

**THE DISPENSATIONAL VIEW
OF THE DAVIDIC KINGDOM:
A RESPONSE TO
PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM**

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Progressive dispensationalism has departed from one of the historical distinctives of normative dispensationalism, that of the offer, rejection, postponement, and exclusively future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom. It has also failed to include a related distinctive, the church's separateness from the Davidic kingdom. Dispensationalists from the successive periods of history have repeatedly emphasized these distinctives, an emphasis that nondispensational critics have also noted. Progressive dispensationalism, on the other hand, has not advocated these distinctives, raising the question of whether that movement deserves the label "dispensational" or whether it belongs more in the category of nondispensational historical premillennialism.

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"This book," writes Craig Blaising, "explains a significant change presently taking place in dispensational interpretations of Scripture. This change affects the way dispensationalists understand key biblical themes such as the kingdom of God, the church in God's redemptive program, the interrelationship of the biblical covenants, the historical and prophetic fulfillment of those covenants, and the role

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of Christ in that fulfillment."² These key biblical themes encompass perhaps the whole of both biblical and systematic theology, implying the extent of proposed changes by Progressive Dispensationalism (hereafter PD) as represented by Craig Blaising and his colleague Darrell Bock. It would be a formidable task to undertake an examination of each of these themes, so this essay will compare the traditional dispensational understanding of the Davidic kingdom with how PD understands it.

²Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, Ill.: BridgePoint, Victor, 1993) 9.

According to Blaising, ". . . Dispensationalism has not been a static tradition," but has undergone change and modification, especially its view of the kingdom.³ He uses this thesis of earlier change to legitimize current proposals of change by the progressives (i.e., progressive dispensationalists) within the dispensational tradition.⁴ This concept forms the substance of the first chapter, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," which gives significant attention to kingdom views⁵ and to the difference between classic and revised dispensationalism. The chapter notes differences among revised dispensationalists in two areas: the kingdom-of-God and kingdom-of-Heaven distinction, and the relationship of the church in its present form to the kingdom.⁶ The focus placed on these two issues, however, obscures a defining distinction of the dispensational view of the kingdom that persists throughout the history of dispensational tradition, but is absent among the progressives. This distinction is the view of the offer, rejection, postponement, and exclusively future fulfillment of the Messianic, Davidic kingdom, and

³Ibid. 21. In earlier works he argued for four such stages: (1) Niagara Premillennialism (1875 - 1909); (2) Scofieldism (1909 - 1963); (3) Essentialist (1965 - 1986); (4) Progressive (1986 -) (*Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, eds. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992] 13-34). A more recent work has revised these labels: (1) Classical (1800's - 1950's); (2) Revised (1950's - 1986); (3) Progressive (1986 -). For a full discussion of these stages and the nomenclature, see Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 21-23, 304-5 n. 8).

⁴This is a similar apologetic to that found in earlier works. See the two-part article by C. Blaising, "Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy" and "Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988):133-40 (esp. 135), 254-80. Though this paper will focus solely on the issue of the Davidic Kingdom, a similar case can be made in the area of hermeneutics. The progressives argue for far more discontinuity within the tradition than the data allows. See Thomas D. Ice, "Dispensational Hermeneutics," *Issues In Dispensationalism*, Wesley Willis and John Master, eds. (Chicago: Moody, 1994) 29-49; and Robert L. Thomas, "A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics," *When the Trumpet Sounds*, Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, eds. (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995) 413-25.

⁵Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 9-56.

⁶Ibid., 30-31, 39-46.

the view that the church in its present form is unrelated to and distinct from the Davidic kingdom.

This essay argues that the rejection, postponement, and entirely future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom is and has been a consistently held view within "normative" dispensationalism.⁷ It further argues that this position serves as a distinguishing feature of dispensationalism, differentiating it from non-dispensational theology. The progressives reject this position and consequently at least blur the distinction between dispensational and non-dispensational views.⁸ The first section of this essay will examine the rejected/postponed Davidic kingdom view throughout the history of dispensationalism, beginning with the work of John Nelson Darby. This section will also examine how non-dispensationalists note this concept within dispensationalism. The second section will assess the current landscape, giving attention to the rejected/postponed Davidic kingdom view in PD. Next will follow a look at the ramifications of the current discussion for normative dispensationalism. However, in order to interact with the claims of Blasing concerning whether the dispensational tradition of the kingdom has changed, a discussion of the meanings of "development" and "change" is in order.

Kingdom Distinctions in Normative Dispensationalism

Charles C. Ryrie has argued for the need to distinguish between the concepts of *development* and *change*, and this is especially true in terms of examining the history of doctrines and doctrinal systems. He sums up his discussion by noting, " (1) development and change are not synonymous but have different meanings; and (2) in order to decide whether something is developing or changing one must

⁷The term "normative" follows Larry Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992) 23-42. It includes the entire dispensational tradition (classic and revised), excluding the progressives.

⁸Cf. "The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church," Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 47; cf. idem, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 41.

consider what the essentials of the matter are."⁹ The issue of the kingdom serves as a fitting example. Admittedly, a difference exists in views of the substantive distinction between the phrases kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven within the dispensational tradition.¹⁰

Clarence Mason in his helpful words on this issue poses the question: "The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God: distinct or equated?"¹¹ He reflects his respect for both C. I. Scofield and L. S. Chafer, prefacing his critique of their view that the phrases themselves represent a substantive distinction.¹² He then writes, "However, . . . I came to the conclusion that this distinction . . . is not a valid distinction," and he proceeds to argue that the terms are used synonymously in Daniel and the Gospels.¹³ However, in regard to root distinctions between the phrases and the concepts underlying them, Mason adds, "It seems to me that the simpler and better solution is to recognize that the terms are synonymous and that the variation is due to context, not the variant word."¹⁴ He then proposes the "Multiple uses of the idea (or word 'kingdom') in the Bible."¹⁵ Ryrie concurs in reasoning that Scripture speaks of various concepts of the

⁹Charles C. Ryrie, "Update On Dispensationalism," in *Issues In Dispensationalism* 16; cf. idem, *Dispensationalism* 161-81.

¹⁰For the teaching of the distinction by earlier dispensationalists, see J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings* (Sunbury, Pa.: Believers Bookshelf, reprint, 1971) 25:47; C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1917) note on Matt 6:33; L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Seminary Press, 1948) 7:223-25.

¹¹Clarence Mason, *Prophetic Problems with Alternate Solutions* (Chicago: Moody, 1973) 101.

¹² Mason acknowledges his early dependence on the *Scofield Reference Bible*. He also served on the revision committee for the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, (1967). He further points out how he was a member of the first class at Dallas Theological Seminary (then named the Evangelical Theological College), sitting under the teaching of Chafer (*ibid.*, 102).

¹³*Ibid.*, 102-3, 103-7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 107.

kingdom and that the concepts are distinguishable in the answers to three questions: "Who is the ruler? Who are the ruled? When and where is the kingdom?"¹⁶ Under this rubric, he distills four concepts: (1) the universal kingdom; (2) the Davidic/Messianic kingdom; (3) the mystery form of the kingdom; and (4) the spiritual kingdom.¹⁷ The contributions of Mason and Ryrie (as well as those of others) have answered the critics and advanced the view while still retaining its essence.¹⁸

The point is that though a difference exists between earlier and later dispensationalists, this difference is a refinement or development, not a change. The latter view retains the essence of the earlier one (i.e., that of distinctions in the concept of the kingdom). In contrast to this essence, however, is Blaising's view of the kingdom of God:

The theme of the kingdom of God is much more unified and much more central to progressive dispensationalism than it is to revised dispensationalism. Instead of dividing up the different features of redemption into self-contained 'kingdoms' progressive dispensationalists see one promised eschatological kingdom which has both spiritual and political dimensions.¹⁹

This focus on the unity of the kingdom as opposed to distinct concepts of the kingdom is more than development; it is a change which affects the essence of dispensationalism.

Blaising also points out differing views of the church's relationship to the kingdom among revised dispensationalists. He surveys the work of A. McClain, C. Ryrie, J. Walvoord, and J. D. Pentecost, noting that, "The main point of this survey is to demonstrate

¹⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986) 397; cf. also idem, *Dispensationalism Today* 169-76; idem, *Dispensationalism* 154-57, for a discussion on the kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven distinctions.

¹⁷Ibid., 397-99.

¹⁸ See Mason, *Prophetic Problems*, 101, where he interacts with G. Ladd's critique in *Crucial Questions Concerning the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952).

¹⁹Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 54 (cf. chart, 55).

that there is no *one* revised dispensational view of the kingdom."²⁰ However, in noting the differences, he fails to acknowledge that each of the authors sees this present dispensation as different from the Davidic kingdom. This omission obscures the agreement within normative dispensationalism in speaking of *one* view of the Davidic kingdom, a subject to which the present discussion now turns.

The Davidic Kingdom View of Normative Dispensationalism

Discussion of the Davidic kingdom within normative dispensationalism appropriately begins with John Darby (1800-1882) and continues with Scofield, Chafer, Ryrie, Walvoord, McClain, and Pentecost, as well as less widely known and read dispensationalists. In addition, the analysis will include the perspective of non-dispensationalists (beginning with O. T. Allis and continuing with more current works) concerning the dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom.

In an essay entitled, "The Church—What Is It?," Darby pointed out, "It is of great importance to distinguish between the kingdom and the church."²¹ He added, "In fact, it appears to me a confusion of the Jewish and Gentile dispensations—the hinge upon which the subject [prophecy] and the understanding of scripture turns."²² A crucial aspect of this distinction for Darby was the rejection of Christ as the Anointed, the son of David, King of Israel.²³ Commenting on Luke 3, he wrote, "In fact we know John was beheaded, and the Lord was crucified, and the kingdom presented in Him, and by Him, was rejected by Israel. By-and-by it will be set up visibly and in power. Meanwhile the church is set up, because the kingdom is not set up in this manifested way."²⁴ Regarding Acts 2:30-36, a passage important

²⁰Ibid., 39; cf. 39-46 for a survey and charts of the views.

²¹Darby, "The Church—What Is It?," *Collected Writings* 12:372.

²²Darby, *Collected Writings* 2:18.

²³See *ibid.*, 5:387-88.

²⁴Ibid., 25:47. Darby refers often to the theme of the rejection of the King and consequent postponement of the kingdom (11:126, 144; 30:94-95; 5:387-89).

to the progressives, he wrote, "In this, again, there is not one word about Christ's being made King," and added, "The question of the kingdom . . . was left in total abeyance."²⁵

Though Darby may not have explicitly stated elements of the offer, rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom and its distinction from the church, they were all present in his writings. William Kelly, the editor of Darby's writings, remarked that Darby was like a miner who "left it to others to melt the ore, and circulate the coin."²⁶ Scofield and Chafer developed Darby's teachings in a systematic way.²⁷

In a book of sermons, Scofield wrote about God's purpose in this age and contrasted the church as a mystery with the "kingdom to be set up by the Messiah, David's great Son." He added,

In the fullness of time John the Baptist, and then Christ came preaching 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 'But His own received Him not.' Israel would not have her King 'meek and lowly' (Zech. ix: 9 ; Matt. xxi: 1-5), and so, when His rejection by the bulk of the nation became manifest, the kingdom was postponed, and Christ announced the mystery, the Church.²⁸

He repeated and expanded this idea throughout the *Scofield Reference Bible*.²⁹ Blaising argued that the original edition, 1909, and the 1917

²⁵Ibid., 2:76.

²⁶William Kelly, *John Nelson Darby, As I knew Him* (reprint, Belfast, Northern Ireland: Words of Truth, 1986) 11.

²⁷Larry Crutchfield offers a thorough examination of the relationship of Darby and Scofield in *Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (esp. 211-12). Though he allows part of Scofield's dispensational scheme differs from Darby's in regard to the period prior to Noah, in terms of the present issue they agreed.

²⁸C. I. Scofield, *Addresses on Prophecy* (Greenville, S. C.: The Gospel Hour Inc., n.d.) 17.

²⁹The impact of the Scofield Bible is readily acknowledged by many. Writing as an historian and sociologist, Paul Boyer notes, "For more than eighty years The Scofield Reference Bible has been a major conduit for disseminating premillennial dispensationalism throughout the world" (*When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief*

edition serve as a reference point for classic dispensationalism, but the revision in 1967 (from which he derives the nomenclature "revised dispensationalism") offers "views much more compatible to writers of this second period [revised stage]."³⁰ However, though revisions of minor points occurred, the major structures and many of the key texts, especially texts of interest to this present discussion, remain intact.³¹ The extensive note on Acts 1:11, which is the same in the original and revised editions, serves as an example of the many that substantiate this point. Here Scofield wrote of the two advents, "In due time the Messiah born of a virgin according to Isaiah's prophecy (7:14), appeared among men and began His ministry by announcing the predicted kingdom as `near' (Mt 4:17, *note* 9). The rejection of King and kingdom followed."³² In the same note he added that the NT teaching of the return of Christ has the following relation to Israel: "The return of the Lord to the earth is to accomplish the yet unfulfilled prophecies of Israel's national regathering, conversion, and establishment in peace and power under the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:16, *note*; cp. Acts 15:14-17 with Zech. 14:1-9)."

Chafer picked up these same emphases:

Every Old Testament prophecy of the kingdom anticipates His kingly office: (a) Christ will yet sit on the Davidic throne as David's heir (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:20-37; Isa. 11:1-16; Jer. 33:19-21). (b) He came as a King (Luke 1:32-33). (c) He was rejected as a King (Mark 15:12-13; Luke 19:14; cf. Gen. 37:8; Ex. 2:14). (d) When He

in Modern American Culture [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 1992] 98).

³⁰Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 22.

³¹One such revision concerns the infamous note on John 1:17; see the discussion in Fred H. Klooster, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Continuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity*, John Feinberg, ed. (Westchester, Ill: Crossway Books, 1988) 133. In addition, the editors have softened the language relating to the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God distinction (cf. note on Matt. 3:2). However, the notes on key texts concerning the kingdom, the church, and eschatology remain substantially intact (cf. various notes on Matt. 13, Acts 1, and throughout Revelation).

³²Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, note on Acts 1:11.

comes again it is as King (Rev. 19:16; cf. Luke 1:32-33).³³

He further emphasized the literal and earthly fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant:

The Covenant is of an earthly throne related to a people whose expectation is earthly. There is no evidence that David foresaw an earthly throne merging into a spiritual reign; yet David was given a perfect understanding concerning the divine purpose which the covenant designated. Nor is this kingdom and throne established in heaven. It is established on earth when the Son of David returns to the earth (Matt. 25:31, 32. Cf. 19:28; Acts 15:16; Luke 1:31-33; Matt. 2:2).³⁴

In addition, Chafer dealt at length with the themes of the offer, rejection and postponement of the kingdom and discussed the church and its relation to the kingdom: "The new purpose of God in this age is seen to be the out-calling of a heavenly people. They form a part of the kingdom in its present mystery form (Mt. xiii.); but are in no way related to the Messianic earthly kingdom of Israel. . . ."³⁵

The agreement of Chafer and Scofield with Darby is clear. Blaising acknowledged agreement between Chafer and Scofield: "Chafer's view of the kingdom was essentially the same as Scofield's."³⁶ The view of the kingdom was shared by many of their lesser known contemporaries as well.³⁷

Dispensationalists of the last half of the twentieth century show

³³Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 7:223.

³⁴L. S. Chafer, "Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 93 (October-December 1936):435.

³⁵L. S. Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1919) 71.

³⁶Craig Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, Walter Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 91.

³⁷The works of W. Pettingill, J. M. Gray, W. E. Blackstone, J. H. Brookes, A. C. Gaebelein, D. G. Barnhouse, and H. A. Ironside contain similar views.

continuity with the earlier dispensationalists in their view of the rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. Charles Feinberg affirmed the normative dispensational view in his classic work, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*,³⁸ particularly in the chapter "The Kingdom Offered, Rejected, and Postponed." He argued for the church as something different from the kingdom in the chapter, "The Church Age and the Church." He returned to Israel and argued for a fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom in the chapter on "The Millennium."³⁹ In another work, he offered the following: "Again the Spirit of God alerts all with emphasis on the Davidic covenant. He came to His land, His throne, and His kingdom (John 1:11),"⁴⁰ and "He offered Himself as King (Mt. 21:1-5) and was rejected in His kingly offer (Jn. 18:37; 19:14-15)."⁴¹ He then spoke of the postponement of the kingdom:

Moreover, other Scriptures confirm the validity of the postponement of the kingdom. . . . To the Hebrews who were expecting a king on David's throne, yet had rejected Him in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the sacred writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, emphasized the session of Christ at God's right hand (1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:20). With every mention the writer points out Christ as seated elsewhere than on His earthly Davidic throne.⁴²

As mentioned above, Blasing deals at length with the kingdom theology of McClain, Ryrie, Walvoord, and Pentecost with the purpose of highlighting their differences. However, the four have striking

³⁸Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1980). The first edition of this work entitled *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* appeared in 1936, so the work spans two alleged stages of dispensationalism.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 129-43, 149-57, 181-87.

⁴⁰Charles Feinberg, "The Eternal Kingship of Christ," *Jesus The King Is Coming*, Charles Feinberg, ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1975) 186.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 187.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 188.

similarities in their views on the Davidic kingdom as evidenced in the following selections.

McClain introduced the term "interregnum" when he discussed the result of Christ's rejection as the Messianic King:

And the Chief purpose of the new phase of teaching will be to prepare the disciples for His rejection and also for the interregnum which will intervene between His death and His return from heaven in glory to establish the Kingdom on earth in accordance with Old Testament prophecy.⁴³

He also spoke of future fulfillment of the kingdom: "Christ also reassures the disciples that His impending death will not mean any abandonment of the Kingdom; and indicates explicitly that its establishment will be connected with a second coming of the King."⁴⁴

Ryrie offers an explicit and lucid summary of his view of the Davidic kingdom:

Because the King was rejected, the Messianic, Davidic kingdom was (from a human viewpoint) postponed. Though He never ceases to be King and, of course, is King today as always, Christ is never designated as King of the church. . . . Though Christ is a King today, He does not rule as King. This awaits His second coming. Then the Davidic kingdom will be realized (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 19:15; 20).⁴⁵

Ryrie also speaks of the church's relationship to the Davidic/Messianic kingdom: "The church is not a part of this kingdom at all."⁴⁶ He

⁴³Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1974) 321.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 334. See also 309-20 for an extensive discussion on the rejection of the kingdom and 170-205 for a discussion of the coming and establishment of the kingdom.

⁴⁵Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986) 259.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 398-99.

argues for a legitimate offer of the Davidic kingdom and the need for its future fulfillment based on the distinction of the church from Israel and a consistently literal interpretation of Old Testament promises.⁴⁷ After discussing the millennium, he sums up the dispensational perspective by noting, "The question is whether the church is recognized as a distinct purpose of God today, and whether or not a place is given for the literal fulfillment of the Davidic, earthly, and spiritual kingdom in the future millennium."⁴⁸

John Walvoord notes in reference to the Davidic kingdom,

It is also clear that Christ is not reigning on earth in any literal sense. Jerusalem is not His capital nor are the people of Israel responsive to His rule at the present time. To attempt to find fulfillment in the present age requires radical spiritualization and denial of the plain, factual statements related to the kingdom.⁴⁹

His numerous articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* as well as a recent work, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, express the same understanding. In the latter he notes, "It is also abundantly clear that the church does not fulfill the promises of the kingdom on earth as given to Israel," adding that God will "resume His plan and purpose to fulfill the kingdom promise to Israel in connection with the second coming of Christ."⁵⁰

J. Dwight Pentecost discusses the eschatological implications of the Davidic covenant: "David's son, the Lord Jesus Christ must return to the earth, bodily and literally, in order to reign over David's

⁴⁷Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* 161-76; idem, *Dispensationalism* 145-60.

⁴⁸Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* 176; idem, *Dispensationalism* 158.

⁴⁹John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 108; cf. also idem, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1959) 202-7; idem, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962.) 80-100, esp. 96-97.

⁵⁰John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990) 438-39. See also appendices A and B concerning the fulfillment of prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, esp. 2 Sam. 7:16 and the prophecy of David's house, kingdom, and throne to be fulfilled in the millennium (658), as well as Luke 1:32-33 and the prophecy of Christ's sitting on the Davidic throne reigning over Israel to be fulfilled in the millennium (716).

covenanted kingdom. The allegation that Christ is seated on the father's throne reigning over a spiritual kingdom, the church, simply does not fulfill the promises of the covenant."⁵¹ In a more recent work, he also speaks of the offer, rejection, and postponement of the kingdom:

In His covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:16), God promised that a descendant of David would sit on David's throne and rule over his house. This covenanted program was offered to Israel, but was rejected by the nation. Because the covenants are eternal, unconditional, and therefore irrevocable, the Davidic kingdom program would not be canceled. It could, however, be postponed.⁵²

He adds, "Christ's central teaching was that the Davidic kingdom would be postponed until a future time."⁵³ He also discusses the church, and though he refers to it as a "new form of the kingdom," he explicitly holds to the withdrawal and postponement of the Davidic kingdom.⁵⁴

After referring to the views of Walvoord, Ryrie, and Pentecost, Blaising claims, "In response to the criticisms of George Ladd, they dropped the kingdom distinctions of Scofield, modified his essential structure in different ways and introduced their own terminology. As a result, there is no revised dispensational kingdom theology but competing interpretations which have had various levels of influence."⁵⁵ He ignores, however, the agreement among them concerning the postponement of the Davidic kingdom, as documented above, and obscures their agreement with each other and with their predecessors.

⁵¹J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1958) 114.

⁵²J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990) 233.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 234-35.

⁵⁵Craig Blaising, "Contemporary Dispensationalism," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 36 (Spring 1994):9.

Other normative dispensationalists have also argued for a similar understanding of the Davidic kingdom.⁵⁶ Very recently, Cleon Rogers has reached the following conclusion concerning the Davidic covenant:

Both He [Christ] and His forerunner, John the Baptist, proclaimed the Davidic kingdom promised in the Old Testament, but this message was rejected. So the Messiah presented a `new' form of God's rule on the earth, the church. . . . The rejection of Israel is not permanent, for the kingdom will be restored when the Son of David returns to set up the kingdom of David. Meanwhile He occupies the place of privilege and prominence, the `right hand of the Father,' where He rules as Head of the church and intercedes as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. His followers are called on to be His faithful witnesses in all the world as they await His return, when He will defeat all enemies, assume His place on the Davidic throne, and set up the Davidic kingdom.⁵⁷

To underline further the pervasiveness of the teaching of the rejection and postponement of the Davidic kingdom within the dispensational tradition, notice the attention given to the teaching by its critics. In 1945, O. T. Allis wrote the following about the "postponement theory":

If it be admitted that a visible earthly kingdom was promised to the Jews and announced as `at hand' by John and by Jesus, some

⁵⁶For example, see Renald Showers, *There Really Is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, N. J.: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990) esp. 97, 181-82; Herman Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 167, 192.

⁵⁷Cleon Rogers, "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (January-March 1994):84. See also "The Davidic Covenant in the Gospels," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (October-December 1993):458-78. Also consider the following recent work by Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, Charles Dyer and Roy Zuck, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 222-37.

explanation must be found of the fact that such a kingdom was not set up. . . . The explanation which is given by Dispensationalists is covered by the two words 'rejection' and 'postponement.' The kingdom was *rejected* by the Jews and *postponed* by God; and in its place the church was introduced.⁵⁸

He added,

It is the claim of all dispensationalists that the kingdom offered the Jews by John and by Jesus was an earthly kingdom similar to that of David, the son of Jesse; and since such a kingdom was not set up at the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus, they insist that it was rejected by the Jews and has been postponed to a time still future.⁵⁹

After discussing the new form of premillennialism, i.e. dispensationalism, L. Berkhof described it thus:

But when the Messiah came and offered to establish the Kingdom, the Jews failed to show the requisite repentance. The result was that the King did not establish the Kingdom, but withdrew from Israel and went into a far country, postponing the establishment of the Kingdom until His return. Before He left the earth, however, He founded the church, which has nothing in common with the Kingdom, and of which the prophets never spoke.⁶⁰

He discussed eschatology as he wrote of events following the rapture and tribulation: "The millennial kingdom will now be established, a real visible, terrestrial, and material kingdom of the Jews, the restoration of the theocratic kingdom, including the re-establishment

⁵⁸O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945) 77.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁰L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 710.

of the Davidic kingship."⁶¹

The historic premillennialist G. Ladd wrote the following concerning dispensationalism: "This system sees no present relationship between the church and the Kingdom. . . . Dispensationalists believe that the Davidic eschatological Kingdom is yet to be established with the return of Christ."⁶² Clarence Bass, a former dispensationalist, viewed the postponed kingdom as a "definite feature of dispensationalism which distinguishes it from the historic faith."⁶³ He offered the following assessment of the view:

The postponed-kingdom idea grows out of the basic concept of what the kingdom was to be, and what it shall yet be. This is held to be a literal restoration of the national kingdom, and since no such covenanted kingdom with the Davidic throne has appeared, it must have been postponed. The kingdom and the church can in no way be paralleled in the plan of God.⁶⁴

Anthony Hoekema also acknowledged the rejection/postponement of the kingdom as a main aspect of dispensationalism as reflected in the *New Scofield Bible*:

When Christ was on earth He offered the kingdom of heaven to the Jews of His day. This kingdom was to be an earthly rule over Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. . . . The Jews at that time, however, rejected the kingdom. The final establishment of this kingdom, therefore, was now postponed until the time of the millennium.⁶⁵

He also characterized the postponed view as one of eight major points

⁶¹Ibid., 711.

⁶²G. Ladd, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *Foundations* 4 (1961):166.

⁶³Clarence Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 32.

⁶⁴Ibid., 32.

⁶⁵Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 189.

of dispensationalism.⁶⁶ O. Palmer Robertson also makes an extended comparison between dispensational and covenantal views of the Davidic kingdom. He acknowledges and critiques the dispensational notions of the rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment in the millennium of the Davidic kingdom.⁶⁷ After arguing for the current session of Christ as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, he observes,

The dispensationalist must be commended for his desire to hold strongly to the full veracity of Scripture in its promises. But the denial of any connection between the 'throne of David' and Christ's current enthronement at God's right hand must be taken as an effort to limit the magnificent realities of the new covenant by the shadowy forms of the old.⁶⁸

In a more current work, Stanley Grenz not only interacts with the normative dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom, but also with that of the progressives. He offers the following perspective on classical dispensationalism's (which for him refers to dispensationalism prior to the progressives) understanding of the Israel and church distinction:

The Israel phase, which began with Abraham, was suspended when the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Consequently, the church phase, which is a parenthesis in God's Israel program, was inaugurated at Pentecost. The advent of the church, however, did not spell the end of God's program for Israel. God neither abrogated the divine promise to His Old Testament people nor enmeshed them into the church.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Ibid., 212-14.

⁶⁷O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 218-27.

⁶⁸Ibid., 252.

⁶⁹Stanley Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992) 97. See also 103-4.

Throughout the history of dispensationalism its adherents and critics alike have acknowledged *one* normative dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom, a view that entails the offer, rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom as well as a separation of the church in its present form from this kingdom. Also, the emphasis given this view by its adherents and critics demonstrates the crucial role this particular element plays in the overall structure of dispensational theology. With the history of the tradition in mind, it is appropriate next to look to the current landscape of the work of PD.

The Davidic Kingdom View in Progressive Dispensationalism

Discussions of the offer, rejection, and postponement of the Davidic kingdom are absent in the work of the progressives. Bock argues that Luke-Acts teaches that Christ has already inaugurated His reign of Christ as Davidic king, that His present position of "*being seated on David's throne is linked to being seated at God's right hand*," and that a future consummative stage of the kingdom rule will follow.⁷⁰ He reaches these conclusions by approaching the text through an already-not yet framework.⁷¹ He exhibits this method in the following:

Peter establishes the Davidic connection by linking Psalm 110 to Psalm 132 and thus to 2 Samuel 7. . . . Both of these Old Testament texts [Ps. 110, 16] from the Psalter are seen beyond any doubt as presently fulfilled in the Resurrection, with Psalm 110 fulfilled at least in terms of inauguration. Peter goes on to declare that this Lord (Jesus) sits by God's side until all enemies are a footstool for

⁷⁰Darrell Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 37-67, 49.

⁷¹See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 97-98, for Bock's endorsement and explanation of his understanding of an already-not yet hermeneutic.

the Lord's feet, something that is yet to be realized. So inauguration is present but consummation is not.⁷²

In an earlier critique I argued that Bock's understanding of these concepts and the related passages follows the work of Ladd. Consequently, a better view of PD takes it as a departure from normative dispensationalism rather than a further development or refinement.⁷³ Here, the purpose will not be to show PD's similarity to non-dispensationalists such as Ladd, but to underline its dissimilarity to normative dispensationalism.⁷⁴

Bock summarizes his essay on the reign of Christ:

⁷²Ibid., 51.

⁷³Stephen J. Nichols, "Already Ladd-Not Yet Dispensationalism: D. Bock and Progressive Dispensationalism" (unpublished paper, Eastern regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Philadelphia, Pa., April 2, 1993). See also V. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994). In this second edition, Poythress has a postscript devoted mainly to the progressives. He observes, "However, their position is inherently unstable. I do not think that they will find it possible in the long run to create a safe haven theologically between classic dispensationalism and covenant premillennialism. The forces that their own observations have set in motion will most likely lead to covenantal premillennialism after the pattern of George E. Ladd" (137). Consider also the comment by Walter Elwell ("Dispensationalism of the Third Kind," *Christianity Today* [September 12, 1994]:18): "The newer dispensationalism looks so much like nondispensationalist premillennialism that one struggles to see any real difference."

⁷⁴Bock has since argued that critics of his position have missed the crucial difference between his already-not yet construct and that of Ladd ("Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics and NT Fulfillment," *Trinity Journal* 15 [Spring 1994]:69-70.). The area of difference lies in the view of Israel in the future stage of fulfillment. I acknowledged this point in my review of *Progressive Dispensationalism* (*Trinity Journal* 15 [Fall 1994]:253-55), i.e., the progressive dispensational concept of the millennium is far more "Israelitish" than that of Ladd. However, the point still stands, that as far as the current, initial stage of fulfillment is concerned, Bock is following Ladd. He admits, "Nevertheless, it is true that this complementary approach of reading Scripture means that this view of the kingdom in the present era looks very much like Ladd's" ("Current Messianic Activity," 70).

In the gospel of Luke, it is clear that with Jesus' presence, and especially his Resurrection-Ascension, comes the beginning of Jesus' kingdom rule. . . . Thus the new community, the church, is the showcase of God's present reign through Messiah Jesus, who inaugurates the fulfillment of God's promises.⁷⁵

Blaising offers a similar understanding in his discussion of "The Church as Present Revelation of the Kingdom."⁷⁶ Throughout his lengthy treatment of the presence and coming of the eschatological kingdom in the person and teaching of Jesus, he has no mention of the kingdom's rejection and postponement.⁷⁷ Regarding Jesus, he writes, "Repeatedly, He is portrayed as enthroned at the right hand of God in fulfillment of promises that belong to God's covenant with David. His enthronement and present authority is *messianic*."⁷⁸ He also states, "*All of the language describing the church in the New Testament is either directly drawn from or is compatible with the genres of covenant promise and the Messianic kingdom.*"⁷⁹

Blaising also discusses "some typical objections raised against the theory of Jesus' present Davidic position and activity."⁸⁰ He lists the following objections:

Objection 1. *The throne Jesus received at His ascension was not the throne promised to David. . . .*

Objection 2. *Jesus' present activity is best understood as divine sovereignty, not Davidic kingship. . . .*

Objection 3. *To speak of the present fulfillment of Davidic promises by Christ in heaven is a spiritual interpretation of earthly, political*

⁷⁵Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ" 65.

⁷⁶Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 257-62.

⁷⁷Cf. *ibid.*, 232-57.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 257.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 260 [emphasis original].

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 182.

*promises.*⁸¹

He then seeks to refute these objections. A review of the normative-dispensational Davidic-kingdom view as discussed above will demonstrate how that view reflects these objections and further demonstrates the departure of the progressives from normative dispensationalism.

Robert Saucy also fails to endorse traditional dispensational concepts in his discussion of the Davidic covenant.⁸² In this vein, Saucy writes,

Traditional dispensationalists have understood this [Jesus as seated at the 'right hand of God'] as teaching the present session of Christ in heaven before His return to fulfill the Davidic messianic kingdom promise of a literal reign on earth. They are careful to distinguish between the Davidic throne and the position that Christ presently occupies in heaven at the right hand of God (Ac 2:30).⁸³

He offers his understanding of Christ's exaltation to the right hand: "The meaning of the right hand of God in Psalm 110:1 and Acts 2:33 is, therefore, the position of messianic authority. It is the throne of David."⁸⁴ However, though arguing that Christ is on the Davidic throne, Saucy does not argue for the active reign of Christ at present. He notes that the allusion to Psalm 110 in Revelation 3:21 "affirms the present exaltation of Jesus, but not a present function of ruling."⁸⁵ Saucy's view as represented here differs significantly from that of Blaising and Bock, but is still a departure from normative dispensationalism, as he observes,

⁸¹Ibid., 182-87 [emphasis original].

⁸²Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 59-80.

⁸³Ibid., 69-70.

⁸⁴Ibid., 72.

⁸⁵Ibid., 73.

This interpretation of the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God in fulfillment of the Davidic messianic promise therefore allows for the inaugural fulfillment of those promises in distinction from the total postponement of the Davidic promise in traditional dispensationalism.⁸⁶

While the progressive dispensationalists are careful to express their commitment to a future for ethnic Israel and a future, literal fulfillment of Israel's covenant promise, these views concerning the inaugural fulfillment of Old Testament promise, especially that of the Davidic covenant, and the redefining of the present form of the church mark an aberration from normative dispensationalism.⁸⁷ The consistently held offer, rejection, postponement, and fully future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom is absent from their teaching. Also absent is the view that the church is distinct from that kingdom. Ryrie offers the following summary of the progressive dispensational teaching on the Davidic covenant, underlining its departure from normative dispensationalism:

Until now the Davidic covenant was understood by dispensationalists as related only to Israel, with its ultimate fulfillment in the reign of Christ on David's throne in the Millennium. Progressive dispensationalism, however, teaches that the Lord Jesus is now reigning as David's king in heaven at the right hand of the Father in an 'already' fulfillment aspect of the Davidic kingdom and that He will also reign on earth in the Millennium in the 'not yet' aspect. They also assert that at Christ's ascension He was inaugurated as Davidic king, that the right hand

⁸⁶Ibid., 76. It is also interesting to point out the synopsis of the book on its back cover: "Dr. Saucy departs from classic dispensationalism, however, in showing that (1) the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy begins in the present church age, and (2) the church is not a parenthesis in God's program but represents a continuity with the Old Testament messianic program."

⁸⁷For the progressive dispensational perspective on future fulfillment, see R. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 297-323; Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 262-77.

of the Father is the throne of David in heaven, and that the present church age is indistinct from the kingdom.⁸⁸

Ramifications for the Dispensational View of the Davidic Kingdom

Progressive dispensationalists' view of the Davidic kingdom has brought to the forefront some crucial aspects of dispensational theology. Four areas in particular suggest future directions in evaluating PD and offering critiques of normative dispensationalism.⁸⁹

1. Hermeneutics.

A crucial aspect, though not the focus of this paper, is that of hermeneutics. On the one hand, progressives have offered helpful comments about the limitations of the hermeneutical designations "literal" "normal." Bock's expansion to a "historical-grammatical-literary-theological" method is more complex and, consequently, is more capable of handling the complexities faced in interpretation.⁹⁰ On the other hand, nothing inherent in such an approach demands the employment of an already-not yet framework.⁹¹ Further, this fuller method does not mutually exclude a 'literal' interpretation. Those issues are beyond the scope of this essay. However, their mention

⁸⁸Ryrie, "Update on Dispensationalism" 21.

⁸⁹I am not suggesting that these issues are in any way breaking new ground for dispensationalism. However, these issues and the related texts are increasingly being understood in new ways in light of the paradigm shifts occurring among progressive dispensationalists. My point is that these issues and interpretations of the text need rethinking and developing in light of the current questions being raised.

⁹⁰Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 76-105, esp. 76-77.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 96-100. Here Bock offers this method as a way of relating texts, arguing that the already-not yet tensions are evident through the Bible and serve to link "the plan of God into a unified whole" (97). However, this approach may be operating on the assumption that because *x* is similar to or like *y*, then *y* has become *x*, or at least incorporates *x* into its meaning, but actually *y* is simply similar to *x*, yet still different. The point is that even with the use of a more complex hermeneutic, theological assumptions still lie behind the application of the already-not yet framework to OT promises.

here points out a need to explore hermeneutical features in more detail.

2. The Rejected/Postponed Davidic-Kingdom View.

Ultimately, a commitment to being consistent with Scripture and not tradition is the issue in the ongoing development of theology. In this regard, the need is for a solid exegetical defense of the rejected/postponed view. A current deserving work along these lines is that of Cleon Rogers mentioned above. This type of work is necessary as the progressives have demonstrated that dispensationalists can no longer simply assume the rejected/postponed paradigm. Perhaps a fruitful study would be to examine the language of fulfillment in Luke-Acts as Luke progresses from the birth narratives through the life of Christ and on to Peter's sermons. Here a study of the contrast/comparison of the introductory formulas, the content of the quotations, and the context of the passages employing the quotations looks most promising.

3. The Present Form of the Church.

Another area brought to the surface through the work of the progressives is the differences of opinion about the relationship of the church to the overarching concept of the universal kingdom or sovereign rule of God. Progressives and non-dispensationalists alike are making much of these differences and perhaps inconsistencies on behalf of dispensationalists. A need exists for a thorough and clear expression of the church's role as distinct from: (1) the Davidic kingdom at present (What are the implications of viewing the church as a mystery form of the kingdom? Cf. Matthew 13 parables.); (2) the Davidic kingdom during the millennium (Is ruling with Christ participation in the Davidic kingdom? Cf. Rev 3:21); and (3) the universal kingdom of God. Some texts relevant to this discussion deserve significant treatment (such as Eph 1:19-23; 1 Pet 3:22; passages in Acts and Hebrews used by the progressives.)

4. The Consistent Distinction Between Israel and the Church.

The rejection of the normative dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom by the progressives is crucial because it impinges on the dispensational distinctive of a separation of Israel from the church.

Ryrie comments on this point:

This understanding of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies quite naturally leads to a third feature—the clear distinction between Israel and the Church which is a vital part of dispensationalism. All other views bring the Church into Israel's fulfilled prophecies except dispensationalism. The amillenarian says that the Church completely fulfills Israel's prophecies, being the true, spiritual Israel. The covenant premillenarian sees the Church as fulfilling in some senses Israel's prophecies because both are the people of God while at the same time preserving the millennial age as a period of fulfillment too. The understanding of the how and when of the fulfillment of Israel's prophecies is in direct proportion to one's clarity of distinction between Israel and the Church.⁹²

The similarities of the progressives to covenant premillenarians are both obvious and telling and demonstrate the need for a *consistent* distinction between the peoples of God.

Conclusion

From the perspective of dispensational tradition, the current landscape of progressive dispensationalists appears to be a different terrain. The view of the offer, rejection, postponement, and fully future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom and the corollary view of the church as something different and distinct is and has been the consistent view of normative dispensationalism. By viewing the present form of the church as an inaugural stage of the Davidic kingdom with Christ seated on the Davidic throne in heaven, the progressive dispensational position has distanced itself from this distinguishing feature of dispensationalism. *The* distinguishing feature of dispensationalism, i.e., the consistent distinction between Israel and the church, is all but absent. Consequently, the legitimacy of calling PD part of the dispensational tradition is questionable.

⁹²Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* 159.