

(4) The Problem of the Hermeneutics of Prophecy

The problem here is one arising out of the fear that any recognition of a unity between the old Testament covenant community and the New Testament community could result in the obscuring or even the destruction of the clear distinction between the place of Israel and the place of the church in God's prophetic program, thus opening the way either for a figurative-spiritualization interpretation of Old Testament predictions related to Israel, or for a post-tribulational rapturist view.

Although I am sympathetic to these fears, I believe that they are groundless, and for two reasons.

First, it simply does not follow that "a consistent application of Covenant Theology to eschatology leads inevitably to Amillennialism." In point of fact, there is nothing in the concepts of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace in their outworking that even hints at a particular stance on the millennial issue! That issue must be settled by the hermeneutics of predictive prophecy one adopts and employs! Consistent Covenant Theologians have numbered among them Premillennialists, Postmillennialists, and Amillennialists. The difference is not consistency it is hermeneutics!

The second reason I believe these fears are groundless is that it is possible to be a non-dispensationalist and be a pre-tribulationist, and an imminent pre-tribulationist at that! It does not follow that giving up an absolute distinction between Israel and the church leads inevitably to post-tribulationism (although many former dispensationalists have become post-tribulationists), unless, of course, the only basis for holding to pre-tribulationism lies in dispensational arguments and assumptions. It is possible to be an imminent pre-tribulationist and a covenant theologian with no more dispensational convictions than those of the Westminster Divines, who held that the one Covenant of Grace (God's single Plan of Salvation) was unfolded under different dispensations and by means of various historical covenants!

However, let us see whether it is possible to make good the claim that the fears of some that belief in the unity of the one body in all ages (with dispensational distinctions) will destroy any understanding of God's prophetic program are indeed groundless. Let us, for examples, take two dispensational arguments for pre-tribulational Rapture, and see what happens eschatologically if we remove the dispensational assumptions in these arguments.

Let us take, first of all, the argument from Daniel's vision of the 70 weeks. The argument goes as follows:

- (a) The whole vision of Daniel 9:24-27 pertains to Israel.
- (b) The church does not appear in the first 69 weeks of Daniel's prediction; therefore it cannot appear in the 70th week.
- (c) Daniel's 70th week is the Tribulation Period
- (d) Since the church does not appear in the 70th week, it must be raptured before the 70th week begins.
- (e) Thus the Rapture of the church must be pre-tribulational.