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THE CONTINUITY OF SCRIPTURE AND ESCHATOLOGY: KEY HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES

DAVID L. TURNER

Heated polemical debates over eschatology among evangelicals are deplorable. Covenant theologians are not necessarily "allegorizers," and neither are dispensationalists necessarily "hyperliteralists." The NT use of the OT and the complex nature of the present and future aspects of God's kingdom are crucial topics for future discussion. Such future discussion should focus upon the exegesis of key OT and NT texts, not upon vague or abstract hermeneutical issues.

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INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH in the current evangelical literature dealing with eschatology reveals about forty recurring issues in the argumentation. Logic, exegesis, and a brotherly spirit are sometimes lacking in this debate, and often the focus is on peripheral rather than central issues.

This study has isolated three issues which are believed to be central. These issues are (1) the practice (not theory) of literal hermeneutics, (2) the NT use of the OT, and (3) the present and future aspects of the kingdom. And beneath all three lies an even more basic one: the continuity of Scripture in progressive revelation. This study is offered in order to focus further debate upon the central issues and to encourage a courteous spirit among evangelicals who enter the debate.

THE CONTINUITY OF SCRIPTURE AND LITERAL HERMENEUTICS

Valid and Invalid Approaches

Writers of various eschatological stripes have commonly expressed the view that differences in eschatological systems arise "primarily out of the distinctive method employed by each in the interpretation of

Scripture."[1] Though there is a degree of truth in such a statement, it is simplistic. One's consistency in taking biblical language literally will have an obvious influence upon one's theology, but the reverse is also true—one's theology will have an obvious influence upon his hermeneutics. It is mistaken to speak of either a "literal" or a "spiritualizing" hermeneutic as a purely inductive, overall approach to Scripture. To speak in such generalities obscures the real issue: the interpretation of specific biblical passages. Any study of Scripture involves a certain degree of exegetical, theological, and hermeneutical preunderstanding. Even the cultural and historical circumstances of the interpreter tend to sway his understanding of Scripture, as Gundry has appropriately warned: "We as Christian exegetes and theologians are susceptible to influences from the moods and conditions of our times, and especially so in our eschatologies."[2]

All of this is not to say that hermeneutics is unimportant, or that a consistent literal hermeneutic is unattainable. Indeed, such a hermeneutic is essential in handling the whole Bible, including poetry, prophecy, and figurative language. Properly used, the result of a literal hermentic is not "wooden letterism," but sensitivity to figures of speech.[3] However, in the exegesis of specific biblical passages, the exegete must realize that his use of a literal hermeneutic is preconditioned by his theological presuppositions. The same holds true for the practicioner of a "spiritualizing" hermeneutic. It is common for dispensationalists to accuse nondispensationalists of spiritualizing or allegorizing the Bible, especially the OT, and for covenant theologians to charge dispensationalists with hyperliteralism. As long as the debate is carried on in such vague generalities there will be no progress whatsoever. It is time to heed the advice of Bahnsen:

> The charge of subjective spiritualization or hyperliteralism against any of the three eschatological positions cannot be settled *in general*; rather,

[1]This example comes from the postmillennialist Loraine Boettner, "Christian Hope and a Millennium," *Christianity Today* 2:25 (Sept 29, 1958) 13. Similar statements implying the absolute precedence of hermeneutics to theology may be found in such dispensationalists as Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 86 and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 1. The amillennialist Floyd Hamilton expressed the same view in *The Basis of Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942) 38.

[2]Stanley Gundry, "Hermeneutics or *Zeitgeist* as the Determining Factor in the History of Eschatologies?," *JETS* 20 (1977) 55. See also J. I. Packer's perceptive discussion of the hermeneutical circle, "Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority," *Themelios* 1 (1975) 3–12.

[3]See any textbook of biblical hermeneutics for support of this statement. Alva J. McClain (*The Greatness of the Kingdom* [Chicago: Moody, 1968] 139) did not exaggerate when he said, "This method, as its adherents have explained times without number, leaves room for all the devices and nuances of language, including the use of figure, metaphor, simile, symbol, and even allegory."

the opponents must get down to hand-to-hand exegetical combat on *particular* passages and phrases.[4]

The Question of Consistency

In their attempt to discover the continuity of Scripture dispensationalists have consistently attempted to utilize a literal hermeneutic.[5] In their view this is the only means whereby the continuity of Scripture may be discovered. Of course, as nondispensationalists have been quick to point out, dispensationalists are not always consistent in their literal approach.[6] Nevertheless, dispensationalism avows a consistent literal hermeneutic which is applied to all of Scripture, regardless of whether the Scripture being studied is prophetic, poetic, narrative, or didactic in nature. Anything less is branded as a dual hermeneutic and even as allegorizing.[7]

Another perspective on the continuity of Scripture is exemplified by covenant theologians, whether historic premillennialists, postmillennialists, or amillennialists. In this approach the emphasis is upon the NT use of the OT as the inspired model of hermeneutics.[8] Hermeneutical consistency comes from imitation of the NT use of the OT, not from a consistently literal hermeneutic. It must be emphasized that the approach is not allegorical. Hamilton, an amillennialist, said that

> the literal interpretation of the prophecy is to be accepted unless (a) the passages contain obviously figurative language, or (b) unless the New Testament gives authority for interpreting them in other than a literal sense, or (c) unless a literal interpretation would produce a contradiction with truths, principles, or factual statements contained in non-symbolic books of the New Testament.[9]

[4]Greg Bahnsen, "The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 3 (1976) 57. In view of Bahnsen's advice the present study seeks to identify crucial exegetical issues and encourage their study.

[5]Examples could be multiplied, but see, e.g., Herman Hoyt, "Dispensational Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977) 66–67.

[6]Here may be noted Anthony Hoekema's "An Amillennial Response" to Herman Hoyt in *The Meaning of the Millennium*. Hoekema believes he has found six examples of nonliteral interpretation in Hoyt. He goes on to speak correctly of the "gross oversimplification" that the basic issue in eschatological debates is over literal versus nonliteral hermeneutics (105–7). Actually, Hoekema's six examples relate to exegetical *conclusions*, not hermeneutical *method*.

[7]E.g., see Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 3–4.

[8]E.g., see Hoekema, "An Amillennial Response," 107–8; Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960) 151–53; and P. E. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 9–10.

[9]Floyd Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 53–54.

In response to (a) it should be recognized that a literal hermeneutic should not be abandoned when figurative language is encountered. Indeed, sensitivity to historical, grammatical, and cultural matters is the only way to arrive at the meaning intended by the figure. Hamilton's latter two points get to the heart of the matter—amillennialists believe that the continuity between the OT and NT is sacrificed if prophecy is interpreted literally.

This debate over biblical continuity and hermeneutical consistency may be conveniently illustrated by the dialogue found in *The Meaning of the Millennium*. Here Ladd, Hoekema, and Boettner converge against Hoyt on the matter of hermeneutics.[10] From Ladd's perspective, Hoyt is too literal in his interpretation of NT passages dealing with the kingdom because of his literal view of OT prophecy. Boettner and Hoekema agree with Ladd here, but then charge Ladd with being too literal in his view of Revelation 20. Radmacher's analysis is correct: "the major criticism that Hoekema and Boettner use on Ladd's interpretation of Revelation 20 is the criticism that Ladd uses on Hoyt and dispensational premillennialists."[11] Ladd is caught in the middle—his hermeneutic is not literal enough to satisfy Hoyt, but neither is it "spiritualized" enough to please Hoekema and Boettner!

Conclusion

It would appear that vague generalities about theoretical hermeneutics accomplish very little. The cavalier dismissal of eschatological systems on the sole ground of hermeneutical theory serves only to obscure the more pertinent issues. Advocates of a "dual hermeneutic" cannot be dismissed with the charge of "allegorizing" and neither can dispensationalists be shouted down with the rebuke of being "hyper-literalists." However, hermeneutical *conclusions* on specific issues may be viewed as being inconsistent with one's professed hermeneutical *method*. When there is a discrepancy between the two, both dispensationalists and covenant theologians should take heed.

The main burden of these thoughts on the hermeneutical question is that any profitable debate must focus upon concrete issues, such as the NT use of the OT and the nature of progressive revelation. Here specific passages may be exegeted and profitably debated.

[10] *Meaning of the Millennium*, 47, 54, 94–95, 107.

[11] Earl D. Radmacher, "Differences on the Millennium," *Christianity Today* 22:14 (Apr 7, 1978) 46. Yet Radmacher elsewhere may excessively rely on a literal hermeneutic as the panacea for today's eschatological difficulties. See his "The Current Status of Dispensationalism and its Eschatology" in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 163–76.

THE CONTINUITY OF SCRIPTURE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Two Basic Approaches

Those who hold to some form of covenant theology (whether premillennial, postmillennial, or amillennial) generally emphasize the unity of the Bible by stressing the NT's supposed reinterpretation of the OT. Ladd was probably the most prominent premillennial advocate of this position. He echoed Augustine's famous words, "*Novum testamentum in vetere latet; vetus testamentum in novo patet*" and then added that

> the Old Testament must be interpreted by the New Testament. In principle it is quite possible that the prophecies addressed originally to literal Israel describing physical blessings have their fulfillment exclusively in the spiritual blessings enjoyed by the Church. It is also possible that the Old Testament expectation of a kingdom on earth could be reinterpreted by the New Testament altogether of blessings in the spiritual realm. Therefore our question must be whether the exegesis of the New Testament requires the inclusion of millennial doctrine.[12]

Here one may note that Ladd agrees with amillennialists on hermeneutical principle but goes on to disagree with them on the exegesis of specific NT passages (mainly Revelation 20, though 1 Cor 15:21–28 and Romans 11 are also involved). In another place Ladd stated emphatically that "a millennial doctrine cannot be based on Old Testament prophecies but should be based on the New Testament alone."[13]

At exactly this point dispensationalists part company with covenant theologians. It is their contention that the NT supplies no "reinterpretation" of OT prophecy which would cancel the OT promises to Israel of a future historical kingdom. In their view the NT use of the OT does not radically modify the OT promises to Israel. Hoyt argues that "in passage after passage Ladd insists that the New Testament is interpreting the Old when the New Testament is simply applying a principle found in the Old Testament."[14] Walvoord views

[12]George E. Ladd, "Revelation 20 and the Millennium," *RevExp* 57 (1960) 167. For similar statements see *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 136–42; *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 199, 204–5, 227–28; and *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 8–10.

[13]Ladd, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 32.

[14]Hoyt, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 42–43.

Ladd's reinterpretation approach as tantamount to a contradiction and cancellation of the OT promises.

> The issue . . . is not progressive revelation versus nonprogressive revelation, but rather in progressive revelation there is no contradiction or correction of what was commonly assumed to be the main tenor of OT revelation. Accordingly, the issue is whether the Old Testament teaches a literal fulfillment of specific promises for Israel and whether the New Testament contradicts or supports literal interpretation.[15]

Similarly Feinberg stresses that though the NT uses the OT in a number of ways it does not empty the OT of its valid predictive meaning.[16]

Relative Priority of Old Testament or New Testament

As the two approaches meet head on, it is immediately noted that a crucial issue concerns the priority assigned to the OT or NT in the exegetical method. Thus the whole issue of the nature of progressive revelation lies just below the surface of the debate. Ladd contrasts the two approaches in this manner: "Dispensationalism forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and then fits the New Testament into it. A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament."[17] Hoyt denies Ladd's description of the issues and offers his own instead: "The dispensationalist interprets the New Testament in the light of the Old, whereas the nondispensationalist, it seems, comes to the New Testament with a system of interpretation which is not derived from the Old Testament and superimposes this upon the New Testament."[18] Feinberg argues similarly that a dispensational approach is scientifically inductive and does not, like Ladd, "wipe out the testimony of the Old Testament because of a certain view of the New."[19]

The upshot of all this is that covenant theologians and dispensationalists disagree on the nature of progressive revelation. Each group accuses the other of misinterpreting the NT due to alien presupposi-

[15]John F. Walvoord, "Does the Church Fulfill Israel's Program?" (part 1) *BSac* 137 (1980) 20. Later Walvoord states the issue as "whether progressive revelation ever reverses preceding revelation and denies its validity" (29).

[16]Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views* (3d ed; Chicago: Moody, 1980) 60. It is interesting to note that the disciples' expected literal fulfillment was not denied by Christ in Acts 1. Christ merely told them that the time of the fulfillment was not their concern.

[17]Ladd, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 27. Similarly, see Hoekema, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 107.

[18]Hoyt, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 43.

[19]Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 56; see also 52, 61.

tions. It is a case of conflicting preunderstandings. Yet a legitimate question is raised concerning biblical continuity. If NT reinterpretation reverses, cancels, or seriously modifies OT promises to Israel, one wonders how to define the word "progressive." God's faithfulness to his promises to Israel must also be explained.

Feinberg's point on induction is well taken. It reminds one of the principle of "antecedent theology" popularized by Kaiser.[20] Though not known as a dispensationalist, his insistence that the Bible is an organic unity and that interpreters must not read later revelation back into earlier revelation resembles the dispensationalist's insistence that the NT does not alter the plain meaning of the OT.

A Test Case

One passage Ladd includes in his argument for OT reinterpretation in the NT is the use of Hos 1:10; 2:23 in Rom 9:25–26. In Ladd's view Paul deliberately takes prophecy about the future of Israel and applies it to the church, thus showing that the passage in Hosea is clearly fulfilled in the Christian church.[21] Hoyt responds to this approach with the assertion that Paul is simply applying Hosea's material to the church "for the purpose of explaining something that is true of both."[22] Of course, even Hoyt's analogy view implies some continuity between Israel and the church.

Though Hoyt is correct that Ladd's interpretation is gratuitous, a third view is preferable to Hoyt's. Examination of the context of Romans 9 shows an exclusive reference to Israel until 9:24, where Paul introduces the Gentiles who along with Israel are "vessels of mercy" (9:23). Gentiles are again contrasted with Israel in 9:30–31. However, the overwhelming emphasis of Romans 9 is upon Paul's burden for unbelieving Israel. In 9:27 Paul cites what Isaiah says "concerning Israel." This fits the context of Hosea perfectly. There is thus no evidence that Paul is thinking primarily of the church in Rom 9:25–26. Instead, he is thinking (along the same lines as Hosea) of the present unbelief and future restoration of the nation of Israel.[23]

[20]Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 14–19; and *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 134–40.

[21]Ladd, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 43–44. It ought to be noted that Boettner and Hoekema agree with Ladd's hermeneutic (47, 55).

[22]Hoyt, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 43. Though both Ladd and Hoyt speak of the NT "applying" the OT to the church, Ladd means that the church fulfills the OT and Hoyt means that the church is similar to Israel.

[23]This approach has been argued well by John A. Battle, "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:25–26," *GTJ* 2 (1981) 115–29.

Conclusion

The NT use of the OT is a complex matter deserving much more study. It is encouraging that this appears to be a popular topic for scholarly study at present. At least three courses of action should be pursued as such study proceeds. First, both the covenant theologian and the dispensationalist must sharpen their positions on the NT use of the OT. It appears exceedingly doubtful that the NT reinterprets the OT so as to evaporate the plain meaning of its promises. This comes perilously close to conflicting with such NT passages as Matt 5:18 and John 10:35*b*. On the other hand, it is clear that the NT is not always as literal in its handling of the OT as some dispensationalists might think. Genuine typology and analogy between OT and NT should not be viewed as destructive to the literal fulfillment of the OT promises to Israel, but rather an indication of a greater continuity between Israel and the church than dispensationalists have often been willing to admit.

A second course of action to be pursued is semantic—the clearing up of definitions. Crucial terms such as "literal," "typological," "reinterpretation," and "application" must be defined in a consistent manner agreeable to both groups. For example, what the covenant theologian calls the NT "reinterpretation" of the OT may be viewed by the dispensationalist as NT "application" of the OT. Third, the covenant theologian must beware of a tendency to erase the future of the nation of Israel from Scripture,[24] and the dispensationalist must beware of a tendency to exaggerate the biblical distinctions between Israel and the church.[25] One aspect of the Israel/church question concerns the nature of the kingdom of God, which will be addressed next.

[24]It is encouraging that Anthony A. Hoekema's *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) shows some openness to the future of the nation of Israel upon the new (renewed) earth (23–40, 146–47). Hoekema's well stated "Critique of Dispensationalism" (194–222) deserves serious attention and response from dispensational scholars. Attention should also be drawn to Willem A. Van Gemeren's two part series "Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy," *WTJ* 45 (1983) 132–44; and 46 (1984) 254–97. Van Gemeren's overview of reformed eschatology since Calvin is enlightening. His description of some reformed OT exegesis takes the form of a parody upon the familiar words of Augustine: "the Old is by the New restricted and the New is on the Old inflicted" (269). He calls upon the reformed community to realize that the NT does not so much "fulfill" the OT as to "confirm" that "all the expectations of the OT prophets will be fulfilled" (280).

[25]See Kenneth L. Barker, "False Dichotomies Between the Testaments," *JETS* 25 (1982) 3–16. It is encouraging here to note two recent essays by Robert L. Saucy. In "Contemporary Dispensational Thought," *TSF Bulletin* 7:4 (1984) 10–11, he shows how some dispensationalists "have come to see a greater unity in the historical program of God" without giving up the literal fulfillment of Israel's OT promises (11). See also "Dispensationalism and the Salvation of the Kingdom," *TSF Bulletin* 7:5 (1984) 6–7.

THE CONTINUITY OF SCRIPTURE AND THE PRESENCE AND FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM

Introduction

In the larger context of the scholarly debate on NT eschatology, the central question seems to revolve around the nature of the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching as being either present/immanent or future/transcendent. Today it is customary to merge the present and future views in an "already but not yet" inaugurated or proleptic eschatology. This rather simplistic summary may supply a larger context into which this present study may be integrated.[26]

Two Basic Approaches

Postmillennialists and amillennialists seem to agree that the millennium is either identical with, inclusive of, or included within the present age.[27] Chronologically the two systems are similar. Amillennialism views the millennium as strictly present; the only literal reign of Christ upon the earth is reserved for the new earth or eternal state.[28] Postmillennialism is more difficult to analyze on this point, but it is characterized by a greater degree of optimism in its view of the prospects of the church before the second coming of Christ. (In some postmillennial schemes the present age blends into the millennium.) Indeed, the postmillennialist Rushdoony styles amillennialists as "merely premillennialists without any hope for the historical future."[29] Granted this difference between postmillennialism and amillennialism, it is still true that these two systems are at one in

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One might also note W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1975) 167–68, 226–27, n. 27, who argues that the Israel-church distinction will become less and less clear in the future. Some of the continuity stressed by Cook and Saucy may have been anticipated by Erich Sauer in *From Eternity to Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 166, 177; and in *The Dawn of World Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 147. Elliott E. Johnson argues for a NT basis for dispensationalism in "Hermeneutics and Dispensationalism" in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody, 1982) 239–55. Stanley D. Toussaint's "A Biblical Defense of Dispensationalism" in the same volume (81–91) includes some helpful clarifications (83–84).

[26]For useful surveys of thought on the nature of the kingdom see McClain, *Greatness*, 7–14; Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 3–42; Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963) 13–89; and Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 288–316.

[27]This may be seen, e.g., in the similar views of Boettner and Hoekema in *The Meaning of the Millennium*.

[28]E.g., Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 41–54, 201–14, 220–38, 274–87.

[29]Rousas J. Rushdoony, cited by Gary North, "Editor's Introduction," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 3:2 (1976) 5.

emphasizing the presence, not the future, of the millennium (God's reign).

All premillennialists, on the other hand, stress the future reign of Christ upon the earth as the consummation of history prior to the inauguration of the new heavens/new earth or the eternal state. Yet premillennialists are divided over the present nature of the kingdom. Ladd is one premillennialist who is convinced that Scripture demands a view which emphasizes the present nature of the kingdom.[30] In fact, he views the present aspect of the kingdom as exegetically more defensible than its future aspect.[31] On the other hand, dispensationalists have traditionally maintained the offer, rejection, suspension, and final establishment scenario,[32] though there have been some exceptions.[33] The tendency of dispensationalists has been to view NT references to a present kingdom as judicial or proleptic in nature.[34] Ladd argues instead that the kingdom should be viewed more as God's dynamic *rule* (in present and future) than as a static future *realm*.[35]

Problems with the Approaches

It appears that a major problem with amillennialism and postmillennialism is found in the preaching of John the baptizer and Jesus. John and Jesus challenged Israel to repent in view of the kingdom which was at hand (Matt 3:1–2; 4:17). What was meant by the term "kingdom?"[36] Feinberg observes that

> no explanation is offered as to the meaning of the "Kingdom" . . . , for the people knew what was implied. . . . After a study of the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures, what else could one expect . . . ? There was no need to describe the conditions and characteristics of the Kingdom, for that had been done so repeatedly and minutely.[37]

[30]Key texts showing the presence of the kingdom include Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; Luke 17:21; and Col 1:13. See Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 149–217.

[31]George E. Ladd, "Review of The Greatness of the Kingdom" *EvQ* 32 (1960) 48–50.

[32]See, e.g, McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 259–430; G. N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (3 vols; reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 1. 375–78, 590–91, 621–31; 2. 224–25, 461–72, 668–730; 3. 29–31, 582–602; and, more recently, Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 229–49.

[33]Notably Sauer, *Eternity to Eternity*, 175–77.

[34]McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 434–39.

[35]Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 149–217.

[36]It is unnecessary here to debate whether "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew is identical to or different from "kingdom of God" in the other gospels. However, it is believed that dispensationalists who distinguish between the two terms are in error.

[37]Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 131. See also McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 274–303; and Hoyt, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 85.

Many amillennialists and postmillennialists, however, do not believe that the kingdom John and Jesus announced should be equated with the promised kingdom of the OT. And here is where a major discontinuity arises in their view of progressive revelation. If the kingdom announced in the NT is not to be equated with that kingdom promised in the OT, then what is it? And why were the Jews so accountable for rejecting the signs which pointed to it?[38]

This discontinuity between OT and NT is also noticeable in Ladd.[39] The amillennialist Kushke welcomes Ladd's emphasis upon the kingdom as a present reality but points out that Ladd's view results in a major discontinuity between OT and NT. In Kushke's view Ladd's position raises serious questions about the good faith of the OT prophecies.[40] Evidently Kushke would agree with Ladd that the kingdom offered in the NT was spiritual but would deny that the OT prophets predicted a future earthly kingdom for Israel. Mawhinney has also argued that Ladd's view of the NT kingdom as being present in realm as well as reign renders a future kingdom as realm unnecessary.[41]

Dispensationalism also has its problems in articulating the continuity of Scripture in terms of a present and future kingdom. The pre-cross NT offer of the kingdom has been viewed by many as suggesting the possibility of salvation apart from the work of Christ on the cross. Unfortunately, some dispensationalists have articulated this doctrine in a manner which implies that the cross was unnecessary or that it represented an emergency "Plan B" which replaced the original kingdom program.[42] Such implications must be disavowed by dispensationalists as untenable—God decreed the cross work of Christ; it was always a necessity in his plan (1 Pet 1:20). However, as many passages in the gospels indicate, Israel was accountable to respond to the kingdom message. In a genuine exercise of human responsibility the nation as a whole rejected this message, and, from a human perspective, Israel's national experience of the kingdom was postponed.

[38]This problem is not so noticeable in the articulation of this issue by Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 13–22. It is more obvious in several of the older works cited by McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 274ff., and in Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 24–28. Of course some would argue that the OT never predicted an earthly kingdom for Israel.

[39]Ladd, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 94; and *Crucial Questions*, 113.

[40]Arthur W. Kushke, "Review of G. E. Ladd: *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God*," *WTJ* 15 (1953) 157–58.

[41]Allan Mawhinney, "Review of G. E. Ladd: *The Presence of the Future*," *WTJ* 37 (1975) 285–86. Similarly, see McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 275, n. 7.

[42]Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 104–5; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 212–14; and Ladd, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 94.

All of this is somewhat problematic, as some dispensationalists have admitted.[43] However it is only another aspect of the divine sovereignty/human responsibility tension which may be observed elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Matt 26:24; Acts 2:23). The cardinal example of such tension might indeed be the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3. *What if* Adam and Eve had not rejected God's plan for them (Gen 2:16–17)? Is this question really all that different from the one which asks *what if* Israel as a nation had accepted the kingdom offer? God knew that Adam and Eve would fall and that Israel would nationally reject the kingdom offer. Yet there was a genuine exercise of human responsibility and a resulting culpability in both cases.[44] Covenant theologians should thus have no problems in principle with the dispensational articulation of the offer of the Kingdom. And what of those who did respond in faith to Jesus' message? Dispensationalists must improve their articulation of the present dynamic rule of God in the lives of believers (Matt 12:28; Col. 1:13).

Conclusion

The tension between the present and future aspects of the kingdom is problematic for all eschatological positions. Amillennialists and, to a lesser degree, postmillennialists and historic premillennialists, have emphasized the presence of the kingdom. Dispensationalists have emphasized the future of the kingdom. All of these views need further refinement and modification in the light of further study and debate. As the evidence continues to be studied, covenant theologians should exhibit more openness to the possibility of a future kingdom of God upon this earth in literal fulfillment of the OT. Similarly, dispensationalists should be more open to the legitimate exegetical insights of Ladd and others concerning the present aspect of God's rule. There is no reason why this should invalidate the millennium or other legitimate dispensational distinctives.

CONCLUSION

This study has outlined three hermeneutical issues which impact the contemporary debate on eschatology. It has been argued that evangelicals should avoid brash charges of "allegorizing" or "hyper-literalism." Instead, debate should focus upon issues such as specific NT uses of the OT (e.g., Acts 2/Joel 2; Acts 15/Amos 9) and specific passages revealing the complex nature of the kingdom of God. The

[43]E.g., McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 319–20.
[44]See Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 146.

continuity of Scripture (as demonstrated in specific passages) is the broad issue at stake here—not theoretical hermeneutics.

My research in this area has shown that eschatological debates are often destructive rather than constructive. A bitter and polemical spirit ill becomes discussions within the body of Christ. It is easier to erect and demolish straw men than it is to courteously and carefully confront real issues.[45]

Twentieth century "eschatologians" should take to heart the words and spirit of the second century father Justin Martyr. Evidently Justin was a premillennialist. In his *Dialogue* with the heretic Trypho he claimed to share premillennialism with "others, who are right-minded Christians on all points." Yet he admitted that "many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise."[46] Let us save our polemics for modern Tryphos and discuss eschatology in a manner befitting Christians.

[45]One wonders how much good would have been accomplished had Ladd and McClain enjoyed a more constructive dialogue than that which appears in *Christianity Today* 4:1 (Oct 12, 1959) 38–40; and 4:10 (Feb 15, 1960) 23–24. Ladd heatedly attacked McClain's position, but McClain responded that Ladd had seriously misconstrued that position. It is encouraging to note Radmacher's belief that a growing rapprochement is taking place in more recent days ("Current Status of Dispensationalism," 163).

[46]Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 80, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, rev. A. C. Coxe (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 239.