A Response to Craig Blaising’s “Classical, Traditional, Progressive: Validity in Labels in Distinguishing Types of Dispensationalism”¹

Dr. Bruce Compton
Professor of Biblical Languages and Exposition
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

INTRODUCTION

I begin my response with a brief comment on Blaising’s thesis and how his thesis has shaped his essay.² Next I list areas of agreement with Blaising’s analysis of American dispensationalism, an analysis that covers both the history of the American tradition and, especially, the diversity within that history. The heart of my response, however, is my interaction with his critique of Ryrie’s sine qua non.³ Here I list areas of disagreement in defense of Ryrie’s essentials. I conclude with a brief proposal for the future of the debate between traditional and progressive dispensationalists both within and outside the Dispensational Study Group (DSG).

BLAISING’S THESIS AND ARGUMENT

Blaising’s thesis is that progressive dispensationalism “constitutes a development of American dispensationalism that brings a different perspective to traditional themes while maintaining continuity with earlier dispensationalism, even invoking some principles obscured by intervening generations.”⁴ Blaising develops his thesis in three sections. In the first, he discusses the roots of American dispensationalism and surveys the previous stages or developments within the tradition over the past century. This allows him to show how the tradition historically has experienced change in the process of self-examination and self-definition. His survey also allows him to identify key themes that have characterized the tradition throughout the various stages of its development.

¹ Craig A. Blaising, “Classical, Traditional, Progressive: Validity of Labels in Distinguishing Types of Dispensationalism,” (paper presented at the 63rd annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Francisco, CA, 16 November 2011). I want to thank Prof. Phil Lueck, moderator of the Dispensational Study Group, for the invitation to present this paper.

² In preparation for my response I spoke with Craig Blaising about the substance of his presentation. He said his intent was to reprise his earlier essay “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 13–34. While my response focuses on this essay, it also interacts with his other publications on defining dispensationalism.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 38–41. “The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist’s consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well” (41).

⁴ Blaising, “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” 15; see also 29–30.
In the second section, Blaising gives an extended critique of the “revised” or “essentialist” expression of American dispensationalism represented by Charles Ryrie. Focusing on Ryrie’s three essentials, Blaising sees these as forcing a definition on dispensationalism that is too parochial. Specifically, Ryrie’s essentials represent changes that are outside the mainstream of the tradition and they omit characteristics that have marked the previous stages. By exposing what he sees as the deficiencies in Ryrie’s essentials, Blaising lays the groundwork for more recent developments within the American tradition.

In his third and final section Blaising gives something of an apologetic for these recent developments. He explains that a growing dissatisfaction with the essentialist approach and recent advances in our understanding of hermeneutics and the theological method have coalesced into a new form of dispensationalism. This new form is labeled progressive, because it revisits the issues on how the periods or epochs within God’s progressive revelation relate to one another. In short, Blaising argues that progressive dispensationalism represents a recent development within American dispensationalism that returns to forms and themes found in earlier stages, introduces others, all in an effort to capture the essence.

**BLAISING’S PRESUPPOSITIONS**

Overall, Blaising’s argument rests on three presuppositions. The first is that there is a core set of beliefs or essence that unites and defines American dispensationalism. It is this core set of beliefs that identifies the system and distinguishes it from others. The second presupposition, related to the first, is that there has been essential unity on the core beliefs among those who identify themselves as dispensationalists. The third presupposition is that diversity exists within the system. This diversity does not threaten the core beliefs nor frustrate identifying the system or those within it. Thus, the search for definition involves identifying amidst the diversity those core beliefs that represent and give coherence to the system.

**AREAS OF AGREEMENT**

Agreement on the History

I find myself in agreement with a number of points Blaising raises in his essay. With Blaising I agree that dispensationalism continues to undergo systematizing and development. Blaising’s survey of this development within American dispensationalism is well documented and convincing. Also, I basically concur with Blaising’s classification of the various stages within American dispensationalism.

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5 Ibid., 29–30.


9 Ibid., 13.
this development. His reflects similar classifications by traditional dispensationalists. I say “basically” in that we both see Ryrie as representing a distinct stage, though we differ on how we label and evaluate that stage.

Agreement on Specific Developments

I also stand with Blaising in applauding many of the developments that have taken place. As one example, the teaching found in the classical stage that salvation was by faith plus sacrifice in the Mosaic economy and by faith alone in the present is a case in point. In their attempt to explain the function of OT sacrifices and the forgiveness of sins, classical dispensationalists created a conflict with other texts. Arguing that justification under the Law was by faith plus sacrifice appears to run counter to Paul’s argument in Romans 4. Paul declares that both Abraham and David were justified by faith alone apart from works, including works of the Law. In that OT sacrifices were prescribed by Moses, they were by definition a work of the Law and, according to Paul, excluded as a basis for justification.

This teaching by classical dispensationalists has opened dispensationalism to the charge of teaching two ways of salvation. As such, this charge has been used as a club to attack the system and has given aid and comfort to its critics. Fortunately, subsequent dispensationalists have addressed the problem and have championed a position in harmony with the larger context on justification and the analogy of faith.

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11 Blaising, “Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists,” 275; Blaising, “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” 28. The charge is that dispensationalism teaches salvation by faith plus works in the Mosaic economy and by faith alone in the present economy. Support for this is found in the note in the Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford, 1909) on John 1:17, where John contrasts the law given by Moses and the grace that came with Jesus Christ, “the point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ” (1115, n. 2). See Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 105–122.


13 See for example, Michael Williams, This World is not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism, (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2003), 206–11.

grace alone through faith alone can legitimately be said to describe the system, effectively countering the charge against it.

Agreement on Diversity

Also with Blaising, I agree that diversity exists within the ranks of those of us who call ourselves dispensationalists. Such diversity is seen, for instance, in the way contemporary dispensationalists understand the OT covenants and their relationship to the church, how they interpret the kingdom parables, or how they apply the Sermon on the Mount. This diversity in the interpretation of specific themes and texts is expected in a theological tradition that continues to undergo development. As Blaising notes, diversity reminds us that wisdom will not die with any of us and drives us back to the text.

Agreement on the Viability of Dispensationalism

Perhaps what most encouraged me about Blaising’s essay was his unapologetic identification of himself as a dispensationalist. Within the academy at least, I sense dispensationalism no longer enjoys the position it once held. The pendulum appears to be swinging more toward a salvation-historical system or toward covenant theology than toward dispensationalism. As well, a few key voices within conservative evangelical scholarship view dispensationalism as something of a foil to be singled out and criticized. Thus, to hear a prominent evangelical scholar identify himself as a dispensationalist, stand up against its critics, and make an argument for the overall viability of the system compared with other theological expressions is refreshing, to say the least.

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AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT

While I agree with much of what Blaising has written, disagreements of course remain. The most significant of these revolve around his criticism of Ryrie’s sine qua non. I will focus my response on those areas. As a point of clarification, I understand a sine qua non is an essential tenet that defines a system and distinguishes it from other systems. By definition, then, a sine qua non must identify what is essential to a system and, at the same time, set it apart from other systems. With that in mind, I will list each essential, give Blaising’s critique, and then give my response.

The Doxological Purpose of Creation and History

Blaising’s Critique

I begin with the doxological purpose or goal of creation and history. Blaising questions whether this can be claimed as a defining characteristic of dispensationalism. His initial concern is that a doxological purpose is not specifically identified in the earlier stages in American dispensationalism. He argues that earlier dispensationalists identified either Christ or eschatology as the unifying theme of the Bible and the goal of history. As such, Ryrie’s doxological center actually changes the definition of dispensationalism rather than distills its essence from the previous periods.

Beyond this, Blaising sees Ryrie’s doxological purpose as co-opting the goal of creation and history that covenant theologians have long championed. Citing the Westminster Confession, Blaising argues that covenant theology from its beginning has had this doxological goal as the center of its system. That being true, dispensationalism cannot rightly claim this goal as a sine qua non or defining essence that distinguishes it from other systems.

My Response

While classical dispensationalists may not have used doxological language, their focus on Christology and eschatology as the goal of history certainly reflects the concept. To say that history looks forward to Christ ruling from Jerusalem in the future millennium with all under his power and authority and this rule foreshadowing the redemption of creation in the eternal state sounds doxological. Thus, identifying a doxological goal for creation and history appears consistent with the classical stage.

The real problem, as Blaising notes, is that both traditional dispensationalists and covenant theologians have identified God’s glory as the overriding theme of Scripture and the goal of

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19 Some of the items Blaising lists as characteristics are shared by other theological systems outside of dispensationalism and, therefore, cannot be considered distinguishing features. See, for example, Blaising’s list in “The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 13–21.


21 Ibid., n. 49.

22 Blaising allows that a doxological theme united the different dispensations in Darby’s system (“Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists,” 264).
history. Blaising argues that this fact alone disqualifies it as a sine qua non. What must be determined, however, is whether this goal actually represents covenant theology as it arguably does dispensationalism. If it does, then a doxological goal cannot be a sine qua non of dispensationalism.

Blaising notes that covenant theologians have traditionally linked their doxological purpose with the covenant of grace and God’s plan of redemption. He acknowledges that by making this connection, covenant theologians seemingly limit God’s glory to the salvation of the elect and, by implication, the condemnation of the non-elect. As such, other aspects of God’s work in history, for example, the pre-fall world or the redemption of creation, appear unaccounted for within their system. To restate the point, their system appears to account as doxological only those elements that can be directly tied to personal redemption.

Blaising adds, however, that several covenant theologians have recently expanded their understanding of God’s doxological goal to include these additional elements. By doing this they are able to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how God is glorified. So the question that remains is this. Does this expanded understanding of God’s purposes represent the majority position within covenant theology? If it does, then a doxological goal cannot be a sine qua non of dispensationalism. However, if it does not, then the case can be made that doxology characterizes dispensationalism in a way that it does not characterize covenant theology as taught by the majority within that system.

A Consistent Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic

Blaising’s Critique

Moving on to a consistent grammatical-historical interpretation, Blaising again questions whether this is a distinguishing mark of dispensationalism. Blaising argues that earlier dispensationalists were open to a spiritual interpretation of the text and only championed a consistent literal hermeneutic for prophecy. In addition, he notes that many non-


24 Blaising, “Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue,” 387. For a covenant theologian who embraces a more comprehensive understanding of how God is glorified, specifically including the redemption of creation involving a renewed earth in the eternal state, see Anthony A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 274‒87.


dispensationalists during the classical period eschewed a spiritual hermeneutic. As such, Ryrie’s identification of a consistent grammatical-historical interpretation as a defining essence does not represent what previous dispensationalists practiced. Moreover, it fails to take into account the interpretive practices of earlier non-dispensationalists.

However, Blaising adds, even if a case can be made that this was a distinguishing essence of previous periods, such is not the case today. Recent developments in hermeneutics and biblical theology have exposed complexities in the interpretative process not previously recognized. Coupled with this is the growing rapprochement between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists on the meaning and use of the grammatical-historical method. The upshot is that both dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists today agree on the definition and importance of a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Consequently, it is no longer viable to identify a consistent grammatical-historical method as the exclusive domain of dispensationalism.

Furthermore, Blaising argues that progressive dispensationalism has developed a better, more nuanced hermeneutic than the one championed by Ryrie, since it takes into account these recent developments. Designated “complementary,” this hermeneutic sees the NT writers introducing meaning in the OT that goes beyond the grammatical-historical sense of the OT text, but does not do away with that sense. Instead, this new meaning complements or expands the meaning found in the OT. As such, Blaising adds, the NT writers see a present, partial fulfilling by the church prophecies in the OT given to national Israel. Thus, progressives see a greater continuity between the Old and New Testaments without sacrificing the meaning of the OT text or the place of national Israel in the fulfillment of OT prophecy.

My Response

Without question these recent developments in hermeneutics and biblical theology have forced interpreters on all sides of the debate to think through their respective systems. Yet, the historical and hermeneutical issues can be assessed in a way that supports Ryrie’s interpretive method as a valid and distinguishing feature of the system. Turning to the hermeneutics of classical dispensationalists, it would seem that the emphasis with their hermeneutic, though not exclusively, was on a consistent literal interpretation. This was certainly true with their interpretation OT prophecy, as Blaising acknowledges.

32 Ibid., 381–82.
So, while they allowed for and used a non-literal method with certain texts, e.g., seeing symbols behind the OT tabernacle, classical dispensationalists saw the importance of a literal hermeneutic and viewed a literal interpretation of prophecy as necessary and essential to their system. Thus, although Ryrie’s consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutic expands the application of the principle to the entire canon, it appears to capture the essence of the classical system.

Turning to the contemporary evangelical landscape, I find Blaising’s contention that dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists today agree on a grammatical-historical hermeneutic somewhat perplexing. Non-dispensationalists certainly recognize the validity of the principle, but they do not appear to embrace it as the exclusive method in their practice. In particular, their interpretation of prophecy, apocalyptic, and specifically the use of the Old in the New appears to be other than a straightforward application of the grammatical-historical method. Even the non-dispensational respondents to Blaising’s earlier article seemingly affirm this fact.  

Thus, the issue is not so much recognizing the validity of a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, but its consistent application. Although traditional dispensationalists may falter in their consistent application of the grammatical-historical method, nevertheless they embrace it as their essential hermeneutic and as necessary to their system. While non-dispensationalists recognize its validity, they do not appear to be committed to this hermeneutic as an exclusive method. Consequently, the case can be made that a consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutic is a sine qua non of dispensationalism.

This of course inevitably raises the question about the relationship between a grammatical-historical interpretation and the complementary hermeneutic embraced by progressive dispensationalists. Progressives have gone to great lengths to distance their complementary hermeneutic from sensus plenior, and understandably so. Locating meaning outside the text and words of the human author, as sensus plenior does, requires a hermeneutic that is necessarily in conflict with a grammatical-historical method. By definition, the grammatical-historical method locates meaning precisely in the words used by the author in their context.

From a traditional dispensational perspective and in spite of all that has been written in defense of a complementary hermeneutic, the distinction between it and sensus plenior is difficult to see. This is particularly true with the use of the OT in the New. To say that whatever additional meaning the NT author finds in the OT text does not jeopardize the meaning of the OT text is commendable. It endeavors to preserve the meaning of the OT text. At the same time, if the NT

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35 See the discussion in R. Bruce Compton, “Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant,” Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal 8 (2003), 40–44.
writer is discovering additional meaning in the text that the OT writer did not understand or intend by the words he used in their context, how is this different from sensus plenior?\(^{37}\)

To restate the point, arguing as progressives do that the NT authors identify additional meaning outside the words of the OT text raises questions about a complementary hermeneutic and the grammatical-historical interpretation of the text. What seems clear from all of this is that progressive dispensationalists and traditional dispensationalists disagree on what constitutes a grammatical-historical method.\(^{38}\)

The Distinction between Israel and the Church

*Blaising’s Critique*

The third and final sine qua non, the distinction between Israel and the church, receives a more favorable treatment. Blaising concludes that of Ryrie’s three essentials, this distinction represents the true essence of dispensationalism. He identifies the distinction as the one constant that has characterized American dispensationalism throughout its history, distinguishing it from all other theological systems.\(^{39}\) By recognizing this distinction, Blaising adds, dispensationalism allows the OT to speak with its own voice. As such, it guards the integrity of OT prophecy and God’s promises to national, ethnic Israel. And, it presents a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the fulfillment of those promises with national Israel in the eschaton.\(^{40}\)

Blaising notes, however, that this sine qua non has undergone significant changes. What began as a distinction between a heavenly people and an earthly people in God’s plan of redemption is now understood as a distinction specifically between national Israel and the church.\(^{41}\) As well, the distinction initially was viewed as absolute and eternal. The heavenly and earthly people of God were separate and distinct not only in history, but also in the eternal state.\(^{42}\) More recently, however, these absolute and eternal distinctions have been mitigated, yet more so in progressive dispensationalism than in traditional.\(^{43}\)

For Blaising and a number of other progressives the distinction between Israel and the church is not to be viewed as an anthropological distinction between two separate peoples of God. Rather the distinction is to be understood primarily in salvation-historical categories as progressive


\(^{40}\) Blaising, “Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue,” 392–93.


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 20, 24–25.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 33; Blaising and Bock, “Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue,” 377–78.
stages in the unfolding plan of redemption of a single people of God.\(^4^4\) In the OT, God called out the nation of Israel as his elect people and gave the nation both spiritual and material/physical promises in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants.\(^4^5\) Because of the nation’s rejection of her Messiah at his First Advent, Blaising argues, God put the fulfilling of his promises with national Israel temporarily in abeyance.\(^4^6\)

In the present, Blaising adds, God is calling out a people from both Gentiles and Jews as part of a new entity, the church. Blaising is careful to note that the church does not supplant national Israel, as in covenant theology.\(^4^7\) Yet, Blaising sees some measure of continuity between the two in that the church partially fulfills in the present the spiritual promises God gave to national Israel in the past. The partial fulfilling of these promises, Blaising argues, is based on the fact that the Gentiles were viewed in the OT as having a share in God’s promises to national Israel.\(^4^8\)

In the kingdom, Blaising sees the distinction between Israel and the church further diminished. While God fulfills all his promises to national Israel at that time, the Gentile nations and the church fully share in those promises.\(^4^9\) Finally, Blaising concludes that in the new heavens and earth of the eternal state the distinction is effectively erased in that all believers are incorporated within the body of Christ as the one people of God.\(^5^0\)

**My Response**

As a traditional dispensationalist, I find myself agreeing with a number of points Blaising makes in his distinction between Israel and the church. The distinction between the two is not between a heavenly people and an earthly people, as in classical dispensationalism. The distinction is between national, ethnic Israel and the church. As well, I see some mitigation of the distinction between the two as God unfolds his plan of redemption. Certainly the church and the Gentile nations will fully enjoy the blessings of the millennial kingdom, when God fulfills his covenant promises with national Israel. In addition, I see one people of God in the eternal state, even


\(^4^5\) Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (September 2001), 443–446.


though, according to John’s description of the New Jerusalem, the identities of Israel and the church are in some sense retained, a point Blaising acknowledges.\footnote{Blaising and Bock, “Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue,” 384. When describing the new heavens and earth of the eternal state, John refers to the city of Jerusalem as the “bride of Christ” (21:9–10). Taking “bride” as a metonymy of association, John has in view the inhabitants of the city and speaks of them as a single entity. At the same time, John also refers to “people” of God (21:3) and “kings” and “nations” (21:24–26) as populating the new earth, all of which argues for diversity within unity. As well, John pictures the gates of Jerusalem as having the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (21:12) and the foundation stones of the city as bearing the names of the 12 apostles (21:14). Assuming the gates and the foundation stones symbolize respectively Israel and the church, the two groups in some way at least appear to maintain their individual identities.}

With Blaising, I recognize the challenge of how to define God’s temporary hiatus in fulfilling his promises to national Israel. To use postponement language as traditional dispensationalism often does raises questions about God’s sovereignty and immutability. With many traditional dispensationalists, I affirm that the nation’s rejection of the Messiah and God’s turning to the Gentiles to call out a people for himself are all part of God’s single, unchanging plan. Blaising prefers defining this hiatus as a temporary abeyance or suspension,\footnote{Blaising and Bock, “Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: Dialogue and Assessment,” 383.} but the differences between “postpone” and “suspend” appear minimal. The nation’s rejection of the Messiah has triggered God’s temporary halt in the fulfilling of his promises to the nation, all according to his eternal plan and purpose.

Perhaps the real issue dividing traditional and progressive dispensationalists on the distinction is over the definition of the church. Both traditional and progressives identify the church as a new entity in God’s redemptive activities, distinct from God’s redemptive activities with national, ethnic Israel.\footnote{Blaising, “The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 15–16.} Both have the church beginning on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, and both see Spirit baptism as a new ministry that initiates and builds the church.\footnote{Ibid., 16–17, 21. Blaising appears to equate Spirit baptism with Spirit indwelling and sees both beginning at Pentecost (“The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” 47–50).} Finally, both describe the church as the invisible body of Christ and have the church raptured prior to the Tribulation judgments.\footnote{Ibid., 19.} Yet significant differences remain.

Some progressive dispensationalists go beyond Blaising and see the relationship between Israel and the church sufficiently blurred in the present that they can speak of the church as the new Israel.\footnote{David L. Turner, “The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1–22:5: Consummation of a Biblical Continuum,” in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 288; Alan Hultberg, “A Case for the Prewrath Rapture,” in Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation, 2nd ed., ed. Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 113–14.} As well, Blaising and other progressives propose that those saved in the Tribulation are part of the church. In other words, although the church is raptured prior to the Tribulation, nevertheless, those saved during the Tribulation are said to be added to the church.\footnote{Craig Blaising, “A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” in Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation, 2nd ed., ed. Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 69–71; idem, “A Pretribulation Response,” 155–56.} Finally,
Blaising and others apparently expand the church in the eternal state to include all believers.\textsuperscript{58} Reinforcing the unity of believers in the eschaton is salutary, but broadening the definition of the church in this way raises some important questions.

Calling the church the new Israel raises the question whether there is, in fact, any real distinction between the two. Such expressions have a long history in covenant theology to support the church’s supplanting national Israel in the fulfilling of God’s promises. I grant there are a number of verses in the NT that draw connections between national Israel and the church. The debate is over the nature of those connections and what they reveal about the relationship between the two. Traditional dispensationalists have argued that these verses can and should be interpreted where the distinction between national Israel and the church is maintained.

For example, Galatians 3:29 is one text where the connection between national Israel and the church appears clear. After all, Paul refers to believers in the church as descendants of Abraham. Covenant theologians have consistently used this verse as a proof text to support the church supplanting the nation and becoming the new, spiritual Israel of God.\textsuperscript{59} However, Paul appears to confine the relationship to the specific promise that in Abraham’s seed all the nations will be blessed and then links this promise to the gospel.\textsuperscript{60} In short, Paul appears to limit the church’s relationship to Abraham to the one promise involving the gospel of Christ. In what sense, then, does this make the church the new Israel?

Furthermore, if those saved in the Tribulation are joined to the church, as Blaising argues, why is the church raptured prior to the Tribulation? What purpose does it serve for God to deliver some in the church from this unprecedented period of divine judgment only to have others in the church live through it? The question is not are there believers on the earth during the Tribulation. The question is, are these believers members of the church? If the answer is yes, then what is the point of a pre-tribulation rapture? Blaising’s answer is that a pre-tribulation Rapture will strengthen the faith of believers in the Tribulation.\textsuperscript{61} But that would be true, even if believers in the Tribulation were not part of the church.

More to the point, if Spirit baptism which forms the church is a new work, how is it that all believers eventually experience this ministry of the Spirit? Why begin this new work at Pentecost if all believers, both before and after Pentecost, eventually partake? I grant the NT teaches that all believers, both in the OT and NT, are united by the Spirit to the death and resurrection of


\textsuperscript{59} Gal 3:29 is one of several key texts in Waltke’s defense of the church replacing national Israel in the fulfillment of God’s promises (“A Response,” 331–59).


\textsuperscript{61} Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 72.
Christ at conversion. But the NT appears to distinguish the Spirit’s work in uniting believers to Christ’s death and resurrection and the Spirit’s work in placing believers in the body of Christ in the formation of the church. In other words, if being united to Christ’s death and resurrection by the Spirit and being placed in Christ’s body by the Spirit are synonymous, how can there be a new work of the Spirit placing believers in the body of Christ on the day of Pentecost?

CONCLUSION AND PROPOSAL

The key sticking point that continues to divide traditional and progressive dispensationalists appears to be the grammatical-historical interpretation of the text and especially the use of the OT in the NT. In a sense all the other issues in the debate seem to revolve around how the NT writers handled the OT. Does the NT’s use of the OT force us to see meaning beyond what is found in the OT text? A yes answer to this question is what informs progressive dispensationalists on the relationship between Israel and the church and on the fulfillment of Israel’s promises in the present and in the future. Thus, the task before us is to provide a fresh analysis of these texts to see which side can best explain the use of the OT in the NT and to do this as part of the larger discussion on the relationship between Israel and the church.

I have benefitted immeasurably from the writings of Craig Blaising and other progressive dispensationalists. These writings have forced me to reexamine the text and grapple with the issues on which we disagree. In this way they have sharpened my thinking and have helped me understand the issues more clearly. I hope the interaction between traditional and progressive dispensationalists continues, both within the DSG and outside, and that it continues with the same gracious spirit that has marked much of its history. Such interaction can only help us in our understanding of the text and in our proclamation and defense of the faith.

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62 While being joined to Christ’s death and resurrection by the Spirit and being placed in the body of Christ by the Spirit are both described in terms of Spirit baptism, the two works of the Spirit appear separate and distinct. The Spirit’s uniting believers spiritually to Christ’s death and resurrection at conversion is experiential and appears necessary for all believers, both in the OT and the NT (Rom 5:15–21; 6:1–11; 8:9–17; 1 Cor 15:20–24; Gal 3:27; Col 2:8–15). The Spirit’s placing believers in Christ’s spiritual or mystical body, forming the church, is judicial or non-experiential. This work began at Pentecost and appears limited to the present dispensation (Acts 1:5; 11:15–16; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4–6).