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How Systems of Belief Affect Our View of Future Prophecy

Scripture in general, and future prophecy in particular, is never interpreted in a vacuum. We all come to the study of future prophecy with prior theological conceptions. Ideally, these conceptions have been thoroughly tested and found to be consistent with the statements of Scripture, based upon sound grammatical and historical interpretation, along with a knowledge of biblical theology. In the study of future prophecy one of the predisposing theological concepts that will greatly affect our understanding of prophecy is our view of “Israel” and “the church.” The reason is that one of the most important questions to be addressed in the interpretation of any prophecy is: “To whom was the prophecy addressed;” and consequently, “To whom does it apply?” In other words, we need to know whether or not the prophecies that were made to Abraham, David, or Israel are directly applicable to the church. As we will see, the nature of Israel and the church, and their relationship to one another is perhaps the single most important issue to be resolved as far as the interpretation of future prophecy is concerned.

Dispensationalism and covenant theology, the two major interpretive frames of reference, each have very different views of the church. These views lead to entirely different interpretations of future prophecy. Understanding these systems and their theological outcomes (*i.e.*, what they believe about the future) is fundamentally important if we are to understand why interpreters disagree over the meaning of future prophecy.

The Historical Development of Millennial Views

The early church was “premillennial.” That is to say, they believed that Christ would come and personally set up His kingdom on earth (the first part of which is called “the millennium”). That

being the case, they believed His coming would be *pre-millennial* (*i.e.*, before the millennium). This belief was simply the result of taking Scripture at face value (using normal/literal interpretation), since numerous passages clearly picture the second coming as occurring immediately prior to the commencement of the millennial kingdom (Isa. 35:4-10; Zech. 2:10-11; 14:1-11; Matt. 24:29-25:46, *esp.* 25:31-34; Rev. 19:11-20:6).

It was not until later that the method known as “spiritualization” (the seeking of a “higher,” more “spiritual” or “mystical” meaning of Scripture) became popular. We first encounter this formally with Origen (A.D. 185-254). For Origen the “spiritual” sense of a passage represented its highest meaning. Unfortunately, Origen’s method of interpretation resulted in nothing more than a highly subjective assessment of the meaning of Scripture (usually viewing it as an allegory to be unraveled). This jeopardized even the most fundamental teachings of the Bible, all of which rest upon the normal/literal sense of the text. Origen himself held many unorthodox views, including universalism (the view that everyone will somehow be saved and spared from eternal damnation). His system is hardly worthy of emulation, yet many today follow in Origen’s footsteps, and are ultimately led away from the truth, into the morass of subjective interpretation.

The second through the fifth centuries saw an increasing rejection of premillennialism. There were many reasons for this, in addition to the increased popularity of “spiritualized” interpretation. In the eastern churches, Greek philosophy, Mysticism, and Gnosticism all had an impact on biblical interpretation. For a brief period some eastern churches even removed the book of Revelation from their canon in an effort to eliminate premillennialism. Meanwhile, in the western churches, premillennial belief continued to be the default position inherited from the early church well into the fifth century. It was not until the time of Augustine (A.D. 354-430) that premillennialism came under serious pressure in the west.

Augustine lived through a transitional period in church history. Whereas in times past the Roman state had been instrumental in the church’s persecution, in the early fourth century the state had formed a patron relationship with the church. It must have seemed

to Augustine that the church was being manifested as the kingdom of God on earth (though in a “spiritual” sense). This state of affairs, along with the influence of neo-Platonism and the “realized eschatology” of Gnosticism, as well as a need to maintain good relations with both the Roman state and citizenry (who were becoming increasingly anxious over Rome’s recent military defeats – attributing them to their defection from the old gods to Christianity) prompted Augustine to abandon the church’s earlier premillennial belief. Augustine adopted the position which in modern times has been dubbed “amillennialism” (signifying no {literal} millennium), holding that the kingdom promised to Israel was being fulfilled through the church (in the current age). Obviously, such a belief could not be derived from a normal/literal, grammatical and historical interpretation of Scripture. Therefore, it was necessary for Augustine to develop a system of interpretation that would support his theological ideas concerning the nature of the kingdom. Thus, Augustine developed what today is referred to as the dual interpretive system (or, “dual hermeneutic”), wherein most of the Bible – except future prophecy – is to be understood normally, but future prophecy (*i.e.*, prophecy not yet fulfilled) is to be “spiritualized” so as to make it conform to this predetermined view of the church as the fulfillment of the kingdom promises made to Israel. Augustine essentially applied Origen’s system of “spiritualization” in a highly selective manner in order to ensure biblical integration for his view of the millennium. The Gnostics of the second through the fourth centuries also made use of allegorization in general biblical interpretation, and Augustine was heavily influenced by Gnosticism. (He had himself been a Manichean.) Augustine’s view resulted in the elevation of the status of the church and soon became the dominant view. Premillennialism never regained its position throughout the middle ages. [The term “amillennialism” is of fairly recent origin. Prior to the beginning of the twentieth century there was simply premillennialism and postmillennialism, with postmillennialism split into two basic groups: those who in the spirit of Augustinian interpretation, spiritualized the kingdom as a present (realized) kingdom, and those that looked for a golden age to come. The former are now referred to as “amillennialists,” and the latter as “postmillennialists” – though with respect to the second coming of Christ, both views are postmillennial. Both views are covenantal, and both views employ essentially the same hermeneutics.]

At the time of the reformation, the amillennialism of the Roman Catholic Church (with some minor modification) was simply carried over into the reformed churches. However, the intellectual and scientific revolution that followed opened the door to question Augustine's view of the kingdom; in fact a new view of the kingdom was needed anyway, since protestants were not happy viewing the Roman Catholic Church as the expression of Christ's kingdom on earth. This not only afforded the opportunity for the re-emergence of premillennialism (Joseph Mede, 1586-1638, seems to be the first post-reformation scholar to embrace premillennialism), but also an opportunity for the emergence of a new millennial view known as "postmillennialism."

Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) is generally credited with the development of postmillennialism—the belief that there will be a progressing kingdom on earth that will be brought about not by the personal presence of Christ, but through the agency of the church. Postmillennialism, quickly took two distinct forms. One form, held by theological conservatives, maintained that the spread of the gospel would bring about a golden age on the earth to be culminated at the personal appearing of Christ at the end of the age. The other form held by theological liberals (who did not accept inspiration), took the position that the kingdom of God would be brought about on earth through the combined efforts of Christian morality, science and technology, and education. Since liberal theologians did not accept the deity of Christ or the reality of His resurrection, they did not expect the millennium to be followed by the personal return of Christ. Postmillennial thinking was very widely accepted in different forms in both conservative and liberal circles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and even into the early part of the twentieth century. However, the events of two world wars dealt a blow to the optimism of postmillennial thinking as it became apparent that man could also employ his scientific and technological accomplishments to serve his own fallen nature. Before the conclusion of the Second World War, postmillennialism was effectively dead. After the collapse of postmillennialism, most postmillennial institutions (churches, seminaries, or other societies) were simply reabsorbed back into amillennialism from whence postmillennialism originated.

There were many similarities between classic postmillennialism and amillennialism. In their more conservative forms, both held that the return of Christ would not occur until the end of the millennium. Both views also held to a general resurrection at the end of the age, and both views allegorized the tribulation prophecies. In short, both views employed essentially the same methods of biblical interpretation (selective non-normal/non-literal interpretation of future prophecy). Seen in this light, it is not surprising that postmillennialism sprang from amillennialism only to be reabsorbed when its theological conclusions failed the test of reality. Since the 1970s a new form of postmillennialism has emerged, called "theonomic postmillennialism." The term "theonomy" is derived from the Greek words *theos* ("God") and *nomos* ("law"). Theonomic postmillennialism (also called "reconstructionism") is the belief that the millennium will be brought about by world evangelism and the establishment of biblical law (principally the Mosaic Law) as the absolute standard of conduct, both personal and civil; thus making obedience to the Old Testament Law obligatory. Obviously, such a view leads to a highly legalistic form of Christianity.

Meanwhile, the revival of premillennialism was slow. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the major church movements and their schools were dominated either by amillennial or postmillennial interpretation. Nevertheless, premillennial teachings were popularized by the Plymouth Brethren in England and through the ministries of influential revivalists in America, such as D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and Billy Sunday. The latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century in America saw the establishment of numerous premillennial Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries, as well as a number of premillennial mission boards and other Christian societies. Today, while amillennialism is by far the dominant view, since liberal and conservative hold it alike, premillennialism is again a major view among theological conservatives.

Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology as Views of History

Premillennialism and amillennialism represent not only different conceptions of the kingdom promises of the Bible, they also rest upon entirely different views of redemptive history. Today, there are essentially two views of redemptive history among biblical conservatives, “covenant theology” and “dispensationalism.” Both views, as articulated systems of belief, are relatively new, having their origins in the reformation and post-reformation period. In the middle ages there was little need for an intellectually defensible justification for amillennialism, the church simply declared it to be so, and as they say, “that was that.” However, in the post-reformation era, even before the re-emergence of premillennialism, it became obvious that amillennialism rested upon a precarious intellectual foundation. Heretofore, the dual interpretive system employed by Augustine provided no real intellectual justification for its highly selective allegorical interpretation of future prophecy. The bias of this type of interpretation in order to produce a predetermined theological outcome (amillennialism) was obvious. This would never do in the increasingly intellectual post-reformation era. Indeed, it would only have been a matter of time before amillennialism came under severe criticism unless some reasonable justification for its concept of the kingdom of God was formulated. Thus, amillennialism gave birth to covenant theology—essentially a view of redemptive history that allows the kingdom promises made to Israel to be applied directly to the church—thus offering justification for the selective use of non-normal/non-literal interpretation needed to reject premillennialism and support amillennialism.

Covenant theology and its view of redemptive history

The central tenet of covenant theology is that all redemptive history, from the fall of man forward, is the outworking of a singular covenant referred to as the “covenant of grace.” While covenant theologians do not agree on the precise nature of this covenant (it is nowhere explicitly referred to in the Bible), it is generally conceived of as a covenant between God and elect sinners, promising redemption upon the exercise of true faith in God. Covenantalists refer to three covenants: 1) the “covenant of redemption,” made between the members of the Godhead in eternity past, in which the redemptive

roles of the members of the Godhead were established; 2) the “covenant of works,” made between God and Adam in which God promised Adam eternal life, if he would obey Him; and 3) the “covenant of grace,” made between God and elect sinners after the fall, promising life upon the exercise of genuine faith in God. (If you attend carefully to this, you will see the connection between Calvinism’s doctrine of “particular redemption,” [*i.e.*, “limited atonement”] and covenant theology.) This being the case, covenant theology associates redemptive history from the fall of man forward under one covenant—the covenant of grace (*see* Figure 3.1, p. 49). Under this conception of redemptive history the distinctive dealings of God with specific individuals and groups is characteristically blurred (or simply ignored). The result is a view of history in which all believers share equally in all of the divine promises—since they are all saved under the same covenant and therefore (according to covenantal reasoning), comprise the same body (whether it happens to be called “Israel” or the “church”). Thus, according to covenantalism the kingdom promises made to Abraham and to his descendants, Israel, can be “spiritually” applied to the church—in allegorical form.

Dispensationalism and its view of redemptive history

Perhaps as a product of the time, or possibly as a reaction to the formalization of covenant theology, another view of redemptive history, called “dispensationalism” arose. A dispensation is simply a distinct era in which a unique set of operative principles is in place that governs, among other things, divine-human relations. The manifestation of dispensational characteristics in redemptive history was recognized very early; the New Testament writers themselves were well aware of dispensational distinctives. On three occasions Paul made specific reference to particular dispensations [Gr. *oikonomia* = “economy”]. Those occasions are Ephesians 1:10, 3:9, and 1 Timothy 1:4. The concept, however, was not limited to a particular vocabulary and was expressed in various forms in many New Testament passages (*e.g.*, Gal. 3:19; 4:1-5; Heb. 3:1-6; 7:11-25; 8:6-7; 9:15-28; 10:1-18; Rev. 20:4; 21:1-22:5). It is important to point out that while each dispensation involves changes in man’s stewardship before God, this does not mean that dispensationalists believe there has been more than one way of salvation. They do not. There is only one means of salvation—it is by grace through faith; there-

fore, salvation is the same in all dispensations (though what the people who lived in those dispensations knew about God's plan certainly varied according to progressive revelation).

What distinguished this emerging "dispensational" interpretation of Scripture was a commitment to interpret the Bible normally/literally, and in the light of its dispensational context; this was something that covenantalists had ignored in their efforts to justify amillennialism by bringing all redemptive history under the "umbrella" of the covenant of grace and thus making the church merely an extension of Israel. One fundamental difference between covenantalism and dispensationalism is that dispensationalism recognizes that normal/literal interpretation leads to the conclusion that Israel and the church are distinct entities; and therefore promises made to Israel must be fulfilled to Israel, they cannot be arbitrarily reassigned to the church.

The contention of dispensationalism is that the Bible can only be properly understood when it is understood in its grammatical, historical, and dispensational context; and the covenantal conception of an overarching covenant of grace, if acknowledged at all, should not be allowed to obscure the dispensational context of a passage. When Scripture is interpreted normally/literally, in its dispensational context, without the imposition of covenantal assumptions regarding the supposed identity between the church and Israel, the result is inevitably a premillennial conception of the future (see, Appendix C: *The Biblical Basis of Premillennialism*, p. 281).

Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology as Systems of Interpretation

Because dispensationalism and covenant theology are both ways of looking at redemptive history (past, present, and future), each naturally has a profound influence on the interpretation of Scripture. The effects of applying either frame of reference will influence almost every area of one's theology. Nowhere is that influence more noticeable than in the study of future prophecy.

The point of controversy between these two frames of reference is not, as might be supposed, the validity of the covenant of grace, though that is a concern. Rather, the disagreement involves the covenantalists' use of this covenantal construct to equate Israel with the church. Even if Israel and the church are saved under the same covenant (and they are, Scripture calls it the "new covenant," *cf.* Jer. 31:31-37), there is no logical necessity to view them as the same entity. Therefore, it is not so much the postulation of the supposed "covenant of grace" to which dispensationalists object, it is rather the assumption made by covenantal interpreters that Israel and the church's inclusion in this supposed covenant justifies the identification of the church as Israel (or a "new Israel," or replacement for Israel). Such a procedure is logically deficient and confuses two prophetic programs that Scripture presents as distinct (see the discussion of Romans 11:1-36 beginning on page 304), so much so that covenantal interpreters must subject many prophecies to allegorical interpretation in order to avoid absurd conclusions.

Covenant theology as a system of interpretation

An important corollary of the covenantal system is that the church is an extension of Israel. Given that assumption, it would seem reasonable that all of the promises made to Israel would apply equally to the church. The interpretive implications are almost endless, but the final result is that there can be no real distinction between God's revelation to and plan for Israel, and that of the church. Under this system of interpretation, the church is a new form of Israel and inherits all the promises and blessings made to Israel in former times (understood "spiritually," of course). As an example of the extent to which this is carried, most covenant theologians identify baptism in the New Testament with circumcision in the Old Testament, taking both as being signs of the covenant, thus validating infant baptism in the church on the basis that infants in the Old Testament were circumcised—even though the New Testament draws no such parallel, referring only to the baptism of believers in Christ.

With regard to future prophecy, if the church were an extension of Israel it would stand to reason that the kingdom promises made to Israel would be fulfilled to the church. Even so, covenantalists

recognize the problems of a literal fulfillment of these prophecies to the church. The solution of course, is to selectively allegorize any prophecies that present problems, which turns out to be virtually all of them. Nevertheless, what covenant theology has never been able to satisfactorily defend is its manifestly *a priori* approach in applying this dual hermeneutic, that is, the necessity to make Scripture conform to its predetermined theological conclusions as evidenced by the *selective*, rather than *consistent*, use of allegorical interpretation. How does the covenantal interpreter know when to switch from a normal/literal method of interpretation (which he uses with most Scripture) to an allegorical method (applied mainly to future prophecy)? The answer is simple: The interpretation has been “pre-concluded;” that’s one of the characteristics of allegorical interpretation, the text can say whatever one needs it to say (which is usually whatever one’s theology requires). Unfortunately, this practice reveals that the covenantal interpreter is not really “interpreting” at all; insofar as he chooses to engage in this practice, he is merely “conforming” scriptural statements to his own preconceived theology. Allegorical interpretation is an inherently eisegetical process, in which meaning is put into a passage rather than derived from the passage. This can be seen from the fact that there are no rules governing the process of allegorical interpretation (nor can there be). Even though it might have a veneer of biblical facts and observations from which to work, its core process is entirely subjective (see, Appendix B: *The Problem With Covenant Theology*).

Dispensationalism as a system of interpretation

In contrast to covenant theology – which is based primarily upon the theological construct of the covenant of grace – dispensationalism imposes no artificial grid upon the interpretive process. Instead, it recognizes the natural landscape of theological history as recorded in Scripture, and interprets accordingly. Dispensationalism maintains that instead of pre-concluding the nature of the kingdom and then tailoring the interpretive process to support that pre-conclusion, one should simply interpret Scriptural statements in light of their clearly intended meaning, according to the normal rules of grammatical and historical interpretation. In other words, dispensationalism holds that the meaning of a text should be determined by the text and its context, not the pre-conclusions of the interpreter.

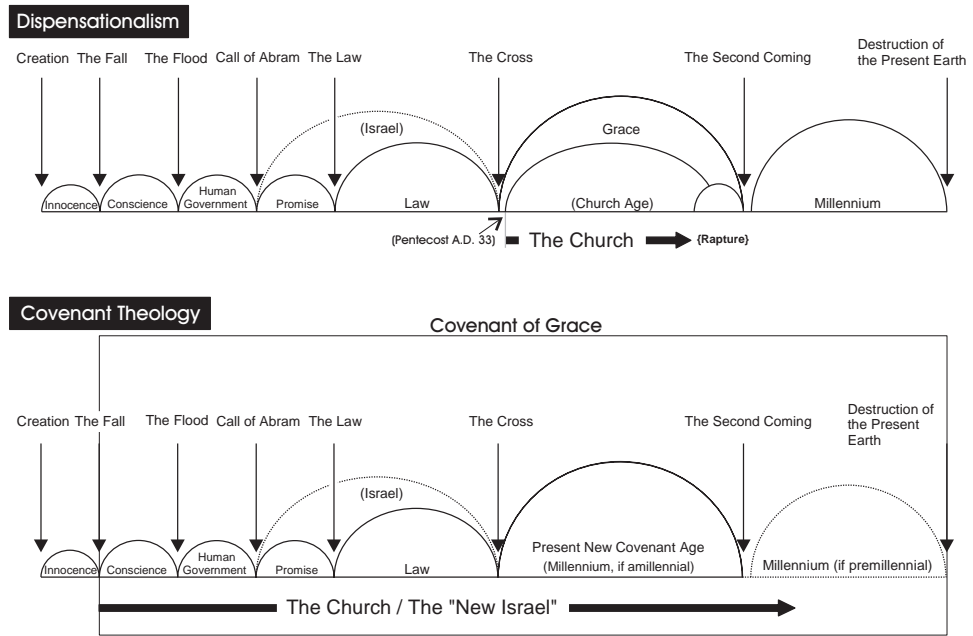


Figure 3.1 A Comparison of Dispensational and Covenant Theology

Covenantalists view all redemptive history as falling under the supposed “covenant of grace,” and therefore blur the dispensations and the distinction between Israel and the church. This results in confusion over how the promises made to Israel will be fulfilled. Covenantalists generally apply those promises to the church (allegorically).

If this point is sustained, it becomes apparent that the interpreter cannot arbitrarily manipulate interpretation (*e.g.*, through the selective use of some alternate method of interpretation {like allegorization} in favor of a particular outcome — such as amillennialism). The interpreter must, at the very least, apply his interpretive principles consistently; failure to do so is an indication of theologically biased interpretation.

Dispensationalism, as an interpretive system, rejects the idea that because all saved people are saved under the same covenant that automatically makes the promises made to one person or group applicable to all people or groups. If specific promises made to individual believers cannot be applied to others (*e.g.*, that Abram would become the father of many nations, or that Hezekiah would live another fifteen years), it does not seem logical that promises made to Israel should be applied to the church, particularly in view of the fact that the New Testament makes a clear distinction between the two (*cf.* Rom. 11). Therefore, dispensationalism holds that the meaning of a passage must be derived from the text itself according to the only rules of communication suitable — the customary usage of language, understood in its historical and dispensational context. When this is done, premillennialism is the clear and natural conclusion. (For further additional information on the interpretation of Romans 11:1-36, see “Appendix D: *Who is the Seed of Abraham*, p. 301.)

Covenant premillennialism

Since covenant theology was developed largely as an explanation of and interpretive framework for the justification of amillennialism, it is strange that a premillennial form of covenant theology would emerge. Covenant premillennialists hold to the same basic covenantal assumptions about the nature of the church as do covenant amillennialists — that is, that all believers throughout history are part of the church. However, when it comes to applying to the church the millennial promises made to Israel, covenant premillennialists object to the degree of allegorization necessary in order to support amillennialism, and thus take a mediate position, holding to covenant theology’s view of the church, but dispensationalism’s view of the millennium. (As will be discussed later, this position leads to what is referred to as “premillennial posttribulationism” — the belief

that the rapture of the church will occur in connection with the second coming of Christ, just prior to the beginning of the millennium.)

While mediate positions tend to be attractive, in that they appear to avoid extremes, they are sometimes the product of internal inconsistencies. If covenant theology's assumption that Israel and the church are the same entity is accepted (which covenant premillennialists do accept), the natural conclusion should be that the millennial promises will not be fulfilled to Israel, but to the church—leading to amillennialism. Yet, premillennialism is based upon those promises being fulfilled to Israel (as distinct from the church). Thus, premillennialism is not compatible with covenant theology's view of Israel and the church. In terms of consistency, "covenant premillennialism" is essentially an oxymoron, somewhat akin to an "Arminian-Calvinist" (or a square-circle).

Progressive Dispensationalism

Progressive dispensationalism represents a movement among some dispensationalists to bridge the gap with covenant premillennialists. The basic tenets of progressive dispensationalism are that there is one people of God, and that the kingdom rule of Christ has already begun (at least in some introductory, preliminary, or spiritual phase). Progressive dispensationalists also see the church as a co-inheritor (along with Israel) of the Old Testament promises, rather than a parenthetical entity as indicated from a study of Old Testament prophecy (*e.g.*, Daniel 9:24-27) and the explicit statements of the New Testament (*cf.* Eph. 3:1-10; Rom 11). This is accomplished through the "progressive" subsuming of one dispensation into the next, such that each dispensation alters (and supersedes) the previous dispensation. This then becomes a mechanism for folding, or graduating the people of God under the Old Testament into the church (accomplishing essentially the same objective that covenant theology attempts with the "covenant of grace"). The problem is that this simply does not represent a biblical picture of either Israel or the church, and requires significant reinterpretation of Scripture (using "spiritualization") in order to iron out all the wrinkles. While progressive dispensationalists insist they continue to accept the basic tenets of dispensationalism, the fact is, they do not. Like many other

theological errors, this one began with a subtle redefinition of key terms (e.g., "dispensationalism," "the church," "Israel"), and a good measure of hermeneutical tweaking, in this case an acceptance of "spiritualization" – with which one can support almost any doctrine. While progressive dispensationalism follows a different route than covenant theology, they aim for the same objective: To demonstrate through some means that there is one people of God in history, and therefore obliterate any distinction between Israel and the church – in the process redefining the biblical picture of the visible aspect of the kingdom of God as already present (at least in some sense), and thus bridging the gap with covenant theology. The problem with progressive dispensationalism is that it has an unbiblical view of the dispensations (as well as Israel, the church, and the visible aspect of the kingdom of God), and as a result has to resort to spiritualization to square its conclusions with the Bible. Paul's teaching on the distinctiveness of Israel and the church presented in Romans 11 simply does not fit this model, neither does the prophetic plan revealed for Israel's future in both the Old and New Testaments (cf. Zechariah 14:1-21; Matthew 24-25; Rev. 19:11-20:4), which may account for why these passages are seldom given serious treatment by progressive dispensationalists.

Why the Bible Should be Interpreted Normally

Of the two major interpretive systems, only dispensationalism subscribes to a consistently normal/literal interpretation of Scripture. In other words, dispensationalism represents a truly exegetical method of interpretation.

By literal interpretation, dispensationalists do not mean that one should ignore figures of speech or various literary devices like symbols. Literal interpretation requires that these forms be understood according to the prevailing usage at the time they were recorded. Thus, the key to interpreting symbols is to ask the question, "How would they have been understood by the writer's contemporaries?" – assuming they already understood what had been previously revealed. (The understanding of truth already revealed is almost always a precondition for comprehending new truth.)

A consistently normal/literal method of interpretation is superior for at least two reasons. First, it is the only method by which exegesis (deriving meaning out of the text) is possible. If we accept the fact that the Bible is God's communication to man and that God intends for man to understand that communication, we can only conceive of God as using human language in a rational and logical manner, according to prevailing usage. The reason is that this is the only way man could ever discern the intended meaning, because the rules of language apply only when language is being used in its normal (conventional) sense. Second, Scripture in general, and prophecy in particular, makes sense when interpreted normally/literally. The normal/literal method is the method of interpretation that we depend upon for other areas of doctrine, including fulfilled prophecy, so it is only consistent to apply it to future prophecy as well. It is worth observing that prophecy that has been fulfilled has been fulfilled in a manner consistent with normal/literal interpretation. By what authority does the covenantal interpreter maintain that only future prophecy will be fulfilled according to a different pattern?

The application of a dual (normal/allegorical) system of interpretation results in inconsistencies. For example, it results in the first sixty-nine "weeks" of Daniel's "seventy-weeks" prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27) being interpreted literally but the last, or seventieth "week," being taken figuratively. Or, in the case of Christ's advent, it requires a literal interpretation of the first advent of Christ and a non-literal interpretation of the events associated with the second coming (even though they may be contained within the same passage, *cf.* Isa. 61:1-3). Once the decision is made to depart from a consistently normal/literal manner of interpretation, interpretation becomes merely the opinion of the interpreter, and it cannot be solidly linked to the text through any known or generally agreed upon standards of communication. What would happen in a modern communications infrastructure if the receiving-end applied whatever communications protocols it wished; or what if it applied a particular protocol simply because it appeared to support what the receiving-end "thought" was the meaning of the communication (albeit, non-literal and subjective); or worse yet, what if it applied no protocol at all? This is what allegorization does. Allegorization doesn't derive

meaning from the text, it simply views the text as a canvas upon which to paint the interpreter's own theology.

In summary, there are at least three key advantages of the literal method of interpretation. 1) The literal method anchors interpretation in fact, rather than subjective opinion. 2) The literal method promotes restraint in the interpretive process, since interpretation cannot go beyond the clear statements of Scripture. 3) The literal method is the cornerstone of orthodox theology; its abandonment in other areas of theology can lead, and has led to apostasy, and its abandonment in the area of future prophecy is the first step in that direction.