant implications for Christians, and are not obviated by the New Covenant or by Christ’s incarnation, life, teachings, death and resurrection, and

-*Discontinuity*: The OT, and all of its parts stand alone, and are not altered by the NT, unless the NT authors expressly refute, or change or alter some part of the OT, meaning that, unless the NT expressly states otherwise, a part of the OT is not carried over into the NT.

This teaching about *Continuity and Discontinuity* is far too simplistic, and disregards the substantial theological effects of two theological systems, *Dispensationalism and Coventalism*, which the author of this book would hold to be the correct labels for two, very important, theological systems which move along a line or scale from *Discontinuity* (likely more appropriately referred to as *Dispensationalism*) to *Continuity* (likely more appropriately referred to as *Covenantalism*).

The author’s stated purpose for this book is not so much one to describe the two theological systems, Dispensationalism and Coventalism, as it is to demonstrate that one needs to be aware of one’s Theological System (something we sometimes refer to as “Theological Method”) and to know, to what extent, his or her beliefs are consistent with that System, and to charitably view and have opinions about the beliefs of others who hold to a different Theological System (e.g. how a Dispensationalist might view the views or beliefs of a Coventanalist). So the author provides summaries of the various, important variations of each of these two competing Systems, Dispensationalism and Coventalism and then, through the works of prominent theologians who hold to such variants, analyzes each of such variant, in detail, and then expresses his opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of each of these variants. He points out that, in many cases, each of the Variants (sub-systems if you will) of each of the two basic Systems, Dispensationalism and Coventalism, relies upon the same passages of Scripture to support its views, as do the proponents of the other Variants of the System (and



even the proponents of the other System and its Variants), while reaching dramatically different conclusions or interpretations about such passages and the implications of such passages.

According to the author, as one moves along a line from left to right, with a neutral center point, and with Dispensationalism being on the left side of that neutral center point (pointing at the far left to *Discontinuity*) and with Covenantalism being on the right side of that neutral center point (pointing on the far right to *Continuity*), one would find variants of, or sub-systems, if you will, of each of the two primary Systems, Dispensationalism and Covenantalism, as follows:

-On the Dispensationalist side of the center point of the line, moving left to right, from *Discontinuity* on the far left to the center point, one would find these variants or sub-systems, if you will of Dispensationalism:

- Classic Dispensationalism,
- Revised Dispensationalism,
- Progressive Dispensationalism,

-On the Covenantalism side of the center point of the line, moving left to right from *Continuity* on the far right, one would find these variants or sub-systems, if you will, of Covenantalism:

- Progressive Covenantalism (the System closest to Progressive Dispensationalism or to Dispensationalism as a whole)
- Covenant Theology (Classic, Historical Covenant Theology),
- Christian Reconstruction.

In other words, as one moves along this line from left to right, one moves from *Discontinuity* to *Continuity*.

So it is first worthy of note that even the proponents of each of the two basic Systems, Dispensationalism and Covenantalism, have some substantial disagreements among themselves, and that they have some appreciably different views, beliefs or conclusions, oftentimes based upon the same Scriptural passages. What is the author's basic point in this respect, I think that it is that "it is ok to debate about and disagree about our Theological Systems and Conclusions, and that we must respect what appear to be good faith beliefs, which are well thought out, but which differ from our beliefs which we believe to be 'correct'".

Candidly, in my view, the middle chapters in this book, the ones in which the author, using the writings of primary proponents of each variant or sub-system of each of the basic *Discontinuity* system (i.e. Dispensationalism) and the basic *Continuity* system (i.e. Covenantalism) are not hugely useful unless the reader is interested in a deep dive analysis of each of these sub-systems. These middle chapters or parts of the book are not hard to read, but they don't seem to leave a student with a whole lot of information that is somewhat readily retained or is of permeant usefulness. So if I wanted to take the best advantage of this book in a basic class on hermeneutics I would use Chapter 1, *An Introduction to Theological Systems of Discontinuity and Continuity* (in which the basic components of each of the basic Systems, *Discontinuity* (i.e. Dispensationalism) and *Continuity* (i.e. Covenantalism) are set forth, summarized and contrasted), and the concluding *Conclusion*, or the last Chapter (in which the author Summarizes (in an extremely helpful fashion) each of the Six "Theological Systems" described by him in the middle chapters or parts of his book (meaning each of the Variants or



Sub-Systems (my words, not those of the author) of the two classic, basic Systems), Dispensationalism (leading on the far left of our line to *Discontinuity*), and Covenantalism (leading on the far right of our line to *Continuity*). These two parts of the author's book, Chapter 1 and the Conclusion, provide wonderful summaries of the basic components of the two basic Theological Systems, *Continuity* (i.e. Dispensationalism) and *Continuity* (i.e. Covenantalism) and their various (3 each) Variants or Sub-Systems (again, my words, not those of the author). In fact, if I had access to a copy machine I would attach copies of such Chapter 1 and Conclusion to this document, and would probably provide copies of this document and of those copies to the hermeneutical students.

All of this said, for my own use if not for the use of any particular student, I need to try to roughly outline these various Theological Systems so that I can try to see how each might apply to particular parts of Scripture as I do my best to study Scripture. This outline will be very rough, and general, at best, and it will fall far short of doing justice to the author's book, or to any deep dive into the Systems and their variations which the author describes. As I go forward with trying to have even a very basic understanding of how the OT has been absorbed by, or changed by, or construed by the OT and the New Covenant, or by Christ's incarnation, life, teachings, death and resurrection I have to ask some basic questions, most of which are those raised by our book's author. Some of these questions (and there are many more, and any student of the Bible would have many such questions) are as follows:

1) The people of Israel, as the descendants of Abraham, were selected by God as God's special people. To what extent has this status of the people of Israel, the ethnic Jewish people, changed? Was it changed by Christ? Was it irrevocably changed by the rejection of Christ by some of the Jews?

2) God made promises to Abraham which are referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17), that the descendants of Abraham would increase in numbers, and that they were given the whole land of Canaan (I believe this is now all of Palestine and perhaps a slightly larger area) as "an everlasting possession". Clearly this situation has not come to pass or has not yet come to pass. Has this Covenant, God's Abrahamic Covenant, been changed or revoked or somehow been fulfilled?

3) God made a promise to David, the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7, and Ps 89) that David's "house and kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever". The NT, particularly the opening chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, establish that Jesus was a descendant of David. What is the significance of this fact? Is Jesus sitting or is He to sit on David's throne? If so, is this to be a literal, earthly throne of David based in Israel, or is this a Spiritual Throne?

4) (And I admittedly do appropriate this question from our author, but would raise it anyway) In Ezeiel 16:59-63 God, through the Prophet told the Israelites in exile in Babylon that, although He would deal with them as they deserved, because they had "...despised God's oath by breaking the covenant..." He would, nevertheless "...remember the covenant made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you...". The Prophets,



throughout their writings, stated that God promised to restore Israel. In Amos 9:11-15, God through the Prophet Amos promised to restore David's fallen tent, and to restore its ruins, and "to build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all nations will bear my name....(and the people)...will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them....(and I, God)...will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them". This prophecy was quoted by James (the half brother of Jesus) during the first Convocation or Council (if you will) of the Church (one of those several Convocations or Councils called by Church Fathers to resolve theological controversies, this one being to resolve the question of whether or not Gentiles had to become Jews or adhere to Jewish customs and law (particularly the requirement of circumcision) in order to be accepted into the fellowship of Christ), as described in Acts 15. Have these "Restoration Prophecies" of Restoration to the land given by God to Abraham and his descendants been somehow revoked, or altered or fulfilled, in whole or in part? In other words is what might be called "the Land Covenant" or the "Palestinian Covenant" that the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham, will occupy, in peace, the land given by God to Abraham? Will Jesus, as a descendant of David, rule over this land from some throne, an earthly throne of some heavenly throne?

5) What is the relationship between Israel and the Church? Has the Church somehow replaced Israel as "God's people"?

6) To what extent does the Mosaic law apply to Christians? Has all of it been revoked by the New Covenant, by Christ? Can we just ignore it? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus refers to various parts of the Mosaic Law, and seems to have even intensified some of its requirements. In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus specifically says that he has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, and that until heaven and the earth disappear, not the smallest letter or stroke of a pen of the law will disappear until everything is accomplished. Jesus made these statements right after He had preached, extensively, on the law and about its applications. How do we reconcile these teachings with those who would contend that the law is not binding on Christians? What do we, as Christians, make of the Law today?

7) We are taught that God made 4 Biblical Covenants in the OT, those being the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic, and then made the New Covenant in the NT. What has happened to the 4 OT Biblical Covenants? Are they gone, or have they been replaced by the New Covenant?

8) Which Testament has priority in my search for a proper Biblical Interpretation or a proper Theology? Can I just assume that all I, as a Christian, need to know and understand is the NT?

These are just some of the many questions which a serious student of the Bible might raise. The Two Theological Systems discussed by the author (i.e., *Continuity/Covenantalism*, and its variations, and *Discontinuity/Dispensationalism*) purport to provide answers to these questions and others. So, for me if not for someone else, let's outline some of the essential



components of each System as follows:

1) *Dispensationalism/Discontinuity*: If we take a deep dive into our book we will see that none of the Systems described by our author are wholly consistent, one with the other, or even within themselves. However, the Systems espoused by each of those proponents of Systems along the Dispensationalism side of our scale, moving from left to right, meaning from pure Discontinuity towards more Continuity (i.e. meaning moving from what we might call “Classical” or “Historical” Dispensationalism to “Progressive Dispensationalism”) seem to have some common characteristics or components, the primary common characteristic is that all *Dispensationalist Systems*, if you will, use the seven Dispensations, which will be described below, as their primary hermeneutical point of reference, whereas the *Coventalist Systems* emphasize the Biblical Covenants as their primary hermeneutical reference point. With these preliminary thoughts in mind, other characteristics or components of *Dispensationalist Systems* are, very generally described, as follows:

1) *Basic Hermeneutic/Literal versus Symbolic or Figurative*: Dispensationalists, to a greater or lesser degree, emphasize the literal interpretations of Scripture and of the words of Scripture, over any non-literal or figurative interpretations. Their claim is that they interpret the words of Scripture and the passages of Scripture, literally, as those words and passages were intended to mean by their authors (using ordinary, plainly understood meaning) and as they would have been understood by their authors and the original audiences of the words or passages. To a Dispensationalist, again to a lesser degree as we move along the scale/the line, left to right towards Progressive Dispensationalism, words of Scripture shall be given their plain, ordinary, generally historically understood meanings, unless the passages or parts of Scripture in which they are contained indicate otherwise. That is to say, that unless a part of Scripture indicates that words are “symbolic”, they are not to be construed or interpreted as being symbolic or figurative. Traditional Dispensationalists contend that they are using the “historical-grammatical interpretation”, meaning that their aim is to interpret a text in light of its “historical and literary content”. A text means what it would have meant to its historical author and original audience, and it is not altered by some later part of Scripture, including the NT. While “Revised Dispensationalists” and “Progressive Dispensationalists” tend to soften or be willing to deviate, to some extent, from this strict literal, historical-grammatical approach, and they do allow for the use of the NT to help explain or expand or perhaps intensify the original author’s intention behind an OT text, they still insist that the literal, historical-grammatical approach be applied to the original interpretation of a text. Some Progressive Dispensationalists espouse a three level approach to a text, claiming that the true grammatical-historical approach is multidimensional, involving three interactive components or levels of interpretation, the historical, the grammatical and the literary theological. First, they emphasize the “historical level”, seeking to be sensitive to the message as it came to its original audience, understanding the general terms and ideas. Second, they emphasize the grammatical level, and seek to consider how the terminology of a Biblical message is laid out, with terms not being understood in isolation from each other, but being understood in conjunction with one another. Third, “The literary-theological level highlights the fact that there is an abiding message and unity in the text, which is laid out literally



in various ways called genres". Classic Dispensationalists typically do not seek to look the NT in order to provide them with any assistance in ascertaining God's true message or intentions, as originally set forth in an OT text. Dispensationalists have their true affinity for the OT, which, generally, is not in any way altered or changed by the NT. Progressive Dispensationalists argue for a "complementary hermeneutic", arguing that "...we should continue to read the Old Testament as telling us something about Israel in God's plan, while being sensitive to how the New Testament complements that hope by expressing fulfillment in Christ." "This means that, while the New Testament may help in developing the ultimate meaning of the Old Testament texts, the expansion of meaning does not change the original meaning unless the New Testament explicitly states otherwise."

2) *The Role of Typology*: It is somewhat difficult to define "types" or "typology", as these terms are used by Dispensationalists, across the spectrum of Dispensationalism. Perhaps, for my/our purposes "types" might be usefully defined as "patterns of resemblance between persons and events in earlier history to persons and events in later history." If this is an appropriate definition then in order to establish a typological-prophetic connection between the OT and the NT: (1) the type must be linked to an historical fact (person, event, etc.): (2) the link to the antitype must be identifiable within Scripture: (3) a pattern must exist between the type and the antitype,; and (4) there must be an escalation or progression from the type to the antitype". The early, Classic Dispensationalists, frequently used Typology, even to the point of finding that physical or material items (not persons or events) described in the OT, such as tent pegs, tents or rocks, etc. were types for later in history events or persons, particularly Christ. This approach has been largely abandoned by Dispensationalists, particularly Progressive or Revised Dispensationalists, who would generally follow the definition and requirements for an OT "type", set forth above. However, all Dispensationalists tend to interpret OT references (and particularly those in prophecies) to Israel, literally, and those to the Church figuratively, or by way of Typology. So, while Classic Dispensationalists moved away from typology in favor of a strict, literal interpretive hermeneutic, Progressive Dispensationalists more readily embrace typology as an aspect of historical-literary interpretation. However, they do not, in their view, use typology as a "spiritual interpretation" device. So they reject any approach to typology which attempts to find hidden meanings or to interpret material items as spiritual entities.

3) *Interpretation of Prophecy*: As noted above, Dispensationalists interpret the Prophecies as to Israel, particularly the Restoration Prophecies (such as the ones in Amos 9:11-15) literally, and not figuratively, meaning that God's promises to Israel, as provided by the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant must be fulfilled literally/physically, such that the ethnic Jewish nation will be restored to all of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants, with a descendant of David (i.e. Christ), sitting on a physical, earthly throne of David ruling over Israel during the millennium.

4) *The Dispensations*: Obviously, Dispensationalists attach a heavy role in God's plan of Progressive Revelation to the *Dispensations*, which are seven historical, well defined time periods, during which God's manner of administration of His creation changed (i.e. differed from that of the prior *Dispensation*). These periods of Dispensation are:

- Innocence (Gen. 1:28-3:6)/Creation to the Fall
- Conscience (Gen. 4:1-8:14)/Fall to the Flood



- Human Government (Gen 8:15-11:9)/Flood to Babel
- Promise (Gen. 11:10-Exod 18:27)/Abramham to Exodus
- Law (Exod 18:28-Acts 1:26)/Moses to John the Baptist
- Grace (Acts 2:1-Rev 19:21)/Pentecost to Rapture
- Kingdom (Rev. 20-21)/Millennium to Great White Throne.

Dispensationalists would hold that each Dispensation, in effect, stands on its own, and that each dispensation revealed God's progressive revelation and subsequent human failure. They would find that each Dispensation represents a distinct, Biblically established time period or epoch, during which there was a separate revelation from God and a failure of humans to receive or abide by that representation, with a following period of punishment. God's progressive revelation, and the related human failure to follow or abide by that revelation necessitated various periods of God's administration of His creation. To classic Dispensationalists, the dispensational study of the Bible consists of identification of these separate, historically and biblically defined periods of time, the dispensations. They view each dispensation as a separate dispensation, a separate time of a distinct administration by God of God's creation, with a following Dispensation not necessarily incorporating a prior Dispensation. The Dispensations are separate periods of revelation for most Dispensationalists. So they study the Bible "from one Dispensation to the next". Classic Dispensationalists assign a somewhat related role to the Biblical Covenants, but not to the exclusion of the more important (at least to them) Dispensations. In their view a new Covenant often triggered a new Dispensation, with the Dispensations involving the historical outwork of God's plan, whereas Covenants involved the relationships between God and man. More Progressive Dispensationalists espouse a more progressive dispensational approach, meaning a more unified understanding of the Dispensations and biblical covenants (i.e. the dispensations were progressive, one to the next, and the covenants and dispensations are linked together in God's Progressive Plan). They reduce the number of Dispensations from seven to four, as follows:

- Patriarchal (to Sinai)
- Mosaic (to Messiah's ascension)
- Ecclesial (to Messiah's return)
- Zionist (millennial and eternal).

To Progressive Dispensationalists these Dispensations are progressive phases of salvation history, which culminates in the eschatological kingdom of God. All Dispensationalists maintain that the Dispensations maintain God's progressive plan for Israel and the nations, holding that God's plan for Israel and the nations in a past Dispensation points forward to the redemption of humanity in its political and cultural dimensions.

5) *The Covenants*: There are six Biblical Covenants: Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New Covenant. This number is sometimes expanded to seven by inserting a "Palestinian", or "Land Covenant" after or as a part of the Abrahamic Covenant, it being God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will have possession of a geographic area, which is roughly all of Palestine. Of these covenants, Dispensationalists view the Abrahamic



8) *What is the Relationship Between Israel and the Church?:* Dispensationalists have, universally, held that Israel and the Church are completely separate entities, with the Church having come into existence only at Pentecost. They see the Church as a part of the new dispensation in the history of redemption, with the Church not being found in the OT since it did not exist prior to Pentecost. Dispensationalists, classically, view the Church as a *New Manifestation of Grace*, although Progressive Dispensationalists do not see this as being a new or distinct type of redemption, but rather as being a grace which is precisely in keeping with the promises of the OT, particularly the promises of the new covenant in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Therefore, at least for Progressive Dispensationalists the traditional Dispensationist's sharp distinction between the Church and Israel begins to become somewhat blurred, but, nevertheless, that distinction remains. In their view, Israel and the Church share theologically rich and important elements of commonality, while at the same time, maintaining distinct identities. This means that, in the view of Progressive Dispensationalists there is both unity and distinction between Israel and the Church; meaning both continuity and discontinuity. For some of them "the kingdom" has a separate ethnic, national and territorial aspect for Israel, whereas the Church refers to the unity in Christ, regardless of their ethnic, national or territorial location or status. Therefore, for Progressive Dispensationalists the continuity between Israel and the Church reflects the common salvation presently available under the New Covenant. Traditional Dispensationalists would hold, to the contrary, that Israel is the primary party to the New Covenant which fulfills the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, and with the Church somehow participating in the spiritual benefits of the New Covenant, or even being party to a separate New Covenant.

9) *What Is the Kingdom of God?:* Classic or Traditional Dispensationalists divided the *Kingdom* into two Kingdoms, the *Kingdom of God* and *The Kingdom of Heaven*, with the *Kingdom of God* referring to God's authoritative rule and the *Kingdom of Heaven* referring to God's earthly rule. They argue that the Kingdom of Heaven is limited to the national interests of Israel, with the Kingdom of God being universal, but with the Kingdom of Heaven being the messianic and Davidic Kingdom on earth. In their view, Christ offered the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel, which rejected it, but that such rejection did not abrogate the offer of the Kingdom of Heaven, but rather put it on hold or in a status of pause, with the Church being some sort of parenthesis in the plan for the offering of the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel. In the view of these Traditional Dispensationalists the Kingdom of Heaven will be fulfilled, for Israel, upon Christ's second coming, and during the millennium. This view is confusing, but seems to be one that has the Church being raptured, and the Tribulation then occurring, and the Kingdom of Heaven then being provided and fulfilled during the subsequent millennium. Progressive Dispensationalists do not offer the same division of the *Kingdom* into the *Kingdom of God* and the *Kingdom of Heaven*, but rather view the *Kingdom* as being a single eschatological Kingdom that contains both spiritual and political dimensions. In their view, the Church today is an inaugural aspect of this eschatological kingdom, with the political and social aspects of the eschatological kingdom awaiting the second coming of Christ. Progressive Dispensationalists, unlike Traditional or Classic Dispensationalists, insist that God's plan is unfolding in history as one unified plan, and that the present dispensation is not a parenthesis in God's plan, but rather that the present age, the



church age or dispensation, is an integrated phase in the development of the eschatological kingdom. It is the beginning of the fulfillment of the eschatological promises, although Israel remains a unique entity in God's redemptive plan since many OT promises are yet to be fulfilled. Progressive Dispensationalists hold that Jesus is now seated on a heavenly throne, at the right hand of God, but that, during the millennial kingdom he will rule from Jerusalem on the physical throne of David. They affirm the existing presence of the kingdom, which was inaugurated with the coming of Jesus, especially his resurrection and ascension, but hold that this kingdom has not been consummated as that consummation will only take place when Jesus returns and establishes the physical kingdom over Israel. So for Progressive Dispensationalists, in some respects, the kingdom is inaugurated and is here, but it is "here or already but not yet", as it remains to be fulfilled with the second coming of Christ.

II) *Covenantalism/Continuity*: As might be expected Covenantalists emphasize the Historical Biblical Covenants, as opposed to the Dispensations, as their point of emphasis in Biblical hermeneutics. However, as will be noted below, some of them emphasize three overriding theological Covenants in their hermeneutics, as opposed to the six (sometimes seven) Historical Covenants. They argue for continuity and unity in God's plan which culminates in the New Covenant, and that the plurality of Historical Covenants (all contained within the three Theological Covenants) progressively reveals the Triune God's one redemptive plan for one people. While our author, in his book, begins his analysis of Covenantalism with Progressive Covenantalism since it is closest to the neutral center point of our left to right scale/line, meaning that it is closest to Progressive Dispensationalism (which is on the immediated left of that center point) it seems to me that it is helpful to first look at Covenant Theology, and then move to Progressive Covenantalism, and then finally to what I find to be an extreme position (the one which most favors Continuity), Christian Reconstruction. So, again, I will try to, very inadequately at best, summarize the Covenantalism System and some of its sub-systems, all as described in our author's book.

1) *Is a Literal or Symbolic Hermeneutic Employed?* As noted in our analysis of *Dispensationalism*, Dispensationalists, by and large, urge that they are utilizing a literal hermeneutic, or a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, with words and phrases and passages being interpreted to mean what they, in their general, historical usage would have meant to their author's and the audiences of those authors. In particular, the Prophecies, particularly the Restoration Prophecies, are literally construed when it comes to Israel, although any OT references to the church will be Typologically construed. In their view, the Restoration Prophecies require a literal, physical, worldly, geographical, national and political fulfillment for Israel. *Covenant Theology* (also called federal or Reformed theology) represents a theological system that emphasizes unity and continuity in the Bible, and it, therefore, contrasts with *Dispensationalism* with respect to the relationship between the OT Covenants and the New Covenant. The key or linchpin for their finding of continuity is the so called "Covenant of Grace," which will be discussed below. While Covenant Theologians affirm a literal



interpretation in the sense of the grammatical-historical approach that interprets the Bible according to the intention of the author as opposed to any allegorical interpretation, they also embrace a so-called “Christocentric hermeneutic” that sees Christ as the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. As such, unlike Dispensationalists who emphasize the OT, Covenant Theologians interpret the OT in light of the NT. They are familiar with the notion of *sensus plenior*, the idea that an earlier revelation can later take on an expanded meaning or a fuller meaning. This expanded or fuller meaning can be beyond what was originally given in the OT. This notion would be anathema to many Dispensationalists. Progressive Covenantalists embrace a somewhat modified literal or grammatical-historical hermeneutic, which affirms elements of both the literal, grammatical-historical approach and a symbolic hermeneutic. They contend that they are neither choosing nor ignoring either the literal, grammatical-historical approach or the symbolic approach, but rather are simply interpreting the Bible according to each author’s intention, which is conveyed in various literary forms or genres. Progressive Covenantalists would contend that they embrace an interpretation of the Bible according to the original intention of the author (*sensus literalis*) as opposed to an allegorical interpretation which seeks a deeper spiritual meaning that was unknown to the author. Yet, when the literal sense includes symbols and types as a part of the divine revelation, they seek to interpret Scripture accordingly. They claim that they are taking seriously the claim of Scripture that it is God’s unfolding revelation over time, and because it is God’s word we should expect an overall unity and coherence between Testaments. While Progressive Dispensationalists are reluctant to embrace the notion of *sensus plenior*, they nevertheless appear to do so as they do give priority to the NT and are comfortable with a conclusion that the OT authors, although divinely inspired, did not fully grasp the meaning and implications of that which they wrote, such full meaning and implications being revealed in the NT. In other words, they hold that the NT’s interpretations of the OT are definitive, in that later texts bring with them greater clarity and understanding. So, while using a grammatical-historical-literal approach to interpreting Scripture, they seek to do so by interpreting each text in light of its place in the canon of Scripture. Some Progressive Covenantalists would use a three horizon approach: textual, epochal and canonical. The textual horizon involves understanding a text in its immediate context, seeking to understand God’s intent as communicated through the human author. The epochal horizon seeks to interpret a text in light of where it is located in God’s unfolding plan in redemptive history, with later authors building on earlier authors. The canonical horizon examines the text in relation to the entire canon. Texts are then placed along the storyline of Scripture. Because they thoroughly embrace Progressive Revelation, all Covenantalists read the OT in light of the NT, although they deny that they are allowing the NT to run roughshod over the OT.

2) *What is the Role of Typology?*: Covenant Theologists, meaning classical Covenantalists, find that Typology plays a prominent role in their hermeneutical approach. For them there are five key aspects related to typology: (1) analogical correspondence between the type and the antitype; (2) historicity; (3) a pointing-forwardness, foreshadowing, or presignification; (4) escalation; and (5) retrospection. For example, some Covenantalists find that the land of Israel is typological, anticipating new covenant realities, similar to the manner in which the sacrificial system prefigured the offering of the body of Christ and how the priesthood



foreshadowed the permanent priesthood of Christ. Rather than to find that the Restoration Prophecies promised a restoration of Israel to all of the geographic area promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, some Covenant Theologians maintain that the land of the Bible simply served in a typological role as a model for the consummate realization of the purposes of God for all of His redeemed people that encompasses the whole of the world. Therefore, to them, the land of Israel does not have any continuing significance in the realm of redemption. One can see how this conclusion differs, dramatically, from the conclusions of most Dispensationalists that there will be a literal, worldly, geographic, national and political fulfillment for Israel of the Abrahamic Covenant. For Progressive Covenantalists typology is grounded in *history, the text, and interbiblical/intertextual development*. They contend that typology is the study of how OT historical persons, events, institutions and settings function to foreshadow, anticipate, prefigure, and predict the greater realities in the new covenant age, with God having designed and intended that certain OT figures, institutions, settings and events will serve as advance presentations which are transcended and surpassed by the arrival of the NT antitype. Progressive Covenantalists argue that typology is prophetic and predictive and that it is divinely intended, in that it is designed by God to anticipate a future greater reality in a later period of redemptive history. They find that clear and explicit types include the nation of Israel, Adam, Melchizedek, David, the exodus and the Passover.

3) *How Are Old Testament Revelation Prophecies Fulfilled?*: Covenantalists, across the spectrum, consistently maintain, based on their rejection of a pure literalistic hermeneutic and an allowance for typology and symbolism, that Old Testament Restoration Prophecies given to the nation of Israel are fulfilled in Christ and His Church. With respect to the seemingly very physical, geographical and rebuilding of the cities of Israel prophecies of Amos 9:11-15 Covenantalists look to the NT authors, and particularly to the references to the statements of James in Acts 15:16-18. While Dispensationalists claim that this verse, combined with the verses in Amos signify God's twofold plan, and that Amos's prophecy has not been fulfilled during Christ's incarnation, life, death and resurrection, but rather will be fulfilled only at Christ's Second Coming, Covenantalists argue that, taking James's quotations in Acts 15 in context with the issue James was addressing, the addition of uncircumcised gentiles into the Church as God's elect people, the statements of James should be interpreted as statements that God's acceptance of the uncircumcised individuals into God's family should be taken as a fulfillment of the prophecies of Amos 9. So Covenantalists, across the spectrum, seem to use typology to hold that Israel was a type for the body of believers, and that Christ, and the acceptance of gentiles into the church fulfilled all of the Old Testament Restoration Prophecies. These conclusions are obviously dramatically different than the conclusions of the Dispensationalists.

4) *What Is the Relationship Between the Covenants?*: Obviously, the concept of Covenants is central to Covenant Theology. While there are six historical covenants, Traditional Covenantalists affirm that there are three Theological Covenants: 1) The Covenant of Redemption, 2) the Covenant of Works (sometimes referred to as the Covenant of Creation), and 3) the Covenant of Grace. All of the historical covenants are embodied with these three theological covenants. These Covenantalists maintain that all of God's interactions with



humanity take place within the historical covenants, and within the these three theological covenants. Although the Covenant of Redemption is not explicitly referenced in Scripture, Traditional Covenant Theologians typically embrace the notion of this covenant, which is a covenant made, not by God with Man, but rather is a covenant made, in eternity, by and within and among the three persons of the Trinity. As some of their number explain this Covenant of Redemption, “the Father elects a people in the Son as their mediator to be brought to saving faith by the Holy Spirit”. As noted, this Covenant of Redemption is unique because, unlike the historical covenants which are made between God and man, this covenant is made solely between and among the three persons of the Godhead. It would appear that Traditional Covenantalists embrace the notions of pre-election, pre-selection and predestination, because, in their view, the Covenant of Redemption, which is made in eternity, is grounded on the Biblical texts which speak of unconditional election, predestination, and adoption. The Covenant of Works (also called the Covenant of Creation or the pre-redemptive covenant) is the pact that God made, pre-fall, with Adam, the federal head of, or representative of humanity. This covenant assumed that Adam (i.e. humanity) was capable of perfect righteousness and thus could fulfill all of God’s stipulations, and it promised reward upon obedience and retribution upon disobedience. God implicitly promised Adam (i.e. humanity) that upon Adam’s complete obedience he would be given the right to eat from the Tree of Life. Humanity was to pass through a probationary period and attain the right to eat from the Tree of Life. Traditional Covenantalists base this covenant upon the “implicit covenant” in the arrangement God made with Adam, and upon Hosea 6:7 and Romans 5:12-21 which emphasizes the representational roles of both Adam and Christ. Although this Covenant is most often referred to as the “Covenant of Works”, some Covenantalists insist that “grace was operative in the Covenant of Works”, with the totality of God’s relationships with mankind being a matter of Grace. The third overarching Covenant is the Covenant of Grace, a Covenant made by God with Adam immediately after Adam’s failure in the Garden, the Fall. Rather than to terminate His relationship with mankind after the fall, God bound Himself to redeem a people for Himself as was first announced in Genesis 3:15. God committed to redeem His now fallen creation, with this Covenant of Grace being ultimately fulfilled by the faithful law-keeping of the Second Adam, Christ. Traditional Covenantalism understands the whole of history after man’s fall into sin as unifying under the Covenant of Grace. It is both a *Conditional* and *Unconditional* covenant. It is *Unconditional* in the sense that God, Himself (through Christ) fulfills all of the requirements of this Covenant (complete obedience) for all of the elect. It is *Conditional* in that Jesus, as the representative of the elect of mankind, met all of the conditions originally given by the Covenant of Works through His active and passive obedience. In a leap which I do not understand Traditional Covenantalists (Reformed Covenantalists) hold that this Covenant of Grace is not just made with the elect, believers, but is rather made with them and their children. Progressive Covenantalists affirm six biblical/historical covenants, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the New Covenant, and assert that all of the Bible develops according to these six covenants. Progressive Covenantalists, therefore, do not seem to affirm, or at least strongly affirm the three Theological Covenants affirmed by Traditional (i.e. “Reformed” or “Federal”) Covenantalists. For Progressive Covenantalists, the relationships between God and man “progressed” through the