

**Learning How to Talk
About Significant
Theological
Differences**

The Hermeneutics of
the Biblical Writers

The Importance of
Knowing the Past

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**THE PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION THE BIBLICAL
WRITERS USE**

The Core Question:

Is there a hermeneutic embedded in the Scriptures
that we must use in interpreting what the
Scriptures mean?

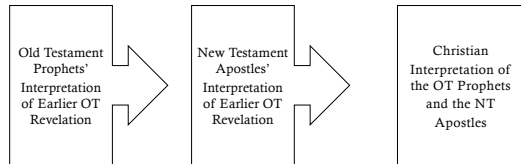
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ONE THEOLOGIAN'S OPINION

- "The way the prophets and apostles read is the way they wrote and the way we ought to read. They have embedded in the Scripture the way Scripture should be interpreted. The Bible comes with "hermeneutic included." We may not always get everything right but that does not mean a standard does not exist. Rather, the biblical writers have set that standard. For a Christian, our hermeneutic then must be one of surrender and obedience, one that bows before how the Author has demanded his children read and seek what he has confluently intended through the human author."
- Abner Chou. The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers, p. 232.

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THE CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTIC



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THE PARTS OF THE HERMENEUTIC OF THE BIBLICAL WRITERS

Interpretation is a complex activity but it breaks down into four basic instructions to follow in making sense of the text of Scripture.

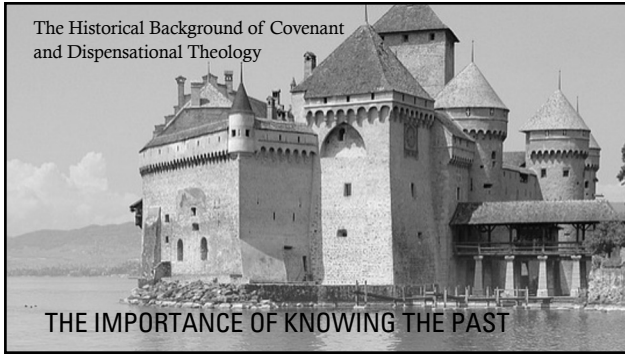
1. Investigate the meanings of words. (literal).
2. Investigate the grammar and literary form in which the words are set (grammatical).
3. Investigate the historical and cultural contexts of the text (historical).
4. Based on the information of steps 1-3 answer the question, "So What?"

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So Why are Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology so Different From Each other in some areas and not in others?

- I believe the answer to that question rests in the interpretational methodology they use to interpret OT prophetic passages.
- Both claim to use a literal, grammatical, historic hermeneutic.
- The difference lies in how they deal with potential symbolic language in the text of the Scriptures.
- The default mode of Dispensationalism is to treat every prophetic passage as literal unless the text demands that it be taken as a symbol.
- The default mode of Covenant Theology is to treat every prophetic passage as symbolic unless the text demands it be understood literally.

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INTRODUCTION

- Proverbs 18:13, esv.
“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”
- One of the realities of our present day is that very often we find that people with differing theological viewpoints talk before they listen.
- It is my desire that we listen before we answer.

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3 CONTEXT QUESTIONS

1. Am I coming to this study with a humble heart that expresses itself in gentleness, respect, honesty and love?
2. Have I recognized the aspects of theology about which we are in agreement?
3. Am I consistently using the interpretive principles of the Biblical writers?

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HOW I WILL PROCEED

I will examine 3 content questions:

1. What so its proponents say it is?
2. What does it say is its central feature?
3. From where did it arise?

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WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY? R.C. Sproul Sr.

"Reformed Theology is nicknamed 'Covenant Theology' . . . Reformed theology sees the primary structure of biblical revelation as that of covenant. This is the structure by which the entire history of redemption is worked out."

-- R.C. Sproul Sr. [What is Reformed Theology?](#), [Understanding the Basics](#), p. 117.

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WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY? J. I. Packer

"WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY? The straightforward, if provocative answer to that question is that it is what is nowadays called a hermeneutic – that is, a way of reading the whole Bible that is itself part of the overall interpretation of that Bible that it undergirds."

-- J.I. Packer. [An Introduction to Covenant Theology](#), p. 2.

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WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY?

J. Ligon Duncan

“Covenant Theology is both Biblical and Systematic Theology. That is, it gives us an organizing principle for our Biblical Theology. But it also provides us a very important category of what older theologians would have called a locus, literally, a place. It gives us a very important category or place in our Systematic Theology. It is the organizing principle of Biblical Theology in the sense that anyone who is going to do justice to God’s unfolding plan of redemption has to talk in terms of covenants. It is the dominant theme featured in the whole issue of God’s unfolding plan of redemption in history.”

~ J. Ligon Duncan, “History of Covenant Theology”, p. 3.

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WHAT IS THE BIG PICTURE OF WHAT COVENANT THEOLOGIAN TEACH?

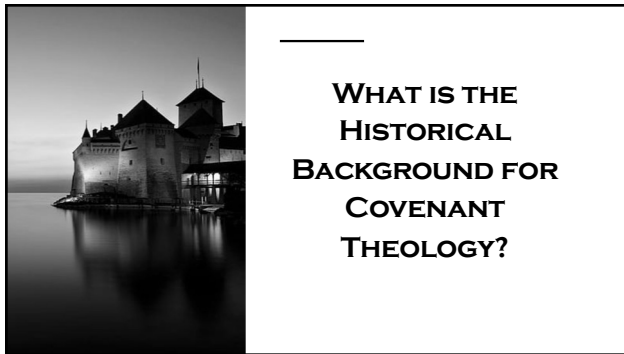
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THE THREE COVENANTS OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

R. C. Sproul Sr, p. 132

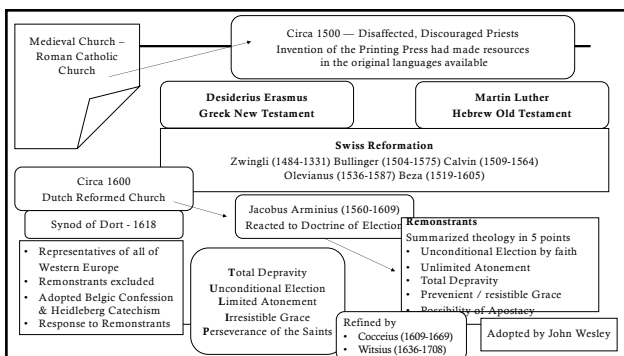
	Covenant of Redemption	Covenant of Works	Covenant of Grace
Parties	The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit	God and Human Beings	God and Chosen, Sinful Human Beings
Initiator	God the Father	God	God
Time	In eternity past	At Creation	After the Fall
Condition		Perfect obedience	Faith in Christ (who satisfied the condition of the covenant of works)
Reward		Life	Spiritual Life
Penalty		Immediate Death (physical and spiritual)	Spiritual Death

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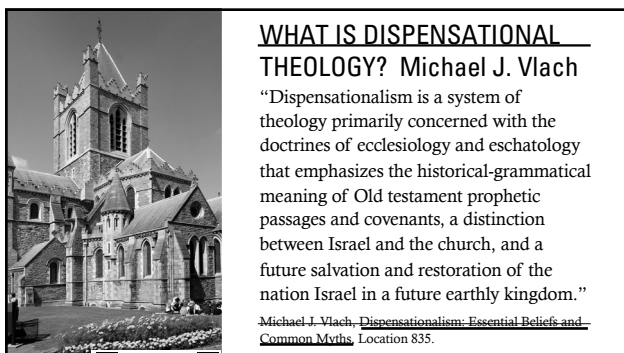


WHAT IS THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR COVENANT THEOLOGY?

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WHAT IS DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY? Michael J. Vlach

"Dispensationalism is a system of theology primarily concerned with the doctrines of ecclesiology and eschatology that emphasizes the historical-grammatical meaning of Old testament prophetic passages and covenants, a distinction between Israel and the church, and a future salvation and restoration of the nation Israel in a future earthly kingdom."

Michael J. Vlach, Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths, Location 835.

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WHAT IS DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY? Renald E. Showers

"Dispensational Theology can be defined very simply as a system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible's philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God's rule."

Renald E. Showers, There Really is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology, p. 27.

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WHAT IS DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY? Charles Ryrie

"Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In this household God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the process of time. These various stages mark off distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these economies are the dispensations. The understanding of God's differing economies is essential to a proper interpretation of his revelation within those various economies."

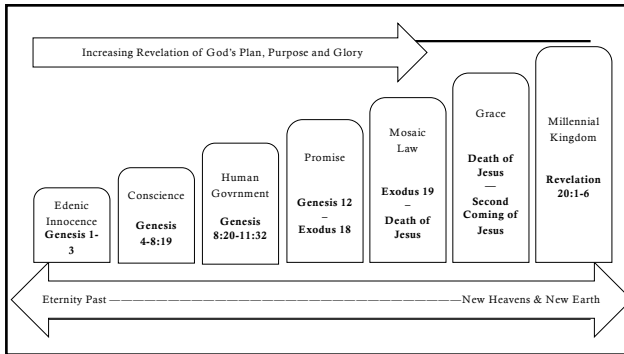
Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, p. 31.

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WHAT IS THE BIG PICTURE OF WHAT DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGIANS TEACH?

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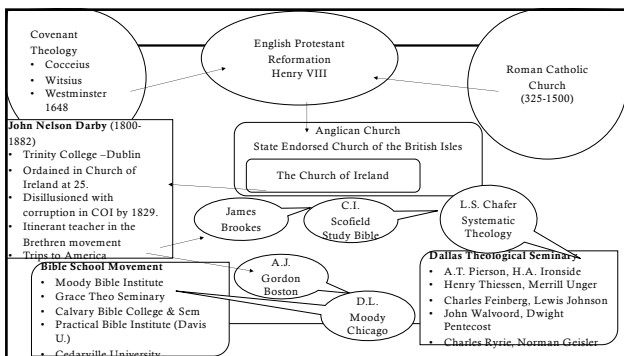


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WHAT IS THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY?

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- An examination of the history of both Covenant and Dispensational Theology shows them to have their roots in the Reformation.
- Both these systems are expressions of Protestant theology that is connected to the theology of John Calvin.

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Like Arminian theology, Dispensational theology is a reaction to how the Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian Churches interpreted and applied the theology of Calvin.
- What separates these two systems of theology is how they choose to interpret the prophetic portions of the Old Testament.

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

One of the things that seems to get forgotten in the discussions between the advocates of these two theologies is that there is no disagreement about the fact that Christ is returning to judge sin completely and establish a New Heavens and New Earth in which righteousness eternally dwells. A person is not a heretic for not believing what I believe the Bible teaches about how Jesus will do that and when He will return. In the end we will all understand where we were wrong and where we were correct about the how and when of Christ's return.

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