



# PROPHETIC TIMING & THE MILLENNIUM

## PART VI

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The conclusion of this series will focus upon dispensational premillennialism. Premillennialists are futurists (obviously) who believe that prophetic fulfillment regarding the Rapture, Tribulation, Second Coming, and Millennium is in an eschatological (future) period. Dispensational premillennialists believe that the Tribulation, Second Coming, and Millennium are all future events pertaining to national Israel (the “Rapture Passages” have distinct reference to the Church). The main difference between premillennial and non-premillennial systems is hermeneutical (interpretive), that is, an understanding of the continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. The procedure is not to interpret the Old Testament by the New Testament (Covenant); rather it is to interpret the meaning of an Old Testament passage in its context and to systematize prophetic doctrines from the priority of the Old Testament, as opposed to the New Testament changing the original meaning. The relationship between the Old and New Testaments is a primary emphasis of dispensational premillennialism.<sup>1</sup>

### THE THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM OF DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

In regards to the Millennium, consistent (dispensational) premillennialists believe the Rapture of the Church will precede the Tribulation Period. At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus Christ will return in glory and power to establish His earthly kingdom from Jerusalem. The duration of the kingdom will be a literal thousand years.

#### *HERMENEUTICS (SCIENCE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION)*

In regards to the issue of eschatological events, dispensational premillennialists (if they are consistent in their hermeneutic) believe it is possible to witness signs of the times before God resumes His unconditional and eternal program with Israel in the Tribulation and the Millennium. Consistent futurism recognizes that current world events set the stage for eschatological events in relation

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to Israel. However, the only prophetic event for the Church in the future is the Rapture, which is imminent, and without any signs (this is why all attempts to predict the Rapture inevitably resort to faulty application of prophecies to Israel being understood in relation to the Church). Even though the tribulational events will not occur during the present Church Age this is not to imply that world events are not significant. If there are present signs of events that are setting the stage for the fulfillment of prophecies that relate to the Tribulation, then, it is appropriate to believe in the soon coming of the Rapture of the Church since that blessed event will come before the start of the Tribulation. Dr. Thomas Ice asked, "How does the interpreter of biblical prophecy insure that he properly understands the timing of prophetic events?"

A good interpreter keeps the future in the future. If an event in a passage is to occur during the Tribulation, then it cannot happen during the current Church Age. It is wrong to say that something is being fulfilled in our day when in fact, the biblical context sets it within the future time of Tribulation....

Having emphasized the point that we are not to commingle the future with the present, it does not mean that current events have no future meaning in the present. The issue is how they relate and have meaning. After all, as a futurist, I do expect that God will one day fulfill His plan for the last days.<sup>2</sup>

Tribulational events do not find fulfillment in the current Church Age. Consistent (dispensational) premillennialists will not adopt a historicist interpretation of world events by quoting, as fulfillment, passages that clearly refer to eschatological events in relation to the nation of Israel. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer reminded his readers that

distinction must be made between the "last days" for Israel — the days of her kingdom glory in the earth (cf. Isaiah 2:1-5) — and the "last days" for the Church, which are days of evil and apostasy (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15). Like-

wise, discrimination is called for between the "last days" for Israel and for the Church and "the last day," which, as related to the Church, is the day of the resurrection of those who have died in Christ (cf. John 6:39-40, 44, 54).<sup>3</sup>

Expositors must relate biblical passages to their appropriate period in time (either the Church or Israel). Commingling eschatological events for the Church and Israel confuses issues. The following chart illustrates this practicality.

<b>"LAST" THINGS FOR CHURCH AND ISRAEL</b>	
<b>Church</b>	<b>Israel</b>
	"Last Day" (John 6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48)
"Last Days" (2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3)	"Last Days" (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1; Acts 2:17)
"Last Time" (1 Pet 1:5; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18)	
"Last Times" (1 Pet 1:20)	
"Latter Days" (1 Tim 4:1)	"Latter Days" (Deut 4:30; 31:29; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28; 10:14; Hos 3:5)
	"Latter Years" (Ezek 38:8)

#### **BIBLICAL COVENANTS**

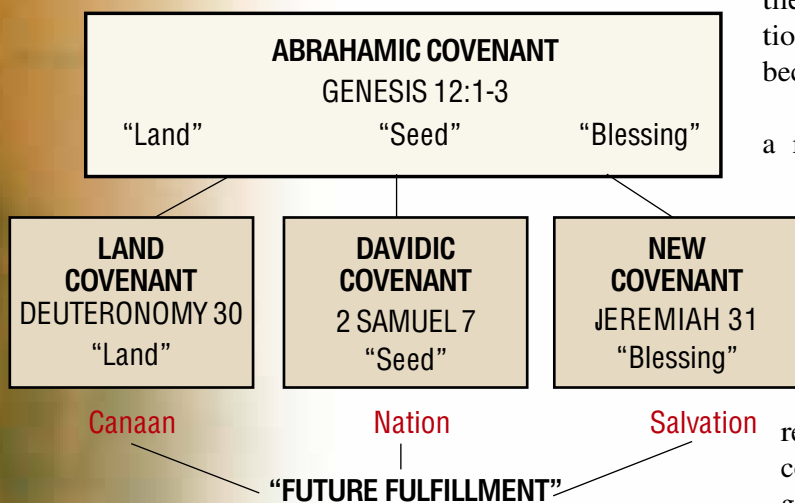
It is obvious that some biblical prophecies awaited fulfillment because a particular human response was required. For instance, the prophecies of the Assyrian captivity (722 BC) and the Babylonian captivity (586 BC) were conditioned on the response of Israel to the message of repentance the prophets preached to them. God, of course, already prophesied the response of Israel but this did not

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mean she was not responsible for her rejection of God's message. Although, it is true that some prophecies are conditioned on human response, other prophecies are clearly unconditional.

Dispensational premillennialists believe that four of the covenantal promises of the Old Testament between God and Israel are unconditional. During the Tribulation, God will prepare Israel for the response He desires for fulfillment of those unconditional covenants. It should be noted that the Abrahamic Covenant, from which all the covenants with Israel branch, is completely conditioned upon God's faithfulness. He alone obligated Himself to the covenant by passing between the severed animals (Genesis 15:12-20).

## COVENANTS OF THE BIBLE



God made five covenants with the nation of Israel: the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Land, Davidic, and New Covenants. Of the five covenants made with Israel, only one of those is conditional: the Mosaic Covenant. Three things are to be noted regarding the covenants with Israel: (1) The covenants are lit-

eral. This means that the contents of those covenants must be interpreted literally; (2) The covenants God made with Israel are eternal, that is, they are not restricted by time; and, (3) The covenants (except for the Mosaic Covenant) are all unconditional. The covenants with Israel are not annulled because of her disobedience. An unconditional covenant is characterized by the words “I will,” which declares God's eternal faithfulness to those promises. It is because the covenants are dependent upon God for fulfillment, that their literal fulfillment can be expected in the endtimes. All the biblical covenants contain both physical and spiritual promises. The physical promises will be fulfilled by and are limited to Israel. The biblical covenants are literal, eternal, depend entirely on God's sovereignty, and were made with a covenant people, Israel. Nevertheless, some of the spiritual blessings of the covenants will extend to the Gentiles. Since the death of Christ is the basis of salvation for all people — for all time — the Church has become a partaker of the Jewish spiritual blessings.

Covenants are contracts given in order to define a relationship between individuals. The biblical covenants between man and God are completely unique to Christianity. Nowhere in the religions of the world does one find the gods relating to man covenantally. In Scripture, the personal relationship between God and man is based upon and mediated through means of covenants. The purpose of the covenants is to reveal God's earthly agreements (covenants being contracts between individuals for the purpose of governing that relationship), spiritual promises (God wants to bind Himself to His people to keep His promises so that He can demonstrate in history the kind of God He is), earthly redemption (plan of redemptive unity), and only hope for mankind (relationships in the Bible, especially between God and man, are legal [law] or judicial [court]). This is why God's earthly agreements are mediated through covenants, which involve intent,



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promises, and sanctions. God wants to bind Himself to His people to keep His promises so that He can demonstrate in history His character.

The Abrahamic covenant is the greatest of redemptive covenants. All of God's blessings for both Jew and Gentile result from this covenant (Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18). Regarding the unconditional covenants, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum wrote:

An unconditional covenant can be defined as a sovereign act of God whereby God unconditionally obligates Himself to bring to pass definite promises, blessings, and conditions for the covenanted people. It is a unilateral covenant. This type of covenant is characterized by the formula I will which declares God's determination to do exactly as He promised. The blessings are secured by the grace of God.<sup>4</sup>

The participants of the Abrahamic covenant are God and Abraham. The perpetuity of the covenant is through Abraham's natural-spiritual seed (Romans 9:6, 8; Galatians 6:16). There are fourteen provisions of the Abrahamic covenant. *First*, from Abraham would come a great nation, Israel (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:1-2, 7; 22:17). *Second*, Abraham was promised a land, Canaan (12:1, 7; 13:14-15, 17; 15:17-21; 17:18). *Third*, Abraham would be

greatly blessed (12:2; 15:6; 22:15-17). *Fourth*, Abraham's name would be great (12:2). *Fifth*, Abraham will be a blessing to others (12:2). *Sixth*, those who bless the nation of Israel will themselves be blessed (12:3). *Seventh*, those who curse the nation of Israel will themselves be cursed (12:3). *Eighth*, through Abraham all humanity will be blessed, including Gentiles (12:3; 22:18). *Ninth*, Abraham will receive a son of promise by his wife Sarah (15:1-4; 17:16-21). *Tenth*, Abraham's descendants would undergo the Egyptian bondage (15:13-14). *Eleventh*, there will be other nations that will spring forth from Abraham (17:3-4, 6). *Twelfth*, Abraham's name would be changed (17:5). *Thirteenth*, the name of Abraham's wife would be changed. *Fourteenth*, circumcision would be the token of the covenant (17:9-14).

The Abrahamic covenant involves a promise of land to Abraham and Israel, a nation (seed), and a worldwide blessing. The implication is that the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled in the form of three sub-covenants: (1) the land covenant; (2) the Davidic covenant; and, (3) the new covenant. This covenant is literal (13:15, 17), eternal (13:15; 17:7, 8, 13, 19), and unconditional (15:1-18). The perpetuity of the covenant would be through Isaac (26:2-

According to the Abrahamic covenant, the seed would be a descendant of Abraham, which meant that the Messiah would be a Jew. It was later revealed to Jacob, that the seed would be limited to the tribe of Judah, the family of David.

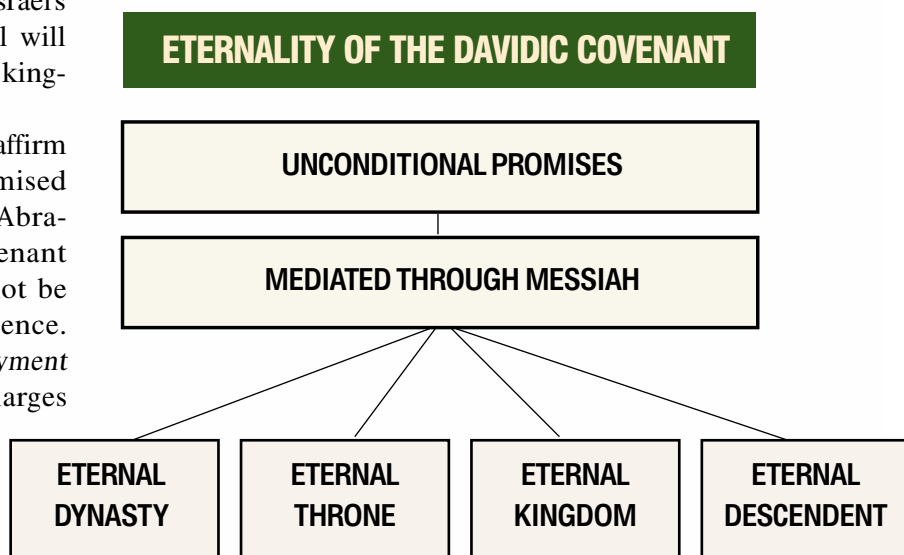
5, 24). Although Isaac had two sons, the promise of the covenant would be through Jacob. Concerning the sons of Jacob, the covenant was confirmed through his twelve sons, who would father the twelve tribes of Israel.

Concerning the promise of a land, God promised that Israel would return to their land after being scattered throughout the world. The content of the covenant is found in Deuteronomy 29:1-30:10. The land covenant is distinct from the Mosaic covenant (Deuteronomy 29:1). The covenant was made between God and the nation of Israel. There are eight provisions of the land covenant. *First*, the disobedience of Israel to the Mosaic Law and subsequent worldwide scattering was prophesied (29:2-30:2). *Second*, after her disobedience, Israel will eventually repent (30:2). *Third*, the Messiah will return (30:3). *Fourth*, after being dispersed, Israel will be regathered to her land (30:3, 4). *Fifth*, Israel will possess the land promised to her (30:5). *Sixth*, Israel will be regenerated (30:6). *Seventh*, Israel's enemies will be judged. *Eighth*, Israel will receive the blessings of the millennial kingdom (30:8-10).<sup>6</sup>

The land covenant was given to reaffirm the title deed of Israel to her promised land, as was originally given in the Abrahamic covenant. Since the land covenant is unconditional, the covenant cannot be canceled despite Israel's disobedience. *Disobedience does affect Israel's enjoyment of the land.* The land covenant enlarges upon the original Abrahamic covenant. This covenant was still in effect centuries after Israel's continued disobedience (Ezekiel 16:1-63). The land covenant is yet to be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom.

The Davidic covenant is set forth in two passages: 2 Samuel 7:11-17 and 1 Chronicles 17:10-15. Although the passages may appear similar, there are some variations. This covenant was made

between God and David. David endures as the representative head of the Davidic house and dynasty. The Davidic covenant amplifies the seed aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. There are seven main provisions given in this covenant. *First*, David is promised a house or dynasty that will be eternal (2 Samuel 7:11; 1 Chronicles 17:10). *Second*, David's son would be established on his throne after him (2 Samuel 7:12). *Third*, Solomon would build the Temple (7:13). *Fourth*, the throne of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdoms would be established forever (7:13, 16). *Fifth*, though Solomon would be judged for disobedience, God would not remove His lovingkindness from him (7:14-15). *Sixth*, the Messiah will come from the seed of David (1 Chronicles 17:11). *Seventh*, the Messiah's throne, house, and kingdom will be established forever (17:12-14).<sup>7</sup>



The Davidic covenant is a literal, unconditional, and eternal covenant. It still awaits fulfillment and is confirmed in numerous biblical passages (Psalm 89; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-17, 19-26; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Hosea 3:4-5;

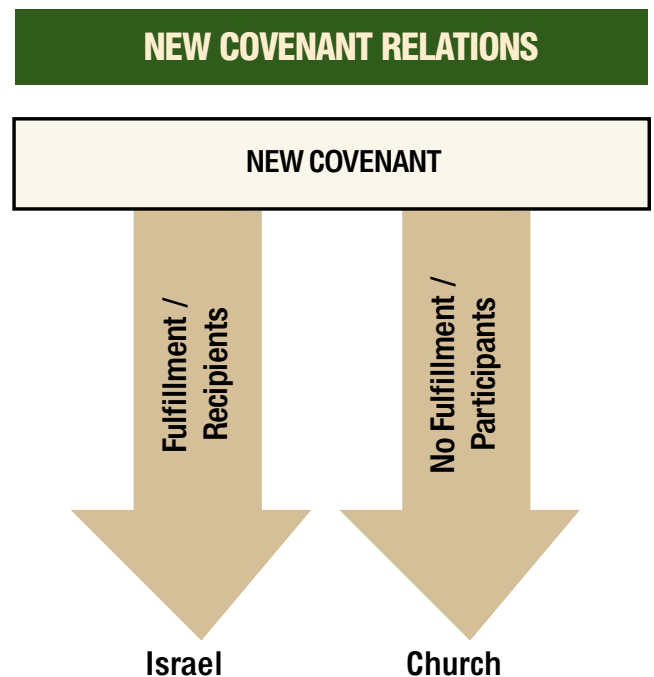
The national salvation of Israel will extend to every individual Jewish person. This salvation will be true in succeeding generations from the time that the initial regeneration of Israel begins. Therefore, during the millennium the only unregenerate people will be Gentiles. In other words, during the entire millennium there will be no unsaved Jews.



Amos 9:11; Luke 1:30-35, 68-70; Acts 15:14-18). The eternal promises of the Davidic covenant will be mediated through the Messiah. These eternal promises are of a house, dynasty, throne, and seed. The importance of this covenant is to amplify the seed aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. According to the Abrahamic covenant, the seed would be a descendant of Abraham, which meant that the Messiah would be a Jew. It was later revealed to Jacob, that the seed would be limited to the tribe of Judah, the family of David.

The New Covenant is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-37 (cf. Isaiah 55:3; 59:21; 61:8-9; Jeremiah 32:40; Ezekiel 16:60; 34:25-31; 37:26-28; Romans 11:25-27; Hebrews 8:7-9:1; 10:16-17). There are eight main provisions of this covenant. *First*, it is an unconditional covenant between God and Israel (Jeremiah 31:31). *Second*, it is distinct from the Mosaic covenant (31:32). *Third*, it promises the regeneration of Israel (32:33; Isaiah 59:21). *Fourth*, the regeneration of Israel would be universal among the Jews (Jeremiah 31:34; Isaiah 61:9; Romans 11:25-27). *Fifth*, it would provide a provision for permanent forgive-

ness of sin (Jeremiah 31:34). *Sixth*, the provision is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 32:41; Isaiah 61:8; Ezekiel 34:25-27). *Seventh*, Israel is promised many material blessings (Jeremiah 32:41; Isaiah 61:8; Ezekiel 34:25-27). *Eighth*, it will provide for a new Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28).<sup>8</sup>



The New Covenant amplifies the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, particularly in relation to salvation. This covenant is not an elaboration of the Mosaic covenant since it ultimately replaced the Law (Jeremiah 31:31-32; Romans 6:14-15). The key aspect of this covenant is the blessing of salvation that will include the national regeneration of Israel (Jeremiah 31:34; Ezekiel 36:29; Romans 6:22; 11:25-27). The national salvation of Israel will extend to every individual Jewish person. This salvation will be true in succeeding generations from the time that the initial regeneration of Israel begins. Therefore, during the millennium the only unregenerate people will be Gentiles. In other words, during the entire millennium there will be no un-

Furthermore, the Church is not to be confused with Israel or the kingdom of God. The Church is a distinct entity in this age. Both the Church and Israel have special relationships with God, but they must be distinguished. The distinction between Israel and the Church is the natural result of interpreting the Bible historically and grammatically (i.e. literal, plain interpretation).



saved Jews. This is the reason *why they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the LORD* (Jeremiah 31:34). Although the Church is partaking of the spiritual blessings of the covenant (Ephesians 1:3), it is the nation of Israel who will receive the material and national promises. This relationship of the Church to the New Covenant is explained in Galatians 3:13-14. Through Christ, the Church partakes of the covenant between God and Israel (Romans 11:28-29; 11:17).

#### ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Negatively stated, it is improper to speak of the Church as a building, a denomination, or a state or national church. Furthermore, the Church is not to be confused with Israel or the kingdom of God. The Church is a distinct entity in this age. Both the Church and Israel have special relationships with God, but they must be distinguished. The distinction between Israel and the Church is the natural result of interpret-

ing the Bible historically and grammatically (i.e. literal, plain interpretation). One must interpret the words of the Bible in their normal or plain meaning. The opposite would be a spiritualizing (allegorizing) of the biblical text. Dr. Charles Ryrie wrote:

Use of the words Israel and church shows clearly that in the New Testament national Israel continues with her own promises and that the church is never equated with a so-called "new Israel" but is carefully and continually distinguished as a separate work of God in this age.<sup>9</sup>

Since Israel and the Church are distinct entities, and Israel has not possessed the land under her Messiah-King, nor have the promises been transferred to the Church, then the timing of fulfillment must be future. Certainly, there is a sense in which the biblical covenants have been fulfilled progressively. For instance, Abraham enjoyed some of the promises that God has covenanted with him. The Davidic covenant was fulfilled some in David and Solomon's day,

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God will be faithful to the unconditional covenants that He has made. God has a covenant relationship with Israel that will lead to future fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (and the sub-covenants of land, seed, and blessing). Due to the current disobedience of the nation, she is experiencing the curses of the Mosaic covenant (and just as the cursings were literal so will be the blessings).

yet there will be a complete fulfillment in a future millennial kingdom. Since the Church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, the Church is distinct from Israel, and cannot inherit the unconditional promises that God made with Israel.

#### MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

The Old Testament refers to the millennial kingdom when referring to the Davidic kingdom, but it did not designate its length (Psalm 2:6-9; Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:6-9; 65:18-23; Jeremiah 31:12-14; 31-37; Ezekiel 34:25-29; 37:1-6; 40-48; Daniel 2:35; 7:13, 14; Joel 2:21-27; Amos 9:13, 14; Micah 4:1-7; Zephaniah 3:9-20; Zechariah 14:9). The New Testament teaches that the length of the kingdom will be one thousand years in length when the Lord Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom and reigns on earth from David's throne in Jerusalem (Revelation 20:1-9). If the biblical covenants are understood literally (on the basis of grammatical interpretation), then there must be a future, regenerate national Israel in the land under the rule of her Messiah-King. The covenants await fulfillment in the millennial kingdom.

#### CONCLUSION

The Old Testament promises made with national Israel will be fulfilled with a future, regenerate national Israel. Since Israel and the Church are distinct entities, there is no sense in which the latter can fulfill promises to the former (unless, of course, one wrongly assumes priority of the New Testament, resulting in the meaning of the promises in their original context being changed or reinterpreted so that they were not unconditional or eternal; e.g. amillennialism and postmillennialism). God will be faithful to the unconditional covenants that He has made. God has a covenant relationship with

Israel that will lead to future fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (and the sub-covenants of land, seed, and blessing). Due to the current disobedience of the nation, she is experiencing the curses of the Mosaic covenant (and just as the cursings were literal so will be the blessings). When those curses have reached their culmination in the seven-year Tribulation Period, resulting in a regenerate nation, God will fulfill the biblical covenants with His chosen people. Since the Church does not have any relation to the period of the Tribulation, she will be removed prior to the start of that period; and when Christ returns to earth, the Church will have already received glorified bodies to rule and serve with Him in the millennial kingdom. (MC)

\* Next month will begin a series on the doctrine of the Church, which will clarify the distinction between Israel and the Church, and how those distinctions relate to the present and the future.

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#### ENDNOTES

- 1 John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, gen. ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 74.
- 2 Thomas Ice, "Stage-Setting of the Last Days," in *Revelation Hoofbeats: When the Riders of Apocalypse Come Forth*, gen. ed. Ron J. Bigalke Jr. (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2003), 284-85.
- 3 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 4:374-75.
- 4 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1989), 570.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 574-75.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 582.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 584-85.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 586-587.
- 9 Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 129.