

2. With regard to Dispensationalism's distinction between Israel and the Church, it should be asked whether this distinction is absolute or relative, and whether Covenant Theology is committed by inherent principle to a rejection of this distinction. In this connection, the following questions should be raised:

- a. Is Christ's kingdom a wholly earthly/future concept, or can it be both earthly/future and spiritual/present? Is there a sense in which Christ's kingdom includes Jewish and Gentile believers, both in the present and in the future? Robert Saucy, Professor of Systematic Theology at Talbot Theological Seminary, addresses this question:

"Although all dispensationalists maintain a distinction between Israel and the Church, there are significant differences as to the extent of their separation in the purposes and program of God. These differences focus on the relationship of the present Church age with the messianic promises of the Old Testament. Since these promises contain the restoration of the nation of Israel as a central feature, older traditional dispensationalism has tended to deny any fulfillment in the Church age of those promises related to the Messianic kingdom during the present church age, arguing that their fulfillment involves the salvation and restoration of Israel as a nation under the Messiah. . . .

Some dispensationalists, however, have come to see a greater unity in the historical program of God centered in the Messianic kingdom. Without giving up the fulfillment of the promises for the nation of Israel when Christ returns to reign openly in glory, this form of dispensationalism agrees with non-dispensational premillennialism that it is preferable to interpret this age as the first phase of the fulfillment of the one promised Messianic kingdom. The present age involves the spiritual aspects of the Messianic kingdom, that is, the blessings of the New Covenant (i.e. regeneration, the indwelling spirit, etc.). The remainder of the promises including those concerning Israel and the nations will find their fulfillment following the second advent.

Thus this form of dispensationalism shares much in common with non-dispensational premillennialism in seeing the action of God through His word and Spirit in this age as the presence of the power of the Messianic kingdom in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

-- Robert Saucy, "Contemporary Dispensational Thought" in *TSF Bulletin*, March-April 1904, pp. 10-11.

- b. Who were the intended inheritors of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and those Israelites who followed them -- promises that God would be their God, would lead them, bless them, forgive their sins, be with them in life and death, resurrect them from the dead, give them the land of Palestine as a perpetual possession, and raise up the Son of David to be their everlasting Messiah and king? Were the intended inheritors of these promises to be all of the Israelites, believers and unbelievers alike, or only believing Israelites? And who will actually inherit these promises? Will it not be believing Israelites? Who will be saved, when