

DISPENSATIONALISM AND SUPPORT FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL

By

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In the debate among many Christians about Palestinian and Israeli rights and their respective treatment of one another, pro-Palestinian Christians often complain that their pro-Israeli Christian brothers have been infected by the malady of dispensationalism, and that is why they seem to support everything the modern state of Israel does, regardless of how unjust and oppressive it is to Palestinians. Pro-Israeli Christians often complain that if their pro-Palestinian Christian brothers properly understood Scripture's end-time prophecies, they wouldn't reject what *God* has done in the land of Israel during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has planned for the future. And, they wouldn't complain when Israelis take various steps to secure their hold on the land God gave them thousands of years ago.

Many who listen to this debate conclude that the ultimate culprit is dispensationalism and its alleged misunderstanding of end-time prophecy about Israel and the nations. **Unfortunately, some non-believers hear bits and pieces of this debate, and conclude that the problems in the Holy Land could be greatly assuaged if not for these fundamentalist dispensationalists. Non-believers understand neither fundamentalism nor dispensationalism, but these labels (and the views they supposedly represent) become convenient weapons to use against Christianity. They think these two "isms" are at least part of the reason so many conservative Christians seem to turn a deaf ear to the plight of the Palestinians and don't seem particularly disturbed that the peace process in the Middle East moves interminably slow, if it moves at all.**

**In the midst of such complaints, does it ever occur that the characterization of dispensationalism in view might not be what the position actually requires its proponents to hold? That possibility seems seldom, if ever, even considered.**

Even so, might dispensationalism be innocent of the charges lodged against it? Is it really true that dispensationalists are logically bound to support everything the modern state of Israel does, regardless of how oppressive and unjust its actions are? Does dispensational understanding of end-time prophecy tie the hands and shut the mouths of believers who would otherwise protest injustice and oppression? The answers to such questions are biblical, theological, and moral, but their implications are very practical and personal, especially for people living in the land of Israel. How should we address such issues?

In this paper, I propose to argue for two theses which address the issue of dispensationalism's support for the modern state of Israel. The first thesis centers on an ethical rule grounded in Scripture. Scripture teaches that neither governments nor private citizens should engage in social, economic or political oppression and injustice. Hence, my first thesis is that no evangelical theology, including dispensationalism, should support social and political oppression and injustice. Second, even though there are varieties of dispensationalism, core biblical and theological commitments common to dispensationalisms do not require, i.e., logically entail, supporting governments or people when they commit social and political injustice and oppression.

In what follows, I plan to look at each thesis, explain it, and offer support for it. Thesis two will require the most explanation and defense. Before turning to thesis one, however, I must clarify what I mean by "support" of Israel and "support" of the Palestinians, as I'll be using these ideas in this paper.

#### *The Meaning of Support for the Palestinians and Israelis*

When discussing whether one should support Israel and/or the Palestinians, there are a number of things one might have in mind. For the sake of this paper, I want to define three types of support and to clarify which is at issue. An initial sense of "support" is that one supports the right of individuals to live and not be killed when they have done nothing meriting loss of life. The foundation of this sense of support is that all humans are the image of God and innocent human life must not be taken. This right has been violated in regard to many Jews throughout history and most notoriously in the holocaust of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But history shows that this right has also been violated on various occasions when Arabs guilty of no crime have lost their lives. In this sense of "support" both dispensational and non-dispensational evangelical theologies support both Israelis' and the Palestinians' right to life. Adopting a biblical account of ethics requires this type of support, and I strongly affirm it.

A second sense of "support" agrees that there is a right (political, legal, and/or moral) for a people to exist as a nation with their own government. As this relates to the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict, it involves having the right to be a nation in the Holy Land. Talk of such rights and

support, of course, escalates the emotion involved in this debate, because it raises questions about who owns the land, how they are to acquire and possess it, and what happens to those who don't own it but live in it. So what is my position on this kind of support?

I affirm initially what all Christians should, namely, that the whole earth, including the Holy Land, belongs to God, and he is free to do with it as he chooses. As we shall see later, God gave it to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. As we shall also see, end-time prophecy predicts that the people of Israel in the end times will have their own government, but it also shows that when Jesus reigns from Jerusalem, Jews and Arabs alike will possess the land in peace and harmony. More on this later, but given biblical teaching, all evangelical Christians should support the right of Israel to have its own government in the land.

But, that isn't the end of the story, because we must speak briefly about what happened during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After World War I, Britain was entrusted with the Mandate of Palestine. Before the Mandate began the Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1917) expressed the British government's willingness to provide a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration, however, said nothing about political control of the land by Jews, but it didn't forbid it either. It did say, however, that if Palestine became a homeland for the Jews "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."<sup>1</sup>

After World War II, the United Nations voted in November 1947 to partition the land into a Jewish state and an Arab state. Jerusalem was to be an international city, belonging to everyone. In 1948, the state of Israel was born. The birth of an Arab state, given the UN vote of 1947 would also have been in order, but Jordan annexed the West Bank territory which was to have been a major portion of an Arab state. In 1988 King Hussein of Jordan relinquished his claim to the West Bank, but in the Six Day War in June, 1967, Israel captured the West Bank and still holds it today. By 1988 when King Hussein gave up Jordanian claim to the West Bank, the international will to create a distinct Arab state in Palestine had ebbed to the point that it is still a dream for Palestinians, but an unrealized one.<sup>2</sup>

Let us assume for the sake of argument that the United Nations in November 1947 actually had

the legal and political right to partition Palestine into two distinct states. If one agrees, then in addition to a right granted by the Lord's decision to give Israel the land, there is also a political and legal right conferred by the UN to have an Israeli state in Palestine. But, because of the UN's 1947 resolution there is also a legal and political right for Palestinians to have a separate state in the Holy Land. Moreover, as I shall explain later, Scripture also teaches that in the end-time Arabs and Jews will live in the land together in peace. Hence, there is a biblical expectation that Arabs will have access to the land at that end-time.

So, because of biblical teaching, and if one accepts the UN's right to partition Palestine in 1947 and sanction both an Arab and Israeli state in the land, one can support both Israel's and the Palestinian's rights not only to live in the land, but to have political control over their respective peoples in nation-states. Of course, this says nothing about whether one has to support the boundaries of a partitioned Palestine that the UN drew up, or the boundaries of the state of Israel as they have emerged through many wars since 1948. But neither dispensational nor non-dispensational theology logically preclude the kind of support I have just mentioned.

There is a third sense in which someone might claim to "support" the modern state of Israel, and this is clearly the most controversial. It is also the focus of this paper. According to this sense of "support," one holds that it is necessary (or at least acceptable) to approve of every action Israel takes with respect to its own people, the Palestinians, and other nations of the world. The rationale for such support is typically taken to be the belief that Scripture promises a distinctive blessed future for Israel not only spiritually, but materially as well, and the belief that this is predicted by a proper understanding of end-time prophecy.

Now, it is this third kind of support for Israel that most rankles her opponents (Christian and non-Christian), and it is this kind of support that dispensationalism supposedly not only allows but requires. According to my second thesis, I reject this sort of support when it involves approving of oppression and injustice. I shall argue that such support isn't required by dispensationalism or any other form of evangelical theology. But, let me turn first to my first thesis.

*Thesis One: Rejection of Social and Political Oppression and Injustice*

A hallmark of evangelical theology is its commitment to the full inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. That means that Scripture isn't mere human opinion, but rather the very word of God. God is omniscient and so can't be wrong about anything he thinks. He is also morally perfect and so would never lie about anything. Hence, whatever he affirms as true matches the way things actually are. As evangelicals, we believe, thus, that whatever Scripture teaches must be true and that lives must be lived in accord with Scripture's teachings. Scripture's moral dictums bind all people, regardless of whether they think they are obliged to follow such rules.

So what does Scripture teach about social and political oppression and injustice? Thankfully, it is easy to find the answer. Scripture clearly forbids both individuals and nations, along with their governments, to treat anyone, citizen or not, unjustly and oppressively. A notable example of God's distaste for injustice is found in God's indictment of Isaiah's Israel as recorded in Isaiah 5. But this is hardly the only passage relevant to my point (see also Jer 22:13-17; Habakkuk 2; Deut 23:15-16; 24:14; Ps 10:17-18; Jer 7:5-7; Ezek 45:8; Amos 4:1-3; Isa 1:16-17).<sup>3</sup> Even though Isaiah 5 and many of the other passages are written about Israel of old, nothing in Scripture suggests that it applies only to her. Any nation or person who oppresses others is committing sin, and needs to stop (Deut 16:18-20; Ps 82:1-4; Prov 1:3; 21:15; Isa 26:7; Amos 5:7-15).<sup>4</sup> Jesus himself said that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31), and the Apostle Paul explained how we should treat our enemies (Rom 12:17-20). Though Jesus and Paul speak of interpersonal relationships, it is hard to imagine that they wouldn't want us in some way to apply these commands to groups of peoples, even to neighboring nations or to ethnic groups which live within our national borders.

Hence, we can say unequivocally that Scripture forbids social and political oppression and injustice. Since evangelical theology is committed to the inspiration and truthfulness of Scripture and is therefore, bound to approve whatever it teaches, it should be clear that no theology can qualify as evangelical if it affirms that it is morally acceptable to break Scripture's moral laws. That also means that no *evangelical* theology can approve of social and political oppression and injustice and at the same time be internally logically consistent.

Friends and foes alike think of dispensationalism as an evangelical theology. If it is, then from what I've said it can't remain internally consistent if it supports anyone or any nation that treats people unjustly or oppressively. Still, some critics believe that dispensationalism's fundamental tenets commit it to unwavering support for the state of Israel, even when Israel acts oppressively or unjustly. Is this complaint true or unfounded? The best way to decide is to clarify the nature of dispensationalism and then to see whether its core principles explicitly or even implicitly sanction oppression and injustice by Israel.

*Thesis Two: Core Principles of Dispensationalism and Social and Political Justice*

Though many of dispensationalism's opponents believe it is a uniform set of beliefs, this is not so. Not all dispensationalisms are created equal! And, not everything associated with dispensationalism is one of its core principles. Elsewhere I have written in detail about my understanding of the core tenets of dispensationalism.<sup>5</sup> Time constraints don't allow me to discuss them in detail, but I can briefly mention what I consider the six core principles common in one way or another to all forms of dispensationalism.

First, dispensationalists understand terms like "seed of Abraham," "Jew," and "Israel" to be used in multiple senses in Scripture. They are used sometimes in an ethnic, biological sense, at others in a spiritual sense to refer to anyone spiritually saved, sometimes in a political sense to refer to the kingdom or nation of Israel (this use is common in the OT), and in a typological sense to connect something in the OT (event, ritual, etc.) with something in the church. Whereas non-dispensationalists typically see these terms used in the NT only in a spiritual or typological sense, dispensationalists argue that all four senses can be found in both testaments. Thus, when many NT passages speak of Israel or the Jew, they refer specifically to those who are ethnically, biologically Jewish, not to the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham, i.e., the church, which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>6</sup>

A second essential dispensationalism is its understanding of literal hermeneutics. For example, dispensationalists typically argue that one must understand the meaning of OT prophecies about Israel's future in their own OT context, rather than reinterpreting these prophecies in light of how some NT writers apply them to the church. Hence, dispensationalists typically argue that the

general rule for relating the testaments is that if God has said something once (OT), it is still in force later (NT) unless God either explicitly or implicitly reveals that the prior teaching is cancelled. Dispensationalists further argue that proper interpretation of the NT shows that promises about Israel's future blessings are neither explicitly nor implicitly nullified in the NT. In fact, some NT passages clearly affirm that those promises are still to be fulfilled.

One outcome of such hermeneutics is that if a NT passage takes an OT promise to national Israel and applies it to the church (as with Peter's handling of Joel 2 on the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2), that means the prophecy must have more than one fulfillment—one to the church because the NT says so, and another to Israel because the OT demands it. While there is more to dispensational hermeneutics than what I've mentioned, these items capture at least some key essentials.<sup>7</sup>

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A third dispensational distinctive is its understanding of the great OT covenants made to Israel. Here the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants are especially in view. Dispensationalists specifically believe four things about these covenants. They were addressed to those who are ethnically, biologically Jewish. They contain promises that include spiritual blessings for ethnic Israel, but also social, political, and economic blessings. In addition, these covenants are made with Israel unconditionally. That means that though blessing under a covenant is always conditioned on one's obedience, if the covenant itself is unconditionally ratified, God will fulfill it to some generation (an obedient one) of Jews. And finally, dispensationalists maintain that the covenant blessings and prophetic promises that grow out of them have never all been conjointly, simultaneously fulfilled to ethnic Israel in the way the covenants demand (e.g., forever!).<sup>8</sup>

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**Comment:** Why? Where is the text?

Consistent with this understanding of the great OT covenants is dispensationalism's fourth distinctive. Dispensationalists believe that both the OT and NT affirm that there will be a distinctive future for ethnic Israel as a nation. This means she will be restored both spiritually and materially, and that includes possession of the land promised to the patriarchs. As to everything involved in this distinctive future, individual dispensationalists may disagree somewhat, but there is still the belief that God will deal with Israel in the future to bless them as a corporate, national entity. One way this distinctive manifests itself is that dispensationalists

hold that the millennial kingdom of Christ will contain both saved Jews and Gentiles, but the kingdom will have a distinctively Jewish flavor to it.<sup>9</sup>

A fifth dispensational essential is the belief that the church is something distinctly new in the NT era. It isn't that no one before the church began was saved or had a relationship with God.

Rather, the point is that the defining characteristics of the church include more than being a group of spiritually saved individuals. They include such things as being baptized into the body of Christ and indwelt with the Holy Spirit, events that didn't begin to occur until the day of Pentecost. They also include the church as a group of believers to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts. According to Paul, the giving of spiritual gifts come from Christ through the Holy Spirit *after* Christ ascended on high, following his resurrection (Eph 4:8). And, the distinctives of the church also include having Christ as head of this body of believers in which Jew and Gentile alike are on equal footing, spiritually speaking. According to Paul again, Christ wasn't made the head of the church until after his resurrection and ascension (Eph 1: 20-23), none of which happened in the OT era.<sup>10</sup>

There are other defining characteristics of the church, according to dispensationalists, but those mentioned give some of the flavor of this dispensational distinctive. A sixth core principle of dispensationalism focuses on its philosophy of history. For non-dispensational systems, the key idea is that God is using history to save men and women; history is to be seen as salvation-history, and other things God is doing with our world are of lesser import. Dispensationalists also think that God is calling out from the Jews and Gentiles alike a body of people to be redeemed. But this is only part of what God is doing with history. Most fundamentally, God's plan is to implement the Kingdom of God. That kingdom, of course, has a spiritual basis, but it also involves social, political, economic—i.e., material—things. Establishing his kingdom with everything it involves doesn't happen all at once, but God's hand is in the affairs and events of peoples and nations as he works out his plan for history.<sup>11</sup>

These six items, I believe, are at the heart of dispensational thinking. That means that other beliefs some dispensationalists have at times held are at most applications of one of these six principles. **In many cases, I think those applications are wrong, but unfortunately, some**

dispensationalists have “publicized” them loudly enough so that non-dispensationalists conclude that if you are a dispensationalist, you must hold these views. Here I refer to beliefs such as the notion that the Sermon on the Mount isn’t at all for the current age, the church is a parenthesis (almost an afterthought) in God’s main plans (his plans for Israel), and that Israel and the church must be so distinct in all things that there must actually be two New Covenants, one for the church because Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper with such language, and another for Israel that she will as a nation enter into some day even future to us.

These beliefs about the Sermon on the Mount, two New Covenants, etc. are possible applications of dispensational distinctives, but I think they are wrong applications. Nonetheless, they aren’t what dispensationalism is actually about at its core. The six distinctives I’ve set forth are.

*Do Dispensational Distinctives Logically Require Support for the State of Israel?*

Now that I have enumerated what I see as the six distinctives of dispensationalism, we must first ask whether any of them is even relevant to the question of my paper. If not, then it can hardly logically entail support for the state of Israel.

The first two dispensational distinctives relate to hermeneutics. They help us to understand how to interpret certain biblical terms and how to relate the testaments. Given the nature of the terms and the testaments, we can say that these points are relevant to Israel, but the hermeneutical points *per se* don’t even address the question of whether one should support the state of Israel. So, the first two dispensational distinctives are broadly relevant, but not specifically relevant to the topic before us.

Principle five about the church as a distinctive organism is even less relevant to our topic. I don’t mean that how the church relates to Israel is irrelevant, but only that the matter of the defining characteristics of the NT church say nothing about the church’s relation now or later to national Israel. From this distinctive it is hard to see how one could conclude much of anything about dispensational or even non-dispensational support for the modern state of Israel.

Since the Kingdom of God (principle 6) relates to all of reality, it must broadly have something to do with Israel, the Palestinians and all other people. But to say that God is establishing his kingdom and that it has spiritual and material elements is to say nothing about the particulars of

either. Nor does it *per se* say anything specific about Israel's exact role in that kingdom.

Given this evaluation of principles 1, 2, 5, and 6, I don't see how any of them can logically entail anything about support or non-support of the state of Israel. On the other hand, principles 3 and 4 do appear relevant to Israel's role in God's plans and his plans for the future. Principle 3 is about OT covenant promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. It promises blessings to the whole world through them, but it also promises specific blessings to Israel. In addition to promising a right spiritual relationship with God, Israel is promised a kingdom with both spiritual and material elements to it. This kingdom is said to be never-ending (Dan 7:14,27) and to cover ultimately all people. Part of these covenant promises include the promise of land. As noted when discussing the covenants, dispensationalists believe that these covenant promises were addressed to ethnic Israel and are about her, and they also believe that all of these promises have never been conjointly fulfilled. So there is reason to expect a fulfilment of these covenant promises and any prophecies that grow out of them.

Clearly, this third dispensational distinctive is relevant to the question of this paper, and the fourth distinctive is as well. When dispensationalists hold that there will be a distinctive future for Israel as a nation, they mean that God has a plan for Israel and that plan hasn't yet been fulfilled. Details of the plan are broadly sketched in the great OT covenants, and further details are clarified in various end-time prophecies about Israel. Given the nature of these promises and prophecies, it is hard to imagine that they aren't relevant as well to other nations and peoples, including Palestinians.

In sum, only principles three and four of dispensationalism are even relevant to our topic. But, what picture do those principles paint of the end-times in particular, and does any of this logically require that dispensationalists must approve of everything the state of Israel does? To those matters we now turn.

#### *A Dispensational Sketch of What OT Covenants and End-Time Prophecies Require*

Above I noted four key features about the great covenant promises made to Abraham and David and found also in the New Covenant. Here I note some specifics of the covenant promises.

An initial point has to do with the blessings promised to Abraham. God told Abraham to leave

his homeland and go to a land that God would show him. So Abraham left, not knowing where he was going (Gen 12:1 and Heb 11:8). But, we learn in Genesis 15 that God ratified his covenant with Abraham. In verses 18-21 God gave Abraham the dimensions of the land he was to inherit and a list of the peoples who at the time of the promise lived in the land. Most specifically, the promised land extended from the river of Egypt<sup>12</sup> on the west and south to the Euphrates River on the north and east (v. 18).

During the days of David, Israel was a kingdom with David as king. David was a man of God, and wanted to build a house for God. Because David was also a man of war God said it would fall to David's son Solomon to build God a house. But, God promised David that he would establish David's ruling house as head of the kingdom of Israel forever. That is, God promised that there would never lack a son to sit on the throne of David (2 Samuel 7). Kings come and go, but as Scripture moves into the NT, it becomes clear that the everlasting king is none other than David's greater son, Jesus the Messiah of Israel, Savior of all, and ultimate King of an everlasting kingdom. Various OT prophecies about Israel's future speak of the material aspects of that kingdom in such a way as to predict that it would not only be spiritual in nature, but a material kingdom with various socio-politico-economic blessings to be detailed below.

So, the great OT covenants with Israel promised a king and a kingdom with a specific land. These God promised unconditionally (note his unilateral ratification of the Abrahamic Covt. twice, as recorded in Genesis 15 and 17). In Gen 17:7-8 God tells Abraham that the covenant is to be an everlasting one, and the promise of the land is also everlasting. That God promises unconditionally means that he guarantees that he will do this. Of course, the specific generation of Abraham's seed that receives all that is promised is the one properly related to God. As the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 9, Israel's election to privilege (vv. 1-6) is not the same thing as election to salvation. Merely being Jewish biologically and ethnically doesn't save you spiritually, and it doesn't include you in the fulfillment of all of the promised national blessings. You must be spiritually saved to get those blessings.

Because OT covenant promises were made unconditionally to Israel, dispensationalists maintain that they must at some time be fulfilled to national Israel. Moreover, dispensationalists also note

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Comment: Why?

that these promises include a whole matrix of spiritual and material blessings, and that Israel has never experienced the fulfilment of all of those blessings conjointly. Since God is not one to renege on his promises and since Israel hasn't yet received all of these blessings as a nation, there is reason to believe that OT covenant promises and the prophecies of end-time blessings that grow out of them are still to be fulfilled as promised.

Of course, the nation of Israel as a whole rejected her Messiah when he first came, so many Christians believe that Israel forfeited the promises. If not, we need some NT evidence that God still plans to fulfill them to national Israel. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans well after the Jews as a nation had rejected their Messiah. In chapter 11 Paul directly addresses the question of whether God has irrevocably cast off his people Israel, since in Christ's day and Paul's most Jews rejected Jesus. Paul exclaims (11:1) emphatically that God has not cast off his people Israel. He then proceeds in chapter 11 to offer three reasons why God isn't finished with Israel. His final proof appears in verses 25-27 where Paul explains that after the "fullness of the Gentiles" has come in God will then save all Israel. To underscore his point that God hasn't forgotten or annulled his promises to Israel, Paul writes in verse 29 that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." In the context of Romans 9-11 this cannot mean anything other than that the great OT covenant promises made to Abraham, David, etc. and the promises of blessing for Israel that grow out of those covenants are still going to be fulfilled! God's promises can be trusted—even if most Jews since the time of Jesus until now have rejected their promised King Jesus.

Because of the nature of the OT covenants and Paul's affirmation that they are still to be fulfilled, dispensationalists believe that the promises to Israel, including ones about land and a kingdom, are not cancelled. But since dispensationalists insist that those blessings have never conjointly been fulfilled to Israel, there must still be in store a distinctive future for ethnic Israel as a nation (dispensational principle 4). So, dispensationalists have a lot to say about end-time prophecies and the role of Israel as depicted in them. Here I cannot cover all end-time prophecies, but I want at very least to mention those that relate to Israel as a national entity and to the promised land.

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**Comment:** This is a hermeneutics that minimizes prophecy to foretelling and downplays ethical standards.

First, there are various prophecies that suggest that after dispersion from the land, God will bring Israel back to the Holy Land. Since the whole matrix of prophesied blessings hasn't yet been fulfilled, dispensational scholars believe that Israel will return to the land in the end times. This doesn't rule out the possibility that she might come back before the end time; the point is that she will have a presence in the land at the end-time. Scripture also says, however, that when she returns at the end time it will be in unbelief. Here one thinks of Ezek 37:1-14 and its vision of the valley of dry bones. In the vision, the bones lie scattered in a valley, but then come together and muscles and skin form upon them. Ezekiel tells us that this means that God will bring Israel back to the land. But, the vision shows that though the bones come together and form the figure of a man, there is no life in them. Later breath comes into the form and the man comes alive. Ezekiel explains that this means that Israel will not fully come to life until God puts his spirit in them. That is, Israel will return to the land and have a semblance of life (37:8, 12-13), but will only come to life when God saves them spiritually (37:9-10, 14). For a time, then, they will be in the land, but in unbelief.

Will the people of Israel be back in the land at the end time under the authority of another country or will they have their own national identity and government? This brings me to a second point about Israel in the end-time. In dispensational thinking, a key passage about the course of history for Israel is Dan 9:24-27, the vision of the 70 weeks. It predicts the future from the perspective of Daniel's time onward, and the things predicted relate to Daniel's people and his holy city, Israel and Jerusalem (v. 24). According to the vision, the first 69 weeks (literally, heptads, i.e., groups of 7) will conclude with the coming of the Messiah (v. 25). After the 69<sup>th</sup> week Messiah will be cut off and the city of Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed (v. 26). While one would initially think these last two events come during the 70<sup>th</sup> week, verse 27 teaches otherwise. It speaks of the 70<sup>th</sup> week and events that come after the death of Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

From our perspective, we can roughly date the coming of the Messiah and his death, and we know exactly when the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple occurred—70 AD under the Romans. While you might expect the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's vision to begin immediately after the 69<sup>th</sup>

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week, or at least after the events of 70 AD, we must see what Dan 9:27 says about the 70<sup>th</sup> week. In verse 26 an individual is introduced who is referred to as “the prince of the people who will come”. Verse 27 says that this prince will make a covenant with the people (meaning Israel) for one heptad (the 70<sup>th</sup> week, a 7 year period). Exegetes presume that this is a covenant of peace, which he will break in the middle of the 7 year period and will stop sacrifices, presumably in the Temple. He will bring abominable things that make desolate, but he will ultimately be completely destroyed himself.

It is very hard to fit the predictions of Dan 9:27 with anything that happened after 70 AD. Moreover, in Matt 24:1-3 we read that Jesus walked out of the Temple and pronounced doom and destruction on it. His disciples were troubled and asked him when this would happen and what would be the sign of his coming and of the end of the age. In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ answer the latter two questions get the most attention. Jesus details events that run the course of the tribulation era, the 7 year period yet to come at the end of the age.

What is crucial is that Jesus links what he is saying with Dan 9:27. In Matt 24:15 Jesus says that when those living at the time of the events he predicts in Matthew 24 see the abomination of desolation standing in the Holy place, they should flee, for the time of intense tribulation is beginning. But, Jesus says even more. If we aren’t sure what the abomination of desolation refers to, in verse 15 Jesus says it is the one spoken of by Daniel the prophet.

Daniel refers to the abomination of desolation in three passages, 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11. I agree with commentators who see 11:31 as fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes. Since the events of Antiochus’ life were past history from Jesus’ perspective, when he speaks of something future to himself, he cannot be referring to Dan 11:31 when Jesus speaks the words of Matt 24:15. Dan 9:27 and 12:11 can be seen as yet future to Jesus’ day. In fact, the events of Dan 9:27 and Matthew 24 haven’t yet occurred, for the Lord hasn’t returned at the end of the tribulation (Matt 24:30).<sup>13</sup>

As do many others, I believe that Dan 9:27 and 12:11 are referring to the same time period, the tribulation, Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week. I think as well that Jesus in Matt 24:15 is most directly referring to Dan 9:27, and he tells us more explicitly what the wilful prince of Dan 9:26-27 will do that is

so abominable and where he will do it (the Temple). Remember, Jesus is responding to his disciples' questions about the sign of his coming and of the end of the age. His disciples, raised in Judaism, would be familiar with Dan 9:24-27 and the broad outline of the course of Israel's history it sets forth. If they truly believed Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, they would know that the first 69 weeks had concluded, and they would wonder about the events after the 69<sup>th</sup> week (Dan 9:26) and those of the 70<sup>th</sup> week (9:27). Jesus' reference to the abomination of desolation and his linkage of it with Daniel suggest that Jesus and Daniel are talking of the tribulation period, the end of Daniel's 70 weeks vision.

Regardless of whether one agrees with such an interpretation, my purpose in mentioning these passages and events is two-fold. One is to present what is a typical dispensational understanding of the tribulation period and to show some of the biblical basis for it. The other is to note what these things teach about the condition of Israel during the end-times, specifically during the tribulation. For one thing, Dan 9:27 says that the 70<sup>th</sup> week begins by the wilful prince making a covenant (presumably of peace) with Israel. But, if Israel is in the land but not in control of its people politically, no treaty of peace can be formalized with Israel, or so it would seem. Hence, it seems that when Israel is in the land at the end time, she will not only be physically present but will also have political control of the nation, i.e., there will be an Israeli government that can make such a treaty.

Another point to be gleaned from what Daniel and Jesus say is that during the tribulation there will be sacrifices made in the Temple in Jerusalem. The wilful prince (many refer to him as the Anti-Christ and/or the Roman Beast—see Daniel 7 and the first beast of Revelation 13—he is the world-wide political leader during the tribulation) will stop sacrifices in the Temple and will set up there the abomination of desolation. If these things are to happen during the tribulation, there must be a functioning Temple in Jerusalem. Currently, that is not the case. Hence, it is reasonable to believe that the Temple must be rebuilt at latest in time for these events to happen.

Some believe it must happen before the tribulation starts. Perhaps, but the key is that it is functioning by the mid-point of the tribulation, and that could happen even if the Temple isn't rebuilt until the early years of the tribulation.

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:06 AM

**Comment:** Why do we need sacrifices again? This eschatology might encourage some to try to dominate a "sacred" Islamic land and as a result damage any possible peaceful stability!

Because Jesus speaks of the tribulation as a horrible time (Matt 24:21-22) and thereby confirms the teaching of OT prophets about it (e.g. Jer 30:7; Joel 2:1-2; Zeph 1:14-15), dispensationalists expect things to get worse as the tribulation moves toward its end. Often portions of Revelation (14:14-20; 16; and 19:11-21, e.g.) are noted as predicting widespread death and destruction during this time and persecution of any who would take a stand for God against the Anti-Christ (see Rev 13:11-18).

By the end of the tribulation, Israel will be surrounded by a confederation of nations from the whole world whose aim is to blot her out once and for all. This climactic battle is most specifically identified in the NT as the battle of Armageddon, but OT prophecies give many details as well. In particular, Zechariah 12 and 14 teach about this battle. According to Zech 14:1-2, the battle at its outset will be going poorly for Israel. Things will look altogether hopeless, but as Zech 12:4-9 shows, God will go forth to fight for Israel. He will strengthen Israel to fight as never before, and he will also confound the enemy. Rev 19:11ff. shows the Lord riding out of heaven followed by the armies of heaven to do battle with his enemies. He will utterly destroy them (see Joel 3, Rev 14:14-20), but more than that will happen. When he returns at his Second Advent, he will be seen by all that day. Zech 12:10 predicts that in the midst of the destruction of Israel's foes, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on Israel and he will move them to repent. But why? Because they will look upon him whom they have pierced and mourn for him. Undoubtedly many will think that now would be the right time for Messiah to come, if there ever were a right time! And then he does come! But it is none other than Jesus whom they have for so long rejected (see also Matt 24:30 and Christ's return and the tribes mourning). At the Second Coming Israel's reaction to the Lord will not be rejection, but repentance and trust in him. It is here that we begin to see how Paul's prediction in Rom 11:26-27 can be fulfilled.

Following the Second Advent will be the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats (Matt 25:31-46). The Goats will be the losers at this judgment; they will be destroyed. The Sheep are those alive who remained faithful to Christ during the tribulation or who turned to him in faith at his Second Coming. They are told to inherit the kingdom. It is then, dispensationalists believe, that Rev 20:1ff about the 1000 year rule of Christ will begin.

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:08 AM

**Comment:** Armageddon is mentioned only once in the NT in revelation and it is not clear what it means there!

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:10 AM

**Comment:** I am troubled by your hermeneutics of text-proofing that does not present a thick interpretation of a particular text but excavates verses eisegeting a particular view.

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:10 AM

**Comment:**

Dispensationalists believe that the redeemed of all ages will be present to enjoy the kingdom (some in resurrected, glorified bodies and others in natural bodies), but they also expect this kingdom to have a special Jewish flavor to it. That is, OT prophecies speak of a time of unparalleled peace and prosperity for Israel (e.g., Isa 60; 11:1-10; Zech 14:10-11; Zeph 3:13-20). These passages also teach that during the kingdom even more Jews will return to the land. It is at this time that Israel will enter fully into the blessings of the New Covenant because she will at last be right with God (Jer 31:27-40). And, Jesus will be ruling physically and visibly from Jerusalem (Isa 2:1-4). Jerusalem will become the throne of the Lord (Jer 3:17). The results will be staggering. **Isa 2:1-4 teaches that the Lord will make just laws and enforce them. He will arbitrate disputes among the nations, and will do that so equitably that there will be nothing left to fight about. Hence, the nations will disarm, and, the Hebrew text says, they won't even know how to make war anymore. And, when righteousness itself is enthroned in the person of Jesus the King, all of Jerusalem and Israel will be holy. Even the most mundane things like the pots in the Temple and the bells on the horses necks will be holiness unto the Lord (Zech 14:20-21).**

Long held animosity toward Israel will cease and in its place there will be respect and admiration (Zeph 3:13-20). There is also good news for the nations of the world. God always intended for Israel to be a light to the Gentiles, a blessing in their midst, and OT prophecies about the kingdom show that when Israel is in her proper place spiritually with the Lord, all the nations will be blessed. For one thing, they will be saved as well and will flourish in the kingdom. Especially meaningful is the promise in Isa 19:16-25 where Isaiah predicts that a day will come when Israel and Egypt will no longer be enemies, but rather partners in serving the Lord. Even more, Assyria will be a third partner in this alliance of holiness and service to the Lord. If Isaiah is thinking of the Assyrian empire as he writes, it included countries that we know today as Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, as well as Israel and Egypt. What an incredible prophecy! How could this possibly happen unless the peoples of these nations turn to Christ in saving faith? How could it happen prior to the millennial kingdom? Dispensationalists, then see the course of this age leading ultimately to the millennial reign of Christ, the absolute monarch. His reign will result in peace and prosperity for Israel and the nations.

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:12 AM

**Comment:** There is no sensitivity to the genre of the text: prophecy; apocalyptic, didactic, etc.

### *Dispensational Principles 3 and 4 and Support for Israel*

The preceding is an all-too-brief description of dispensational understanding of the OT covenants God made with Israel and of some events of end-time prophecies. It is now time to face squarely whether these intellectual commitments mandate that anyone holding dispensationalism must approve of what the state of Israel does, regardless of what it does. We have seen something of what the promises and prophecies predict and of how they need to be fulfilled. But, it is a long way from promises and prediction to fulfilment, and Scripture doesn't explain all the steps it will take to get there, "there" being the fulfilment of these things. **Some are so excited about things to come, that they unfortunately think they can somehow bring them to pass sooner, rather than later—at least they want to try. Some well-meaning American Christians have even talked of sending rock and stone to help in rebuilding the Temple. If there is anything not needed in Israel it is more rock and stone. Even if there were such a need, contributing money to fill that need won't make the end-times come any sooner than God has planned. Unless you happen to be the Anti-Christ, there is probably little you can do to make these events happen, and no one can move God's sovereign timetable one moment faster or slower than he wants.**

But how does dispensational understanding of the OT covenants and of end-time prophecy relate to support for the state of Israel? I believe it is helpful to answer by addressing three distinct, yet not totally unrelated, questions. They are: 1) are any events of the last hundred years as they relate to Israel fulfilment of any end-time prophecies described above?; 2) do dispensational principles 3 and 4 require (or even legitimize) attempts to "make the end-times happen?"; and 3) do dispensational principles 3 and 4 logically entail that one must approve of everything the modern state of Israel does, no matter what it is?

I believe that answers to the first question are often where things start to go wrong in our understanding of whether one must support the current state of Israel. Put simply, many dispensationalists would say that the return of Jews to the Holy Land and the founding of the state of Israel during the 20<sup>th</sup> century are fulfilments of end-time prophecies. And, if that is right, the argument continues, we dare not disrupt or interrupt what God is doing as he moves us toward the end of the age. It is true that in Israel most Jews are unbelievers, but end-time

prophecies predicted that Israel would return to the land in unbelief. That is, because God has a distinctive future planned for ethnic Israel as a nation, including political control of the land, that means that if at any time in our day or the future Israel gets political control of the land, then we must be in the end times and Israel's political control of the land must fulfill prophecy. That being so, Christians (at least) should support the state of Israel in what it does, because it is a fulfilment of end-time prophecy.

Note that this line of reasoning contains two basic assumptions. The first is that what happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> and now the 21<sup>st</sup> century to Israel fulfills end-time prophecies. The second is that if something fulfills prophecy, we must affirm what happens, because we don't want to disrupt God's plans.

In response, I think the reasoning just sketched is wrong. That is so at least in part because the second assumption is false and we don't yet actually know that the first is true. Let me explain. I begin with the second assumption because it is the easier one to handle. This is the assumption that if something fulfills prophecy, we must leave it alone and affirm what has happened and will happen as a result of prophecy being fulfilled. I trust that it is obvious that this assumption is false. Someday someone will be the Anti-Christ and will do the various horrible things Scripture predicts. Because he and his deeds fulfill prophecy, should everyone just let him alone and applaud whatever he says and does? That suggestion is patently absurd, but then, so too is the general assumption that if something fulfills prophecy, we must rejoice and support whatever happens next, regardless of what it is.

Now, I doubt that if you put the point to a dispensationalist the way I have just made it, he would disagree. But, when dispensationalists aren't thinking as clearly as they should, they may tacitly think the assumption has merit. **And, I am relatively sure that many non-dispensationalists think dispensationalists hold this assumption, especially when they hear no critique from dispensationalists when Israel does something unjust or oppressive.** Nonetheless, many dispensationalists don't hold this assumption, and there is nothing in dispensational understanding of prophecy (as I have described it earlier in this presentation) that requires its advocates to believe that if something fulfills a prophecy, we must applaud it and in no way

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:30 AM

**Comment:** Why not?

inhibit its doing whatever else it chooses to do.

As noted, I am not really convinced that many dispensationalists actually hold this second assumption, though at times some seem to. But, the “touchier” issue is the first assumption about the events of the last century fulfilling prophecy. Certainly, there are people, including some dispensationalists, who use such language about the birth and growth of the state of Israel. Of course, making such claims sensationalizes headlines in the newspapers, sells books (fiction or non-fiction), makes for entertaining movies, and generates at least for a time interest in parts of Scripture. However, our understanding of biblical prophecy should not depend on the daily newspaper headlines and stories, movies, etc.

My major contention is that we don’t actually know that the events of the last century fulfill prophecy. Why is that so? The reason is that end-time prophecies involve a lot of different events, and prophecies about blessings for Israel involve blessings that are spiritual and ones that are material. At this point in history, there are just too many details of end-time prophecies that need to be fulfilled in order to confirm that we are in fact in the end times to be sure that what happened during the last hundred years fulfills biblical prophecy. In particular, we noted that during the tribulation there would be sacrifices in the Temple—currently that at least requires that it be rebuilt so that it could function in that way. But, even more specifically, we noted that Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week, the tribulation, begins with the signing of a seven year peace pact between Israel and the Anti-Christ (the wilful prince of Dan 9:26-27). Once that happens, it will be a very good sign that the tribulation is beginning, but until it does and until sacrifices can be made in the Temple, we can’t be certain that Israel’s return to the land and the birth of the state of Israel fulfill end-time prophecy.

Though many don’t like to think this, it is still possible that God might again disperse Israel from the land, only to bring her back 500-1000 years later and then bring the end. Such suggestions won’t sell many books, but they are within God’s sovereign right to do, and I believe recognizing this is a more responsible way to understand God and his plans, and end-time prophecy, than to say that we *know* prophecy is being fulfilled. Even if what has happened in the last century does fulfill end-time prophecy, assumption two about having to support everything that follows is

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:33 AM  
**Comment:** Let us wait until millions of people are killed in order to rebuild the temple then we will see if this is God’s will.

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:34 AM  
**Comment:** Unethical prophecies?

simply false. If it doesn't fulfill prophecy, then both assumptions are wrong, and the reasoning they are used to support is quite suspect.

So, we may not in fact be living in the end-times, though some feel certain that we are. Let me just say reverently that given various conditions in our world today, if God doesn't use the current situation to wrap up his end-time plans and institute the kingdom, he is missing a very good chance. At the very least, what has happened over the last hundred years should convince everyone that, despite appearances for a long time in history, God is fully capable of bringing to pass whatever he has prophesied. I should also add that even if the two assumptions we've been considering are false, that wouldn't mean dispensationalism in general, or its six core principles I've set forth, are false. Dispensationalism's understanding of the events of the end-time can still be right, even if some dispensationalists are wrong about whether events in our day fulfill prophecy.

But, what about question two? Apart from whether what has happened in the last hundred years fulfills end-time prophecy, do dispensational principles about the covenants and a distinctive future for ethnic Israel require us to do something to "make the end-time events happen"? The answer here is both simple and obvious. If we aren't certain that we are in the end-time, how can we be sure that whatever we do would make the end-times come to pass? Even if we are in the end-times, what can we do to make these events happen, unless we happen to be the Anti-Christ, for example? Since no true believer, dispensationalist or not, is the Anti-Christ, it is hard to see what we can do. But, more to the point, principles 3 and 4 obligate individual Christians to do nothing! The covenants will be fulfilled by God in his relation to Israel, not by us. The only part we might have in that is to plant the Gospel seed in Jewish hearts. But, even if they respond and accept Christ, that doesn't mean we have made end-time events happen or even come sooner. As you think about dispensational principle 4, it involves a number of end-time events, none of which individual Christians have any control over. So, it is hard to see how that principle can require those who hold it to try to "make end-time events happen." The answer to our second question, then, is a resounding "no!" You aren't obligated to try to make these things happen, and most of it, if not all, you can't make happen, anyway. Dispensational essentials agree on my

answer to the second question.

This brings us to the third question: does dispensational understanding of OT covenant promises to Israel and its understanding of end-time prophecies require approval of anything that the current state of Israel does? No, it doesn't, but I must explain why not.

Let us consider initially the promises made in the great OT covenants. Some will quickly note that Abraham was promised the land with very specific dimensions (Gen 15:18-21), so they have a divine right to it. Moreover, the UN resolution also granted them certain rights to the land. But, what does that entail? When God made the promise of land to Abraham, he didn't say how Abraham's descendants would acquire it, or how they were to maintain control over it. When God told Moses, Aaron, and later Joshua to go in and possess the land, he did tell the Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites in the process. But, that was then, and even then they didn't get the whole land promised to Abraham, so it was clear that more land was to come. God certainly hasn't revealed that the current state of Israel was to take and is to hold onto the land by any means whatsoever. And, given the UN resolution in 1947, if Israel hadn't been attacked by its Arab neighbors after declaring statehood in 1948, there wouldn't have had to be a war to establish the Israeli government as legitimately in command of the land given them by the UN resolution.

The main point here, however, is that God's promise of the land to Israel and her own political control of the land in no way says anything about how they are to acquire these things or maintain them. They certainly don't give Israel the right to do anything whatsoever, including unjust and oppressive measures, to maintain their hold on the land. Some may reply that Israel is only fulfilling what God planned for them when he promised the land to Abraham and a kingdom to David.

Assuming that what has happened over the last 100 years in fact fulfills those promises, the fact that you are God's instrument to bring about his will doesn't mean you can do your part any way you choose. Let me illustrate this point. In Isaiah day, God predicted that because of Israel's evil, he would send the Assyrians to punish Israel (Isa 7:17-20), and he did so. The Northern Kingdom was swept away. So, Assyria served as God's instrument to accomplish his will, but

that didn't mean God sanctioned everything the Assyrians did to overthrow the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrian army committed many atrocities in its war of conquest of Israel. God didn't respond by saying that the atrocities were fine, because Assyria was only doing God's bidding. On the contrary, God was angry at the way Assyria waged this war of conquest, and God responded by promising Assyria's punishment and downfall.

Similarly, even if Israel, in taking and protecting the Holy Land for herself, serves as God's instrument to bring to pass what he has promised to do for Israel in relation to possession of the land and having their own government, that doesn't legitimize anything and everything Israel does in serving as God's instrument to bring these things to pass. Those who act unjustly and oppressively as they rule Israel and hold onto the land can expect to be punished by God when and how he sees fit. Nothing essential to dispensationalism disagrees with what I am saying on this point.

Still unconvinced, some may reply that the great covenants promise Israel many material blessings, so what has happened and continues to happen in Israel in our day is merely a case of Israel holding on to what God has promised her. However, here is where it is essential to underscore the dispensational point that the covenants promise material blessings for Israel *in conjunction with* spiritual blessings that require her salvation. That is, too often, non-dispensationalists focus only on the spiritual aspects of the covenant promises and forget the material. The opposite error is to focus only on the material blessings and ignore the spiritual ones.

Dispensational understanding of the covenant promises requires that one take all aspects of the promises, material and spiritual, seriously. Hence, even though the things that have happened over the last hundred years may begin to fulfil some of the material blessings, the spiritual change that is required by the covenants hasn't happened. The nation as a whole doesn't have a saving relationship to Jesus, and Jesus isn't King of Israel. Most of the people in the land and in the government are non-believers. Even if the government were composed of all evangelical Christians, that wouldn't mean everything they would do would be right. People in non-glorified bodies (saved and unsaved) can and do sin. Thus, we cannot simply say that anything the current

government does is acceptable, because God has promised Israel so many blessings. Not all of those blessings have yet been bestowed, because much of the nation and its government is spiritually far from God. People without God (and even non-glorified saints) cannot simply be trusted to do the right thing, so there can be no blanket approval of everything the Israeli government and people do, regardless of what it is. Remember that when Israel does possess all of these blessings, her government will be an absolute monarchy with Jesus as the King. Since he is morally perfect, at that time it will make sense to approve of whatever he does. But, we can't give such approval to the current government, and dispensational understanding of covenant promises doesn't require that we do.

Some may still be unconvinced, for Israel is still God's chosen people, his elect nation. Doesn't that give them certain rights and privileges in the way they conduct their business as a political entity? Not really, but I must explain. Here we get much help from the Apostle Paul in Romans 9. Paul begins the chapter by noting that Israel is God's elect nation. But, from verses 1-6 we can see that it is an election to privilege. Immediately following these verses, Paul underscores the critical point that election to privilege isn't election to salvation, nor does it guarantee it. You don't automatically become saved because of your ethnic Jewish heritage.

So, people elected to privilege are still abject sinners without a saving relationship to God. But, for our purposes, there is another point I must make about this election. The underlying assumption in the imagined objection about Israel as God's chosen seems to be that if you are a member of God's elect, that legitimizes anything you might do. This is absolutely false! Being elected to privilege no more justifies a people to engage in political and social oppression of those under its authority than being elect to salvation sanctions those elect people to engage in as much sin as they want to commit. That is, being a member of God's elect, regardless of the nature of the election, doesn't free you to sin with impunity! And nothing about dispensational distinctives says otherwise!

In sum, nothing about dispensational understanding of God's OT covenant promises to Israel requires dispensationalists to approve of Israel when she acts unjustly and oppressively. But, what about dispensational understanding of end-time prophecies and the distinctive future for

Israel as a nation that dispensationalists espouse? Here again, I must affirm that there is nothing in that understanding of end-time prophecies that requires approval of everything Israel does. Let me explain.

As argued earlier, one can support Israel's return to the land, establishment of her own government, and even, when it happens, rebuilding of the Temple. None of these events in and of themselves require any acts of political or social oppression and injustice. If, of course, in the process of rebuilding the Temple, for example, Israel engages in political and/or social oppression, we cannot support those acts of injustice, even if we in general can be positive about the Temple being rebuilt. If the Temple can be rebuilt without treating Israelis and non-Israelis unjustly, that would, of course, be preferable. But, nothing in dispensational belief about these end-time events requires approval of acts of political and social injustice at any time.

What about the rest of end-time events yet to come? Does dispensational understanding of the events of the tribulation, of the battle of Armageddon, of the Second Advent and the salvation of Israel require approval of Israel's actions involving these events or events of other times besides the end times, even if some of those actions are socially and politically unjust? Not at all.

During the tribulation there will be much persecution of Jews and Israel. Nothing in end-time prophecy says that Israel will be attacked militarily only at Armageddon; there may be other military strikes earlier in the tribulation. Though it isn't an essential of dispensationalism, and not all dispensationalists hold it, I favor just war theory (though I recognize its limitations, especially in a nuclear age). Just war theory requires a just cause in order to go to war. Self-defense when attacked is considered a just cause. So, if at any time during the tribulation, Israel is attacked, she has the right to defend herself.

However, just war theory also talks about just actions in conducting the war. Specifically, a nation's actions during a war aren't considered just if there isn't non-combatant immunity. That is, civilians not engaged in the war are to be free from harm. If in the course of defending oneself, a nation not only attacks enemy armies but also harms civilians who live in the enemy's country, that is morally unacceptable. Whether the war comes during the tribulation or before it, it can't be just if it is waged unjustly, and killing innocent civilians is not just. Nothing inherent

to dispensationalism disagrees. That is, dispensationalists don't believe or hold anything that entails believing that killing non-combatants in war is morally permissible.

The Second Advent of Christ and his establishment of the millennial kingdom will in no way be unjust. Scripture is clear that when Christ is King, there will be justice and peace for all—we have already mentioned passages that teach this. Israel's special place in the millennium will be brought about not by Israel's deeds, but by the gracious work of the Lord. Since it is the Lord who does this, it isn't Israel's work, and hence there can be no question of whether Israel is acting justly or unjustly. The only question is whether the Lord has acted justly in giving Israel prominence. Since the Lord is morally perfect, his special blessing of Israel as an act of divine grace can in no way be unjust! Dispensational understanding of Israel's future, as laid out in end-time prophecies, in no way involves approving of *Israeli deeds* of political and social injustice whenever they occur, because the Second Advent, the salvation of Israel, the establishment of the kingdom, Jesus' just reign and Israel's prominence are not *Israeli acts*. They are *God's acts*, so believing these events will happen doesn't commit anyone to approving of Israel's acts, just or unjust.

So, nothing involved in a dispensational understanding of Israel's future trials and blessings and the end-time prophecies that predict them requires anyone to approve of Israel today or in the future when she does acts of political and social oppression and injustice.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have clarified the essentials of dispensational thinking. I have also examined whether any of them requires that dispensationalists approve of social and political injustice and oppression when done by Israel. Despite what some may think, nothing essential to dispensationalism requires that kind of support for Israel. One can believe everything dispensationalism is really about and still insist that the Israeli government treat its own citizens with justice and do the same for Palestinians living in the land. And, it's a good thing that this is so, because at the very beginning we saw that no evangelical theology should approve of social and political oppression and injustice. And dispensationalism is a form of evangelical theology! In closing, I must add that disapproval of unjust and oppressive deeds applies not only to Israel,

but to the Palestinians as well. When Palestinians or military organizations claiming to represent them unjustly kill via rocket attacks, suicide bombings or whatever, Israeli civilians who aren't attacking them, no form of evangelical theology can approve of those acts as morally right either. In the current struggle between Israelis and Palestinians, there is plenty of blame to be shared by all sides in this struggle. Nothing about dispensationalism, or any other form of evangelical Christian theology, requires supporting acts of sin done by anyone. Hopefully, dispensational and non-dispensational theologians, as well as just ordinary Christians, will understand the theological points I am making, and will turn their attention from vilifying one form of theology or another to focusing on meeting the needs of the many suffering people who are victims of this ongoing conflict. May we also realize that while it is proper to work and pray for peace, only Jesus as King is the ultimate answer to these problems. Even so come Lord Jesus—quickly!

Hanna Katanacho 3/11/10 10:52 AM

**Comment:** There is no mention of the occupation of settlements????

## NOTES

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1. Balfour Declaration in book, and also quoted in Wesley H. Brown, "A Historical Overview of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Christian Responses," in Wesley H. Brown and Peter F. Penner, *Christian Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2008), p. 15.
  2. For more of the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the last hundred years, see Gary Burge's *Whose Land? Whose Promise* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003). See pages 38-39 and 48 for details mentioned in my text.
  3. Robert D. Linder, "Oppression," in Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 473.
  4. *Ibid.*
  5. John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in John S. Feinberg, editor, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988).
  6. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-73.
  7. For a fuller discussion of dispensational hermeneutics see my "Systems of Discontinuity," pp. 73-79, and also Paul D. Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in John S. Feinberg, editor, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988).
  8. John Feinberg, pp. 79-81.
  9. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.
  10. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
  11. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
  12. Commentators are divided as to whether this is the Nile or the *Wadi el Arish*. For our purposes, it isn't necessary to decide this issue. For those who wish to pursue this matter see any of the many fine commentaries on the book of Genesis.
  13. For more details on Daniel's portrait of the events and people of the 70<sup>th</sup> week see Daniel 7, especially verses 23-28.