

ism). Thomas Ice then considers the so-called golden years of dispensationalism, from C. I. Scofield to Hal Lindsey (1900–1980). Much attention is given here to the Scofield Reference Bible and to Dallas Theological Seminary. Darrell Bock provides the final chapter, charting the rise of progressive dispensationalism within the larger field, starting in the 1980s. The editors conclude the book with a final retrospect and prospect. They tie together the long history of dispensational forms of Christian thought and end on a hopeful note that dispensationalism will continue to grow and develop in the coming years.

The book has strengths and weaknesses. Its primary strength is its unique status as an academic treatment of historical approaches to dispensational thought. Not many works of this nature have been published. As a corollary, the book provides dispensational thinkers some cover in making the case that dispensationalism is not merely a recent aberration feverishly dreamed up by a convalescing J. N. Darby. There are, however, a few drawbacks to the work. The academic rigor of the essays is of varying quality, creating a certain unevenness that is often difficult to avoid in a multi-author work. Another criticism would be a certain inconsistency in defining what actually constitutes dispensational thought. A book of this nature can easily become a “Where’s Waldo” of church history, straining to find elusive figures and arguments, perhaps finding them where they do not clearly exist. This is not to say that the book ultimately fails to accomplish its objective, only that at times a certain vagueness or latitude in what really constitutes the dispensational approach offsets the book’s piquancy to some degree. All that notwithstanding, I commend the book to readers, who, I think, will find here much of value in discerning the historical forebears to the dispensational approach to Scripture.

Kyle C. Dunham
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Allen Park, MI

Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture, edited by Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022. ix + 266 pp. \$21.99.

The editors of this volume are Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, who also worked together on *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (B&H, 2016). Parker serves as assistant editor of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* while Lucas is pastor of teaching and preaching at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. As for the book’s contributors, representing Covenant Theology is Michael S. Horton, the J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California. Writing on behalf of Progressive Covenantalism is Stephen J. Wellum, Professor of Christian Theology at the Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary. Representing Progressive Dispensationalism is Darrell Bock, Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. Finally, Traditional Dispensationalism is represented by Mark Snoberger, Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.

This text belongs to IVP Academic's series of Spectrum Multiview Books and explores the four most popular evangelical systems of theology: covenantal theology, progressive covenantalism, progressive dispensationalism, and traditional dispensationalism. The primary goal of this work is to foster reflection regarding one's interpretive approach and hermeneutic for linking the Old Testament and New Testament to determine whether their currently held system of theology is the most biblical and faithful to the whole canon. In terms of structure, the views are ordered from what the editors consider to have the most to least continuity between the testaments. Then, each author provides a rebuttal chapter addressing the other three presentations where the authors both engage with one another as well as clarify perceived misunderstandings of their own view.

Horton's stated goal of his chapter is to explain the covenant theology (CT) framework, which he claims is the architectural design of Scripture itself. He ventures to defend this claim first by providing the history of CT, which he does primarily through highlighting the distinction between law and gospel. He spends most of his chapter explaining the heart of CT: the theological covenants of works, grace, and redemption. He expresses that from a hermeneutical standpoint the NT takes priority because it is the divinely inspired interpretation of the OT. Horton argues that the one covenant of grace, stretching from Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 22:21, provides continuity across Scripture.

Wellum presents a *via media* to the widely held covenantal and dispensational theologies through progressive covenantalism (PC), which holds that the biblical covenants are not simply a unifying theme of Scripture but are rather the backbone of Scripture's entire storyline. He notes that PC is understood using a grammatical-literary-historical exegesis and that the NT definitively interprets the OT due to progressive revelation. Wellum explains that PC demonstrates that the Bible presents a plurality of covenants that progressively reveal God's single redemptive plan for his one people which reach their fulfillment in Christ.

Bock explains that progressive dispensationalism (PD) seeks to reintroduce continuity to dispensational theology by highlighting how the covenants of promise have advanced or progressed in their fulfillment through Jesus's initial coming and future return. He clarifies the progressive goal in PD is different than that of PC by viewing God's promises as building upon one another rather than redirecting one another. Bock notes that PD holds to what he calls a "complementary hermeneutic," which maintains the NT complements what the OT reveals without discarding original revelation.

Snoberger argues that the success of traditional dispensationalism (TD) is its established *mitte* (i.e., a unifying theological center) for the

Bible that addresses the OT with natural readings that facilitate biblical unity. Snoeberger advocates for what he calls an “originalist” hermeneutic, which asserts that interpretation of texts ought to be carried out with “strict intentionalism” that honors the authority of the original intent of the authors, allowing the Bible to speak for itself. Snoeberger states that the overarching continuity of Scripture is the manifold government of God expressed through divinely appointed dispensations.

This text successfully facilitates valuable engagement with these four systematic theological views. Each author expresses in his own way that this is an in-house discussion within evangelicalism. Resultingly, this book is primarily geared toward those who are already familiar with the debate. This is not an introductory book that provides an entry-level explanation of each view. Positively, the views are represented by experts (and even founders), and thus this book is an excellent tool for clarification and deeper understanding of each perspective. As the contributors are experts and have written extensively on the subject, some of what they have included in this text is borrowed from previous works (both admittedly and evidently).

Though it is objectively clear that each expert successfully presents the view they represent, in this type of text subjectivity inevitably causes the reader to prefer a certain style of argumentation over another. Horton’s chapter stands on the shoulders of the Reformers and other covenant theologians past, resulting in a strongly historical essay. Wellum’s writing style is highly organized and marches forward with a clearly marked battle plan, which is enjoyable for the reader while sifting through thick material. Bock’s chapter reads like the writing of a scholar who knows his material front to back and has probably written about it in his sleep. Snoeberger offers fresh insight and perspective into a theological system that has carried with it many misconceptions.

However, where preference in writing style of the chapters might sway the reader, the rebuttals provide an opportunity to evaluate if a certain view can stand up against real criticism, regardless of how it is presented. Without question, the view that receives the most criticism is the traditional dispensational view, which has historically also received such a response. Though every contributor on the whole is rather charitable with the other, there is a notable shift in the criticism toward Snoeberger and TD, particularly from Wellum, who used multiple exclamation points, scare quotes, and condescending remarks. This is surprising, as Wellum boasts a grammatical-literary-historical-canonical method of interpretation for his *via media* and explains that in his view there is a distinction between Israel and the church as well as adherence to believer’s baptism. One would not expect such strong opposition to a system from which his view significantly borrows. Naturally, the two systems in “the middle,” PC and PD, have the least strong criticism for one another, primarily defending why their nuances are more scripturally faithful. The representatives of PC and PD reflect similar critiques of CT that address disagreements regarding the presence of the theological covenants and the unification of Israel and the church. Despite the

uneven criticism, the rebuttal section is rather refreshing, as the authors sincerely attempt to engage the others while honoring them as fellow believers.

I began reading this text hailing from a traditional dispensationalism perspective, and after reading I remain convinced my systematic view is the most faithful to Scripture. Horton's chapter utilized arguments that can only be identified as conjecture. Though he is no doubt a respectable scholar, he appears to rely much on the historical general respect of Covenant Theology and does not convincingly defend key areas where he makes great claims that significantly differ from the other views. One point that stands out is an illustration he makes to argue that Adam and Eve are clear examples of the covenant of works because they were called to found a holy priesthood from their Edenic capital in which Genesis 1 serves as a preamble to the treaty with Yahweh, the great king. Horton's chapter masterfully explains his view, but it did not convincingly defend key differing arguments like paedobaptism, the unification of Israel and the church, and the existence of the three theological covenants of CT.

Wellum and Bock both aspire to an admirable goal, aiming to bridge the gap between covenantal and dispensational theologies. However, their nuances end up coming across as compromises rather than improvements upon both the end-of-the-spectrum views. Similarly, while the editors do a fair job introducing all four perspectives, they both hold to the progressive covenantalism view. The careful reader can detect certain biases in their chapters as well. Though Snoeberger's presentation and defense of traditional dispensationalism is rather personalized, it remains faithful to the key tenets of traditional dispensationalism. The only real issue I took with Snoeberger is that he wrote from the defensive much of the time. Nevertheless, Horton, Wellum, and Bock have not successfully persuaded me toward their viewpoint and Snoeberger engages with the conversation in a way that keeps me convinced that traditional dispensationalism is the most faithful theological system.

Those looking for an engaging skirmish amongst systematic theologians may likely remain disappointed. However, for readers who are seeking a highly academic work that provides a forum for experts from different perspectives, this text will deliver.

Jordan B. Polverini
Southern California Seminary, El Cajon, CA

Dispensational Hermeneutics: Interpretation Principles that Guide Dispensationalism's Understanding of the Bible's Storyline, by Michael J. Vlach. Cary, NC: Theological Studies Press, 2023. 111 pp. \$29.95.

Michael J. Vlach (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) served on The Master's Seminary faculty from 2006–2021. In 2021, he