

## DOCTRINE: RIGHT, WRONG, AND FALSE

*(This is a letter written by C. Leo Jordan around 1990  
to a friend in response to a question about doctrine)*

**I**s church doctrine important? Some denominations insist doctrine is the most important element of the Christian faith. Others place little store in doctrine, claiming that a righteous life is far more important than theory.

As one brought up in a strict fundamentalist sect, I heard the issues of “sound doctrine” discussed and argued most of my life. Anyone who disagreed with our Pentecostal doctrine was in “false” doctrine. Hence, the denominations—we argued that Pentecost was not a denomination at all but was the true church—were in error and caught up in false doctrine.

However, as I listened to these arguments, I became aware of contradictions and doctrinal changes. In other words, our leaders were gradually changing some of their beliefs as they matured, sometimes to the point of refuting and renouncing what they formerly believed. But they did not all change nor did they all agree among themselves over what was to be changed, what was to be discarded as obsolete and wrong, and what was to be accepted as the truth. At any one time, one could hear dozens of variations of the many Pentecostal doctrines being taught. Each teacher, of course, had the inside track on the issue and was God’s spokesman; the air was thick with accusations of *false teachers* and *false doctrines* being hurled at one another. The question that arose in my mind was this: how can we know when a doctrine is true or false? If our own leaders and teachers were so much in disagreement among themselves and, even worse, were so inconsistent

with their own theology, how could we laymen ever hope to come to an understanding of what the true Christian doctrines are?

This issue consumed my thinking for years. At last, as late as 1973, I began to formulate some definitions and some views that have greatly helped me to understand. I was forced into this by a certain pastor who denounced others who disagreed with him as being false prophets. (I was one of those he denounced.)

First of all, is doctrine important? Decidedly so. I will quote here only a verse or two from the writings of Paul to show that it was considered extremely important by the apostles:

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained (1 Tim. 4:6).

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13).

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine . . . . (1 Tim. 4:16).

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine . . . . (2 Tim. 3:16).

This last verse is important, and we shall refer to it later.

The verses cited here all refer to right, or “sound,” doctrine. However, there are equally many that warn us away from false doctrine. I shall later mention one or two wherever appropriate. It should be obvious that doctrine was considered of paramount importance by both Jesus and his apostles.

The word “doctrine” is derived from the Greek *didache*, which may be translated *teaching*. Practically the whole of the New Testament is therefore “doctrine.” However, nearly two millennia of Christian usage has somewhat narrowed the definition of the word causing the confusion and the controversy over the importance of doctrine in the church. Loosely speaking, I think the word doctrine conjures up to the casual student the idea of “reproof.” At least, this was so in my case. Whenever the pastor used the word, it always seemed that he was reminding us of some failure on our part, some guilt concerning our actions, or some hidden sin, perhaps, in our life. These sermons almost always contained

a condemnation of anyone who disagreed with (they called it “disobedience to”) the pastor. I grew weary of these bouts of “good, sound, doctrine.” It is precisely this, I believe, that has caused some of the charismatic movement to reject what they think of as traditional doctrines in favor of “actions.” Their attitude is that all one needs do is live the right kind of Christian life and do the appropriate good works; he will then have no need for doctrine. I think also that to many, doctrine means endless squabbling over the minutiae of such subjects as predestination, eternal security, works versus grace, irresistible grace, second works of grace, sanctification versus justification, correct modes of baptism, the nature of the godhead, the why’s, how’s, and the wherefore’s of the baptism of the Spirit, etc. They have grown desperately weary of these subjects and wish only to obey the simple commandments of Christ and to get on with their life.

To which I almost one hundred percent agree. But there is a danger in this notion; we may throw out the baby with the bath water. That there is such a thing as “sound doctrine” and that it is important to our spiritual welfare surely cannot be denied. If one equates doctrine with “teaching,” as most assuredly the Greek scholars tell us we may, then any Christian teaching is properly called doctrine. Therefore, try as he may, one cannot escape hearing doctrine preached or taught.

With the foregoing in mind, I wish to propose the following definitions:

**Right, or Sound, Doctrine:** those teachings derived from the Holy Scriptures that promote right actions, that inhibit wrong doing, and that create a lively hope within us that will enlighten, encourage, and comfort.

**False Doctrine:** Any teaching that is deliberately and maliciously designed to deceive, to seduce the Christian to violate God’s commandments, and to cause him to renounce or turn away from Christ himself. The key words here are *deliberately and maliciously*. See the following definition.

**Wrong Doctrine:** I have added this category out of necessity. Wrong doctrine is simply any teaching or concept that is not in harmony with the Holy Scriptures but is not the result of a malicious attempt to deceive. It is simply a misguided and mistaken interpretation or opinion. None of us are perfect; we all are wrong in some areas, and we all are ignorant of the true meaning of much of the Bible. The proof that we as

a true disciple can still be wrong is quite simple; we are constantly learning, discarding beliefs and notions once held, and accepting newer and, hopefully, more correct interpretations. Surely, we do not condemn ourselves for these honest mistakes; we should therefore be tolerant and forgiving of others who hold what we think are wrong ideas but who are sincere followers of Jesus Christ. If we all did this, I feel strongly that the Christians of all denominations, sects, and cults would be drawn together into one body. However, I don't expect this to happen before the resurrection.

At this point, I wish to give an example of "wrong doctrine" with which I am personally familiar and which involves primarily the Pentecostal bodies. In the beginning of the Pentecostal outpouring in America, circa 1901, baptism in water was in the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19. Around 1912, some of the brethren began advocating a new "revelation that the apostles actually baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." This doctrine was embraced by about a third of the Pentecostals but soundly rejected by the rest. The controversy erupted into a major split in 1914 that caused the "Jesus name" group to be evicted from the main body of Pentecostals. The evicted group subsequently formed several of their own denominations, or "organizations" as they preferred to call them, with such titles as *The Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ* or *The Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ* to distinguish themselves from the main body who was called *The Assemblies of God*. These titles soon became abbreviated into acronyms. The three largest and most influential were the PA of W (*Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*), PA of JC (*Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ*) and PCI (*Pentecostal Church, Incorporated*). All of the bodies believed essentially the same things concerning baptism of water and of the Spirit, the oneness of the Godhead, and holiness in personal dress and habits, etc. The differences, such as they were, were mostly on interpretations of eschatology (popularly called "prophecy") and minutiae concerning the theology of the new birth, exactly what was involved in baptism, etc.

For example, all Pentecostals singled out Acts 2:38 as being of utmost importance in the plan of salvation. It specifies, according to them, the "keys" to the kingdom that Jesus gave to Peter. Here is the verse:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

There was no question among them that baptism was to be administered in the name of Jesus Christ. (It is to this day the one solid Pentecostal doctrine I retain from my early Pentecostal background.) A question, however, was debated strenuously between the PA of JC and the PCI over the meaning of the phrase “for the remission of sins.” The PA of JC said that baptism in Jesus’ name actually remitted one’s sins, making the disciple ready for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The PCI, on the other hand, said that our sins had already been remitted upon repentance alone, and that baptism was simply an affirmation of this fact, “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Pet. 3:21). The PCI also maintained that water baptism was not essential to the new birth whereas the PA of JC firmly believed that it was. They also argued over whether baptism in Jesus’ name was essential to place the believer into the “bride” of Christ.

For several years, they argued these points among themselves with no final agreement or compromise. However, the two bodies eventually decided that in all other doctrines they were substantially in agreement. Furthermore, each group contained a large number of members who sided with the other group. They reasoned that if their own members who held contrary views could be fellowshipped, why couldn’t they be fellowshipped in the other and rival group? The result of this thinking was that the two organizations decided to merge together with the sole proviso that no more would they argue or question one another over the issue of the new birth. That merger took place in 1945. The resulting merged body adopted the name *United Pentecostal Church, Incorporated*. I personally knew two of the original board members who were active in forming the merger, one from each of the merging organizations.

The assembly agreed to a statement of the fundamental doctrine to be supported by every member of the new church. As I think this is of utmost importance in my discussion, I am quoting it here in full:

The basic and fundamental doctrine of this organization shall be the Bible standard of full salvation, which is repentance, baptism in water by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.

We shall endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit until we all come into the unity of the faith, at the same time admonishing all brethren that they shall not contend for their different views to the disunity of the body (attributed to W.T. Witherspoon and cited from *Think It Not Strange* by Fred J. Foster).

I regard the various interpretations of the new birth and of Acts 2:38 as honest opinions (for the most part) of good men. I do not believe they were trying to deceive anyone. My own view is that both sides were correct: baptism in water in the name of Jesus Christ is indeed an answer to a good conscience, and it makes no difference whatsoever whether the disciple has had his sins forgiven before the act or after. I regard it as equal to signing a contract: both parties to the contract must sign it. It makes no difference who signs first, as long as both sign. As regards the New Covenant between ourselves and God, repentance and water baptism is our signature; the remission of sins and the Holy Spirit baptism is God's signature.<sup>1</sup> As long as both are accomplished, it makes no difference which is first or which depends on the other—the New Covenant is made effective. Cornelius was baptized after he was filled with the Holy Spirit; the Samaritans were baptized before. We do not even know whether the 120 disciples in the upper room, the first to receive the Holy Spirit, were all baptized in Jesus' name before that day or not. The Bible is silent. I strongly suspect that most of them had been baptized by the apostles, an act tantamount to our doing it in the name of Jesus, while there may have been some who were baptized only with John's baptism. For it too was for the remission of sins.

How important do I think these issues are? Well, certainly our goal ought to be to search out and accept the right interpretation at all times. Wrong doctrine, though perhaps not fatal as long as it is sincerely held (there are those, by the way, who disagree violently with this statement), has undesirable consequences. To illustrate, consider the second paragraph in the fundamental doctrine of the UPC quoted above which contains the statement "admonishing all brethren that they shall not contend for their different views to the disunity of the body." Admittedly, this sounds like a commonsensical and wise statement designed to foster unity. In spite of this, I am totally convinced that it achieved an undesirable side effect. This one statement gave politically motivated leaders exactly the kind of authority they needed to squelch all dissent.

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<sup>1</sup> The early church fathers regarded the Holy Spirit as God's signature. Remember, too, the 144,000 Israelites in the Revelation were sealed with the Father's name in their foreheads.

All they had to do was shout “disunity” and the dissenter was brought into line. The strict application of this rule effectively stifled honest scholarship in the UPC, though, ironically, it did not create unity. I know of no other church that has had so many splits and tumults as the *United Pentecostal Church*. I have seen the consequences of the suppression of legitimate debate: the average UPC minister or pastor has almost no real knowledge of the deeper things of the Scriptures. Their sermons are little more than propaganda for the church, brain washing sessions that condition the laity into a blind and unquestioning obedience to the pastor’s will. He, in turn, must support the governing body at “headquarters”; he is not at liberty to promulgate anything new and different. The result has been a steady decline in the quality of doctrine and a steady increase in political and fund raising activities, all in the name of “unity.”

I admit that debate over some of these points indeed can be hair splitting and potentially trouble making, causing needless arguments and dissension. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to suppress all legitimate study and debate. If I have to choose between an extremely censored body of believers who are attempting to achieve unity (itself a highly debatable point) or a loosely governed body of believers some of who come up with bizarre and silly interpretations, I will choose the latter. Thanks be unto God, I don’t have to choose.

But, to summarize, most of these issues, wherever proven to be erroneous, will have to be tucked under the category of wrong doctrine rather than false doctrine. Let us now turn our attention to false doctrine.

False doctrine can also be labeled *damnable heresies*. Heresy itself means, according to my lexicon, *choice, opinion, or sentiment*. Strictly speaking, then, heresy is not necessarily evil. However, I think that its usage in the New Testament connotes in all cases malicious and evil opinions.

Let me make one more point to finish this line of thinking. Doctrine, that is, teaching, is likened to the rain that falls, causing grain to grow from which flour is ground and bread is baked. This formula is many times shortened in the Bible to the simple statement of cause and effect: the word of God is spiritual bread for the inner man. Jesus said we must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have life. Many of the Jews took his sayings literally, became offended, and left him. When he saw that, he explained that he didn’t mean his flesh literally, but his words: they were

spirit and they were life. Perhaps he was thinking of Job 34:3: “For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat.”

Paul, following up on that, explained further that the communion of the saints is the partaking of the bread. We are actually all one loaf of bread; we “eat” of that bread by hearkening unto the teachings, exhortations, revelations, prophecies, tongues, and psalms of the members of the body of Christ. It is this that is the communion of the saints. He explains the cup as symbolic of the Holy Spirit by which we are all made to drink. (I believe in the literal partaking of wine and bread, but I recognize that it, like baptism in water, has a deeper spiritual significance.)

The conclusion is this: if we hear and obey the words of Jesus, that is, eat his flesh, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is, will drink his blood. To say it even more briefly, the words of Christ become Holy Spirit in him who hears and obeys.

Jesus is the Passover Lamb of God. (Lambs are clean beasts.) We thus celebrate the true Passover every time we share our experiences in word or in song with one another.

There is a diabolical equivalent to eating the Passover Lamb. Isaiah mentions a rebellious people who ate swine’s flesh and drank abominable broth from their vessels. I doubt if many of the Jews of his day were literally eating pork and drinking swine’s blood. Isaiah was talking figuratively. They were hearkening to false doctrines that caused them to embrace the abominations of the heathen, that is idols. Eventually, many of them became demon possessed. Jesus actually cast out some demons once that then went into a herd of swine, thus exhibiting their swinish and unclean nature.

We can state the foregoing in a concise form:

A doctrine has the power of imparting a spirit. If the doctrine of Christ, then the Holy Spirit; if the doctrine of devils, then the spirit of demons.
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To say it as simply as possible, right doctrine imparts a good spirit; wrong doctrine, a bad spirit; false doctrine, an evil spirit.

Paul says that in the latter times, “some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to

marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:1–3).

Here, two specific false doctrines are mentioned: forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats. I have only to point out that the Seventh Day Adventists abstain from pork. The Shakers forbade marriage; those who were already married when they embraced the faith were required to abstain from the marital relationship. Even in such cases, we must be cautious in condemning. However, I believe Paul was right; such doctrines can have nothing but evil consequences. I may not know or be able to deduce exactly how or what evil they may cause, but I believe that these doctrines can only result in evil somewhere down the line. My thesis that false doctrine imparts an evil spirit seems borne out by the Shakers. That sect was founded by a woman who later began to be regarded as a female Christ, the opposite sex counterpart of Jesus Christ. (The Shakers cut their nose off to spite their face; they have died out as a direct result of their suppression of marriage.)

Peter said,

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious [i.e., deadly] ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Pet. 2:1–2).

Peter proceeds to describe and condemn false teachers and warns us to give them no heed.

Again, I ask the question: how are we to know when a doctrine is false? Peter’s dissertation offers some good clues. The first is “denying the Lord that bought them.” Any doctrine that denies that Jesus is the Lord is a false doctrine. Its ultimate aim is to destroy those who accept it. If one denies the Lordship of Jesus, he is in danger of violating his commandments which can only result in eternal death if not repented of. How can one be a faithful servant of Christ if he does not regard him as Lord?

A good example of a false doctrine is one of the earliest to invade Christendom. It goes by the name of Gnosticism, derived from the Greek *gnosis* meaning *to know*. It actually was several movements that had widely varying teachings on a number of things, but practically all of

them agreed on one main point: Christ was not a corporeal man, but an illusion or a spirit that only appeared to suffer and die. John assures us that he who does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is antichrist.

John also labelled those who deny that Jesus is the Christ as antichrist. Any doctrine that demotes Jesus from the position of supreme Lord of the creation is false. Two modern examples are the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Neither gives Jesus the title of full and absolute Lord. (In addition, Jehovah's Witnesses are very Judaistic in their understanding of God's kingdom.)

One time a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses came by our house, and I invited them in to talk. After a number of topics had been discussed, something was said about Jehovah being Lord and about baptism. I asked them, "Don't you believe that Jesus is Lord?" One of them remained silent. The other finally admitted, somewhat grudgingly I thought, that, yes, Jesus was Lord. I asked them then shouldn't they be baptized in the name of Jesus? The one who was silent nudged the other with his elbow and said through clenched teeth, "Let's get out of here." They promptly took their leave. No, they do not believe that Jesus is absolute Lord. As I said, neither do the Mormons whose theology is very much akin to the first and second century Gnosticism which also denied the Lordship to the man Christ Jesus. (Ironically, their literature supports baptism in the name of Jesus and speaking in tongues.)

Other characteristics of false teachers and their doctrines are their adulterous ways and their lasciviousness. Peter especially emphasizes this aspect of false teachers. One of the most insidious false doctrines to invade contemporary Christianity is that homosexuality is permissible if it is between consenting and "caring" adults. Homosexuals of both sexes are being ordained as clergymen. God will overlook it because it is an expression of love. Statements such as these are even now being made by licensed clergy from the pulpits of some of our leading churches. They are fulfilling what Jude declared: "ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

Covetousness, which is but the other side of the same coin, also marks the false prophet and false teacher. One should be on guard when he hears too much emphasis on tithes and offerings. The Scriptures are replete with examples, such as Balaam, who destroyed his prophetic ministry over wealth. Another example cited is Esau who sold his birthright for a morsel.

The New Testament contains another form of false doctrine that was being taught by the Pharisees. It is mentioned briefly in Matthew 15 and again in Mark 7. To understand this example, we must recognize that it was Jewish practice to pass along the estate or the farm to the eldest son. When the parents got too old to farm or care for the property, the son took over its operation, continuing to support his parents. This was considered obedience to the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother. There developed, however, a custom or a tradition that was taught by the Jewish leaders that permitted one to donate his property or goods to the temple with the vow *Corban*. *Corban* simply means "It is a gift," and was used to dedicate all manner of gifts of livestock, produce, land, and goods to the temple ostensibly for use by the priests and for distribution to the poor and needy. But, and this is what is totally incomprehensible, the donor need not deliver the goods; he could retain them in his possession and use them for his own benefit. It was only a theoretical donation having no reality at all. I suppose that at death the property did indeed transfer to the temple. The vow of *Corban* was much like our own legal last will and testament.

Sometimes, a man would become angry with his parents and for spite would dedicate the farm or property to the temple with the vow *Corban*. He would then tell them, "I can no longer support you, for I have vowed all the property to God." Of course, he still retained the usage of that property for his own sake, but he was forbidden by the tradition to use it for anyone else's benefit, even his own parents. Jewish tradition records that on occasion such an individual would become remorseful, and, trying to repent of his evil deed, would go back to the priests and asked to be relieved of his vow of *Corban*. They refused. When he mentioned that he would be guilty of violating the fifth commandment, they would console him saying that the vow of *Corban* took precedence over the fifth commandment and that God would overlook its violation.

This is why Jesus angrily denounced their tradition saying,

Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is *Corban*, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered . . . . (Mark 7:9–13)

Mark mentions the existence of many other acts and traditions of the Jews that violated God's commandments. It is noteworthy, then, that of all the examples he could have given, it is precisely this one involving the fifth commandment that he singles out for mention. This example proves that Jesus was right in calling the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers serpents and a generation of vipers. He also said they were of their father the devil, that old serpent (Rev. 12:9), who was a murderer and a liar from the beginning. To see why this is appropriate, consider how Satan lied to Eve about the tree of knowledge, telling her, contrary to God's own word, that they would not die if they ate of it. Paul called the fifth commandment the first commandment with promise; the promise was long life to those who obeyed it, while cursing one's parents brought the death penalty. Just as Satan had lied to Eve saying she would not die, so his sons lied to the people concerning the fifth commandment saying they would not die for violating it—provided, of course, that they had willed their property to those spiritual leaders. Like father, like son. Both went for the jugular vein. Both maliciously lied and deceived their disciples into violating a commandment of God that promised life for obedience or the death penalty for disobedience. It was tantamount to being bitten by a poisonous snake. And this is why Jesus told Nicodemus that as the brazen serpent was raised up by Moses, so would the Son of man be raised up so the people would not perish. The brazen serpent was made by Moses so that those who had been bitten by poisonous snakes could look upon it and be healed. Likewise, those Jews who had been bitten by that generation of vipers called the Pharisees would be healed of their vicious snake bites if only they looked upon the crucified Christ and believed.

That is enough of false doctrine at the moment. I did not intend to make a laundry list of false doctrines and heresies, but rather to establish the definition. False doctrine is maliciously and deliberately designed to deceive men concerning God's commandments, to seduce the unwary into violating them to their own destruction, and to deny the divinity, the Lordship, and the Messiahship of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

The early church was very concerned with false doctrine. However, though the church fathers did in fact root out many false doctrines from their midst, there were many other rather harmless doctrines, though possibly wrong technically speaking, that were declared heresies by the ruling authorities. This was decidedly so during the formative years of the church up until about AD 600. For example, the mystery of the incarnation fascinated the scholars. Many theories and hypotheses were

advanced to explain how Jesus could be both divine and human, and to describe his exact relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. I have read sketches of literally dozens of these Christologies, as the scholar terms them. I was struck by the fact that most of them sounded quite reasonable and logical. Nevertheless, the mainstream church condemned the vast majority of them as being heresies. Men were even burned at the stake over some of them. At the very least, they had their reputation destroyed and many of them were exiled from their native land, losing their church and their disciples. It is interesting that the only Christologies to survive this attack were those that supported the Trinitarian doctrine of Tertullian. In my own definition of things, I see no harm in most of them. I see an honest attempt to come to an understanding of what may forever be a mystery to us in this flesh. Wrong though some of them may have been—I say may, for I am not sure they were wrong—they were not false doctrines designed to deceive and to destroy trusting souls. Therefore the church erred greatly in condemning them as severely as they did..

The moral, Mary, should be obvious; Pentecostals likewise err in making too big an issue over their theories of the godhead and are far too quick to condemn those who disagree. (Nor am I convinced that their Christology is entirely correct, either.)

I want to discuss another rather broad area of Pentecostal doctrine that I regard as false. But before I do, I need to insert a biographical note.

I was literally born in a Pentecostal church building, in a small apartment over the sanctuary. This in 1925. Shortly after, my father announced his intention of becoming a minister. My earliest memories consists of prayer meetings held in homes, the building of a church (only the basement was ever completed while we attended), street meetings, jail and old-folks'-home meetings, tent revivals, and all day meetings with dinner on the ground. I thus grew up absorbing the Pentecostal beliefs and doctrines. But, though I fully believed them, I was uncomfortable with Pentecostal ideas. I couldn't understand why. It bothered me that I should be so miserable concerning those things that were absolutely proven to be scriptural. Why, if these things were so vitally important to eternal life, was I so reluctant to accept them? No, that isn't quite the way to state it. I accepted them all right, but I didn't want to practice them. I wanted nothing more than to be a normal little boy playing with other normal little boys, having fun and enjoying life to the fullest. Definitely, I had no desire to be a saint, Pentecostal style. One time

when I was about four, my parents asked me when was I going to get baptized. I said, "Nine." That was so far off in the future that I didn't have to worry about it. Then, when nine rolled around, Mom reminded me. Leave it to Mom. She never forgot a promise or a hurt. I again put it off until I was 12 or so. I finally did get baptized when I was 14, in White River in Anderson, Indiana. Bro. Nicolas J. Bibbs was the evangelist holding a revival at Sis. Nellie C. Anson's church on 14th and Brown. Though I did definitely feel an urge to repent and seek the Holy Spirit, I again put it off. But when I was seventeen, just shy of eighteen by a month or so, I finally sought, and received the Holy Spirit. I spoke in tongues at the time.

Going into the Navy shortly thereafter, I quickly absorbed other ideas and manners. The result of this awakening was the beginning of doubts about many of the things I had been taught. Unless one has been subjected to the situation, he cannot fully understand what the battle is about or why it is so difficult to abandon the silly and absurd things one has been taught. I did intellectually recognize their silliness, but what troubled me was that so many men whom I trusted as being inspired men of God taught them. How could these men be so wrong, I wondered. One of these men was my own father who, by his exemplary life, proved to me he was indeed a man of God. Surely, he couldn't be wrong, could he? (But see page 32.)

And so I struggled and struggled. There fell into my hands about this time a wonderful little book, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*. It made an indelible impression on me and I attribute my soon coming freedom from the bondage of Pentecostalism to this book. It was just a collection of small biographies of many of the better known Christian leaders, preachers, and missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant. I was deeply impressed; these men were holy, righteous, and dedicated, in many cases even to martyrdom for the Lord. Not a single one of them was Pentecostal. The closest to that genre was Charles Finney. (When I later read some of his works, I was appalled at how autocratic he was—typically Pentecostal, though this was several years before the Pentecostal movement came into existence. I do not think he was a wicked and an evil person—no, on the contrary he was truly a man of God. Nevertheless, many of his ideas I find repellent. I would now just classify them as mistaken notions and incorrect interpretations—in other words, wrong doctrine, but not false doctrine.)

However, to continue. After the years of military duty, I got married and went to college. It was at this time that I first met you, Mary. I hope

this doesn't embarrass you, but I was immediately impressed by your superior intelligence, your questioning attitude, your great musical talent, and your very strict mother. I longed for you to get a musical education, but all appeals to your mother were lost. Now, as I evaluate the situation, I can see that you and I have travelled very similar paths. It is no wonder that we tend to think alike. (Except that I can't play the piano nor sing so gloriously as you.)

I always said that higher education would not affect me. But it did anyway. It was a delayed reaction, but by the time I graduated and acquired my first job as a high school teacher, I knew that I could never be very happy in the Pentecostal Church. There is a book about something called "cultural shock"; though I have only read reviews of it, I think I know what the author is trying to say. I experienced that very thing when we moved to Bedford and began attending the Pentecostal Church in that little backwoods town. But what to do? To walk out on them was at that time unthinkable; I still regarded their doctrine as the very truth. Complicating this was the attitude of several of the pastors I met, a topic I need not discuss here since we have talked about it elsewhere. The only thing I knew to do was just to look for another Pentecostal Church.

So, in 1956, I moved my family to Tennessee. We immediately began attending another Pentecostal Church in Kingsport that had been recommended to me by an old friend of the family. I attended faithfully for about 18 months. To make a long story short, that did it. I grew so totally disillusioned with the whole thing that I just quit attending church altogether. For the entire decade of the sixties, I never set foot inside of a church. I grew daily more contemptuous of the movement. I questioned the validity of the Bible. I made the statement many times that there was far more inspiration in a good mathematics text book than there is in the Bible. I began to regard the whole thing as a figment of men's imagination. I used to say, "Well, it is nothing but a dream, but it ought to be true for it is the noblest dream ever dreamed."

You know this story so I will cut it very short. At the end of the sixties, I began to rethink my relationship with God; I began to think back on the sweet, kind, loving people I once knew, even though I didn't see many like that at the present. I felt God was definitely interested in my salvation. Though I had expressed agnostic ideas, I never became an atheist. Nor did I hate Jesus. I really respected him, and, I honestly believe, loved him. But I was angry with God for allowing me to be fooled for so many years by Pentecostal preachers. I guess I wanted my

independence like the prodigal son, and then, when I achieved it, I became a pauper and wanted to come back to my Father's house. Well, he graciously accepted me back. As an aside, I feel my restoration was largely due to the concern, love, and prayers of about six or seven people: my wife, my parents, Rev. Tom and Sis. Marshall, and last but certainly not least, you and Harold.

At this time, though I was very skeptical and cynical concerning the doctrines of the Pentecostals, I didn't know enough about the Scriptures to argue with them. I thought I knew the Bible, but that was not true. All I really knew was what I had been told by others. When I read it, it was only to support what I already thought I knew. There was no attempt to play the devil's advocate, to test and to prove, but only to support. It was a most uncomfortable position to be in: I was very disillusioned with Pentecostal teachers, but did not know how to debunk them, nor that I even had that privilege. That is important: before you can become enlightened, you must believe that enlightenment can be achieved and that you have the right to it.

Now I had a remarkable experience at this time. I hardly ever tell anyone about it because it was so personal and of such a nature that many people will neither understand nor believe me. I think you will, however, and it may be that I have told you before. If so, just skip the next paragraph or so to get on with my discussion.

This occurred only a few weeks after I was restored. I did not like Sunday School (nor do I like it yet) and so I was not attending. One Sunday morning, while Evelyn was gone to Sunday School, I was reading about the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. As I read how Jesus said, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace," I began weeping inconsolably, for I too had just heard him say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee. Go in peace." Then something caused me to look up. I raised to my feet and looked up into the ceiling. I felt, but did not see, the Lord's presence, as though he were sitting on a throne just above the ceiling. I remember so distinctly and so clearly that he was a Jewish Rabbi, the greatest that ever lived. I had never considered him as a rabbi before, though he was called that. But at this moment, I knew beyond any doubt that Jesus was indeed the greatest Rabbi of all. He spoke, not audibly, but it might as well have been it was so forceful. He said, "Study, son, study the Scriptures, and I will help you to understand them." I said, "Yes, Lord, I will." But would you believe that I made one restriction? I thought, yes, I will study the whole Bible, except for the books of Daniel and Revelation. I will study

the epistles, the gospels, the prophets, the law, and the Psalms. But not Daniel and Revelation. I had what I thought was a very good reason for this: all my life I had heard nothing but confusion concerning those very books. I knew that the ministers violently disagreed among themselves over their meaning, and I wanted no part of that.

A few weeks later, I was on my way to work in Bristol. While meditating on something my father had taught several years previously concerning the blood of Jesus that speaks better things than that of Abel (Heb. 12:24), suddenly, like a bolt of lightning out of a clear blue sky, I was struck with one of the most remarkable and exhilarating ideas I had ever had. And it came right out of the nineteenth chapter of Revelation!

From that moment to the present, I have never ceased to study that book. I do not claim to have spent much time with Daniel: it seems to be exactly what it says, a sealed book that will only be opened in the time of the end. But Revelation is not sealed. I feel more strongly every day that now, more than ever before, is the time for the church to find out what it means.

I was off to a good start.

But there was, and still is, a problem. I want to add, Mary, that if you have read this far, do not stop now. I think I have something quite important to say and I really believe if you will hear me out, you will agree. I really think that I have a timely message for the church. However, I have been hindered in getting it out.

Let me answer first one question. Is the study of the book of Revelation really important? I know, or I suspect, that you are personally not very interested. And I believe I know why: like myself, you have been exposed to a lot of tommyrot concerning that book. Though you may not be able to provide better answers, somehow you are not satisfied with those you have heard. So please let me have this one moment to explain. Then, if you are still not interested, so be it. Not all members of the body of Christ are going to have exactly the same talents and interests—I must recognize that. But, to repeat, I feel that you are so much like myself in so many things that surely, if you were presented with something that makes sense and is logically derived, you would not only accept it but be quite interested. That is my supposition. Only time will tell.

But I must explain: all I am attempting to do in this modest essay is to expose the falseness of one of the cardinal doctrines of Pentecost. I am not going to try to replace it with the correct interpretation of every detail but will limit myself to the fundamental principles involved. It

would require probably several books to explore the complete system. Besides, I do not have all the details worked out yet and probably never will. I will consider my goal accomplished if I can get you to see the error and the danger lurking in this doctrine.

Why study the Revelation? How can we ever get any meaning out of such a crazy patchwork of bizarre visions without apparent rhyme or reason? Is it important that we do understand, at least partially, what John was trying to tell us? To answer this, let us consider the epistle to the Hebrews.

We do not know who wrote it. Tradition says Paul but this is almost certainly false; internal evidence in the book itself rules him out. Nor do we know that it was addressed to the Jewish Christians, that is, the Hebrews; that is just an assumption based on its contents, but one with which I have no quarrel. The major theme of the book is the passing away of the Old Covenant and its replacement with the New, a subject that would have little meaning to the Gentile pagans who were just then entering the church. The transition of the covenants involves a change of temple (or tabernacle), a change of priesthood, a change of the kind of sacrifices to be offered, etc. His thesis is that the Old Covenant with all of its ritualism was but “types and shadows” of the New and far better Covenant that was ushered in with Jesus Christ.

One of his main concerns is the changing of the priesthood. He must show that Jesus is the High Priest of the New Covenant; but therein is a problem. Jesus was not born of the tribe of Levi of which the Jewish priests were extracted, but of Judah. How, then, can he be a priest?

And so he introduces a very obscure personage, Melchisedec. There cannot possibly be a more shadowy and mysterious figure in all of the Old Testament. His name only occurs in two places, Genesis 14:18, and Psalm 110:4. We know almost nothing about this man. So the writer of Hebrews begins to introduce this character and to compare him with Christ. But he suddenly hesitates: he becomes aware that his audience may not be following his argument. So he digresses for a while and gently rebukes his readers for their dullness. He begins by saying,

Of whom [that is, Melchisedec] we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to

them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:11–14).

This, Mary, is a strong indictment of those who ought to have been teachers themselves but who were obviously resisting his efforts to enlighten them on some very important issues. I can almost hear them now, saying, “Why is he wasting our time on this Melchisedec thing? Who needs him? What we want is for him to teach us about repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection, and eternal judgment.”

But these are precisely the very topics the writer includes under the category of fundamentals. He advises them to leave these principles of the doctrine of Christ and to go on unto perfection (Heb. 6:1–2).

He then warns them of the dangers of apostasy if they refuse. He mentions rather obliquely about the earth drinking in the rain and producing tender herbs for the husbandmen; he contrasts this well watered garden of herbs with an arid field that brings forth briars and thorns suitable only for cursing, whose end is to be burned.

Now why did he say that? Well, Moses said that the words and the doctrine of God would fall as rain, his speech would distil as the dew, as rain and showers upon the tender herb and the grass (Deut. 32:1–2). Isaiah said exactly the same thing:

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: ***so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth . . . (Isa. 55:10–11).***

In other words, the writer of Hebrews is telling us that we had better let our garden be watered by the word of the Lord so that we will be fruitful and bring forth pleasant plants for his pleasure. If, however, we resist this watering, we will become dry and parched; instead of tender herbs, briars and thorns will spring up—which Jesus said symbolizes riches, lusts, and cares of this life. We will then become accursed and end up being burned. Strong words.

But the important thing to be noted is that obviously this writer regarded his subject of Melchisedec as of such an importance that if they refused to hear him out, they were in danger of becoming a dry and thorn infested field whose end was to be burned. He says to “go on unto perfection.” How can one go unto perfection? Only by studying and hearing every word of the Lord, not just be content with the first

principles. That means, if I have learned anything at all, that we should be interested in those very difficult books such as Revelation. Indeed, Paul says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . . that the man of God may be **perfect**, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). All scripture certainly includes the Revelation of John. Revelation itself contains its own justification: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3). It further states that John was instructed to not seal his book for “the time is at hand” (Rev. 22:10).

We are thus assured that our perfection as a Christian is brought about by a study of “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”; this is the rain that, watering the earth, brings forth grain from which is made that bread from heaven. If we rebel against this, and carve out only some portion of Scripture to study that does not require a great deal of effort to understand, we are in grave danger of failing to mature. Strong meat, the writer says, belongs to those who are able to discern both good and evil. It is not easy to discern good and evil, regardless of what some may think. There are always situations arising that tax our powers of judgment to the limit. One has only to read the daily newspapers to see that is true. How can we cope with surrogate motherhood, with abortions even if for the safety of the mother or in cases of rape and incest, or *in vitro* fertilizations, or the right to die by unplugging life support systems, etc.? No, judging according to the doctrines of Jesus Christ is not always very easy; one can make horrible mistakes. Therefore, it is necessary to always be studying and meditating on the complete written word, not just some portions. My mistake was in telling the Lord that I would study the whole Bible except for Daniel and Revelation. He quickly, but kindly and gently, showed me otherwise.

Then, after the writer of Hebrews has delivered his gentle rebuke, he resumes the subject that he had interrupted, Melchisedec (Heb. 6:20).

As regards Pentecostals, I see them falling into the category of babes, scripturally speaking. They are always dwelling on the first principles of the doctrine of Christ and they resent any efforts to be taught anything else. However, they should seriously consider what the author of Hebrews is trying to tell us. If Melchizedec was important enough to occupy the better part of two chapters, how much more so the book of Revelation? Of course, we are dull of hearing, and it contains many things hard to be understood—all the more reason why we should

seriously study that book. If ever there was a message to the church, John's Revelation must be it.

But I understand something else involved here, for it also troubled me. You and I, Mary, have heard the book of Revelation taught quite often. Why, then, do you, and formerly myself, resist knowing anything more about that book? I think it is simply because we were taught wrong. I mean really wrong. I am going to make the statement, which I think I can prove, that we have been exposed to a false doctrine. We didn't know in what way it was false, nor did we even recognize that it was false, but we were nevertheless dissatisfied and ill at ease hearing of the great tribulation, the rapture, the rise of the Antichrist, etc. Our subconscious somehow knew it was a line of nonsense, to be brutally frank. At least, that was so in my case. I remember you telling me of your doubts concerning the rapture doctrine.

Now on with my narrative.

Bro. Tom Marshall was our pastor at this time. One day he asked me, "What do you think of dispensationalism?" I said I didn't accept it. He didn't reply. Later, I discovered that I did accept it and he knew it, so he patiently and wisely kept his peace at that time, since he himself had already learned that it was sorely defective.

What I thought dispensationalism was was this: history is divided into seven dispensations. We are living in the sixth one called the church age. In each of these dispensations, God has ordained a plan of salvation. However, man has consistently failed each plan. Furthermore, the sixth, and current dispensation is further subdivided into seven "church ages" according to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2-3. We are living in the seventh one, or the Laodicean Age, the lukewarm church. There is one dispensation, the millennium, also called the kingdom age, to follow after the rapture of the church. Furthermore, the total span from Adam to the final judgment is 7,000 years. It was 4,000 years from Adam to Christ; the millennium will last for 1,000. This leaves exactly 2,000 years for the present dispensation.

And that, Mary, is really all I understood dispensationalism to be; and I rejected it, not so much out of scriptural knowledge, as just a gut reaction. It seemed too pat, too trivial, too convoluted, perhaps, and, while I could not say that it exactly contradicted the Scriptures, neither did the Scriptures support it.

Let me at this time insert what I thought the future held, what we termed "prophecy," but which is better termed "eschatology," the doctrine of the end-time. I thought that what follows was unique to Pentecost,

that our inspired Bible teachers had these things revealed to them by the Spirit. Little did I know . . . .

I believed the following, and I think you did too:

- \* At any moment, Jesus was poised to descend and rapture the church, consisting of all who were filled with the Holy Ghost, and including the Old Testament saints. This would end the church age.
- \* There were no prophecies remaining to be fulfilled before this event: it could have happened during the days of the apostles as far as any unfulfilled prophecy was concerned. I often heard preachers say, "There is absolutely no unfulfilled prophecy interceding between us and the second Advent."
- \* Sometime during the closing days of the church age, the nation of Israel would be restored. This to fulfill God's promises to Abraham.
- \* The rapture, when it happened, would be a secret event, unseen and unheard by the world. They would only know it had happened by the mysterious disappearance of millions of people.
- \* The church would rise to meet the Lord in the air, then accompany him as he returned to heaven, there to remain "until the indignation be overpast."
- \* Immediately after the "rapture," two major developments would occur: first, the third temple would be built, the Levitical priesthood restored, and beastly sacrifices reinstated.
- \* Secondly, Antichrist would ascend to his throne in the temple in Jerusalem, though some thought it would be Rome.
- \* At first, he would befriend the Jewish nation who would hail him as their Messiah.
- \* During this "benevolent" phase of his reign, two witnesses would arise in Jerusalem. Their ministry would result in 144,000 Jews being converted to Christ and being sealed. However, this sealing could not be with the Holy Spirit because the Age of the Holy Spirit had ended with the rapture.

In truth, I rejected this point because of something my father had taught for years.

- \* Then the 144,000 would go forth to evangelize the Gentiles, converting untold millions of them. These would form that great innumerable multitude that John saw standing around the throne (Rev. 7:9–10).
- \* At this, Antichrist would become alarmed and begin an intensive persecution of both Christians and Jews. This would last, according to some, seven years but according to others, only three and a half years. This tribulation period is probably the most confused notion of the whole scheme. I was aware of that and it troubled me.
- \* The great tribulation would greatly endanger the very existence of the Jewish nation. At precisely the moment when all appeared lost, when Antichrist had

gathered his armies of something like 200 million troops around Jerusalem with the intention of annihilating them, Jesus would descend with his previously raptured saints, fight the battle of Armageddon, and destroy the beast and his armies.

- \* When the Jews saw Jesus coming in clouds to defend them, they would become converted to him at sight.
- \* Christ would then ascend the throne in Jerusalem and begin a thousand year reign of peace. The Jews would be supreme. The Gentile nations who survived Armageddon would become their servants. Millions and millions of people would become converted to Christ, far more than had ever happened in the church age.
- \* The millennium would close with a universal rebellion, called Gog and Magog. It would end with fire coming down from heaven, Satan being cast into the lake of fire, and the final judgment set.

That is it. I remember teaching this myself on several occasions. I also remember several years ago finding a little book written by a Baptist that outlined the above points. I was amazed that someone besides a Pentecostal believed “our doctrine.” I sent it to Dad with the remark, “Well, they have got this right, at least.” Nevertheless, I had severe doubts about some of it from time to time. What I didn’t know then, but which I later discovered, is that the whole scheme above is pure dispensationalism. When I discovered that, I was dismayed. I felt betrayed. I saw that what we Pentecostals thought was a divine revelation given to our Holy Ghost filled and “anointed” teachers was just the concoction of men who actually opposed Pentecostalism.

Then, something happened that forever changed the picture.

Shortly after the experience of sensing the presence of the Great Rabbi and the insight I received concerning a verse in Revelation, I began exploring around for some subject to study. My desire was not just to randomly read the Bible, but to pursue some topic to its fullest. There came to me the subject of Babylon the Great. When I was first saved at 17, I had toyed with the thought of studying that subject, I suppose because Dad taught on it frequently, but I never got around to doing so. At last, at the age of 48, I began to tackle the subject. I was obsessed with the idea of proving, from Scriptures, that our contention that **Babylon was the Roman Catholic Church** was correct. I had absolutely no doubt in my mind that we were right, but I did not think we had sufficient scriptural proof. I studied with that thought in mind for several weeks but was getting nowhere at all.

At last, the first great insight came to me. (I call these “insights”; old-timers called them “revelations.” I hesitate to use that word as being too

strong. I think “insights” is a much better word.) I began to connect the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers that Jesus met with Babylon. However, I did not at that time go much further, still believing that, though it was true that the spiritual leaders of Judaism in apostolic times were somehow associated with Babylon the Great, she was actually the Roman Catholic Church.

Then our church had a visitor one night, an elderly retired preacher from Ohio. It was really quite a marvel how he found us, a fact that subsequently convinced me he had been sent by the Lord. He had a ministry trying to work with the Jews. Though he was UPC, he strongly disagreed with the organization on certain prophetic issues concerning the Jews. I happened to agree with him on one particular point with the result that he came to our house and talked far into the night. The one good thing that came out of this visit was that he too had made the same connection of the Jews with Babylon. But he went much farther than me; he forthrightly declared that they were Babylon the Great. Well, this knocked down the barriers that had hindered my progress. Within a few weeks, I had found myriads of Scriptures supporting the same thing. I outlined enough to start a book. I think you may have read it. But it was three or four years in the making during which more and more clearly I began seeing this great truth, that Babylon the Great was actually apostate Judaism.<sup>2</sup>

It completely changed my thinking. The main result was I began to suspect our whole scheme of eschatology was in error. But it was such a big topic that I just began nibbling around the edges of it, hoping to get a foothold and a perspective from which I could frame some kind of an alternative answer. The first thing I began questioning was the pre-tribulation rapture. Hesitantly at first, then with increasing enthusiasm, I studied everything I could find on the subject. In the midst of this confusion, another one of those mysterious and apparently accidental incidents took place that fully convinced me of the error of the pre-tribulation stand. We were attending the same church in Kingsport that Bro. Marshall had pastored, though he had left at this time. We had another pastor that I began to suspect was not right. My wife had already terminated her membership some months previously, but I was still attending. However, there came a night that I made up my mind to quit and to go somewhere else. After the main part of the service was

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<sup>2</sup> Newly revised and completely rewritten, over twice as long, with much new material. May be had free by requesting *The Cup of His Indignation*.

over and people were praying around the altar, I started to leave. As I reached the little porch in the front, one of the younger brothers hurried out to see me with a book in his hand. Now I had never talked to this man before except to say hello. He immediately asked me this: “Do you believe in the pre-tribulation rapture?” I said, “Well, that’s odd you should ask. As a matter of fact, I am very troubled about that issue. I simply don’t know the answer. Something tells me it is wrong but I can’t yet disprove it.” He gave me the book, saying, “Here, read this. If this doesn’t prove to you it is wrong, then nothing will.” Then he left. I took the book, *The Blessed Hope* by George Eldon Ladd, read it cover to cover and became enlightened. The pre-trib theory is definitely wrong. Incidentally, I had heard this young man give forth a message in tongues and an interpretation that was one of the very few I have ever heard that I felt was genuine.

Rather than trying to give a complete disproof, I will here pick out two or three points to debunk and then quote a text that totally demolishes the dispensationalist’s theory. The first is this: all my life I had heard that when the rapture happened, two women would be grinding at the mill; one would be taken (in the rapture) and one left. Two would be sleeping side by side in the bed; one would be taken and the other left. As a result of my studies on Babylon the Great, I carefully read that passage (Mat. 24:37–41). I immediately saw that they had this exactly reversed! The one taken is the wicked one while the one left is the righteous. You can easily see this for yourself if you read Jesus’ opening remarks about his coming being like the days of Noah. The wicked were complacently going about with their normal everyday activities and were completely unsuspecting of their eminent doom. They “knew not” until the flood came, and **took** them all away. Only Noah and his family were **left**. Isaiah also uses the word “taken” to designate the destruction of the wicked (Isa. 8:15; 28:13).

This passage does not support the rapture theory.

Another verse often cited by dispensationalists to support pre-trib is Revelation 3:10 where the Lord promises one of the churches that they will be kept from the hour of temptation (or trial) which shall come upon all the world. (For the sake of simplicity, I will grant that this “temptation” is synonymous with the great tribulation, though that is not at all certain.) However, Greek scholars tell me that the word “from” here means also “out of” and that the sense of this statement is not that the church shall be taken before the hour of temptation, but rather be taken out of it. In other words, they will have to endure that temptation (or

trial) for at least some portion of its duration. We can see this is the correct meaning without becoming Greek scholars by comparing it with a verse in Hebrews (as you will quickly see, I am a loyal and devoted student of that book). The writer was reminding us of the sufferings of Christ: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to **save him from death**, and was heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7).

Jesus’ prayer was answered; he was saved from death, wasn’t he? But we know that he did die. He was saved **not** from dying, but **out of death** by the resurrection. Therefore, “from” can mean “out of.” Revelation 3:10 is no proof at all that we shall be spared any part of the Great Tribulation.

Likewise, the Israelites were saved “out of” the plagues of Egypt. They had not yet departed for Canaan when those plagues came, but they were unaffected by them. Just so, the church need not be raptured to escape the seven last plagues.

But by far the greatest piece of evidence that the pre-trib doctrine is false is simply Jesus’ own words. In Matthew 24, he outlines the future. It is in this passage that he mentions the great tribulation, so great that unless God shortened it, no flesh would be spared. Then he says,

Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days . . . they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:29–31).

Notice the word “after”? Dispensationalists have some sort of an answer to this, of course, but it also contradicts the Scriptures. They say that this passage is directed to the “elect” which is the Jews exclusively. But Peter calls the Gentile Christians the elect also, as does Paul. Furthermore, here would be a second “Jewish” rapture that follows the “Gentile” rapture by about 7 years. That is typical of dispensationalism: every time they get in a corner, they create a new event by splitting apart some other event. They have created two kingdoms, at least two gospels, five crowns, several judgments, two second comings of Christ, several resurrections, etc. They are forever dividing and splitting apart what is in reality only one thing, often inserting a “parenthesis” between the divisions. Did you know that their favorite Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:15? “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not

to be ashamed, ***rightly dividing the word of truth***”? And so divide they do.

Their explanation of this text also bears investigation. They take it to mean that before one can begin to study the Scriptures, he must pre-sort the Scriptures into seven piles, one pile for each dispensation. In particular, there will be separate piles for Israel and the church. Only then can one hope to unravel the mysteries of the end time events. So they say. But that is not what Paul is speaking about.

For Paul, the Scriptures consisted of the Old Testament, written almost entirely in Hebrew, some small portions being written in the closely related language of Aramaic. The Hebrew alphabet consists of 22 consonants. There are no vowels. In those days, words were not separated by spaces, and there were no punctuation marks to separate sentences, and paragraphs; all were run together as a long line of consonants placed in columns on the parchment, broken only by the width of the column or the bottom of the parchment. It required at least one hearing of it read by a knowledgeable scribe before one could even begin to understand it. Suppose, for example, that our alphabet contained neither vowels nor punctuation. When we saw the word BLL, we would not know whether this was BALL, BELL, BILL, BOLL, or BULL unless it were read aloud for us by someone who did know. In some cases, we could figure out which word was meant by the context but not certainly. For instance, suppose we ran across the sentence, CTCHTHBLL. Is this *CATCH THE BALL* or *CATCH THE BULL*? How about RNGTHBLL? Is this *RING THE BELL* or *RING THE BULL*? The scribe, therefore, had to first of all separate the words from each other, figure out where the sentences ended and whether they were statements or questions (there were no question marks), then determine where the oracle ended. Mistakes in doing this often resulted in nonsense, but on occasion, though it was sensible enough, it conveyed a vastly different meaning from what was intended. Dialog was particularly tricky; since there were no quotation marks, it was most difficult to determine who said what. That problem, by the way, remains unsolved in a great many cases. One particular example is the *Song of Solomon*. I have even seen cases in the New Testament, especially in John's writings, where I felt that the dialog had been improperly divided, crediting to Jesus some of John's comments on what Jesus had said. So Paul's admonition to Timothy was precisely this: "study hard, so you won't make mistakes in deciphering (dividing) the Scriptures." It has nothing to do with assigning some to Israel and some to the church.

As a last point concerning the rapture, dispensationalists believe that we are going to rise to meet the Lord in the air, then be whisked off to heaven where we shall reside during the time of the great tribulation. But Greek scholars tell me that the word used here for “meet the Lord” implies that we shall immediately turn around and escort him to the earth. For support, they point out Acts 28:15, where Paul was en route to Rome to be tried. When the brethren heard of his arrival, they came out to “meet” Paul and his entourage (same word for “meet” as used in 1 Thess. 4:17) as far as Appii forum and *The Three Taverns*. These brethren then turned around and escorted Paul to Rome. Paul did not return to Jerusalem with them in tow. Just so, when we meet the Lord in the air, it will be to escort him back to the earth, not to accompany him as he turns around and heads back towards heaven.

Finally, I must make mention of a gross contradiction in item one of the above list. According to dispensational doctrine, Jesus could have returned anytime after his ascension—there were no prophecies to be fulfilled between his Ascension and his second advent. Suppose, then, he had returned in the first century. That would shorten the church age by about 19 centuries so that the overall supposition of 7,000 years from Adam to the judgment is no longer true. Simply speaking, these two assumptions are mutually contradictory. Here is another and related point against them: they make much of the “signless” second coming, that is, there are no signs to help us to know when his coming is near. Nevertheless, these same people are totally obsessed with the signs of his appearing. One can hardly pick up one of their articles without some mention being made of the earthquakes, famines, wars, and crime being signs of the soon returning Christ. What I gather from this is that they are not truly convinced themselves of their own doctrine.

Mary, I don’t want to bore you with these details. The greatest proof to me that they are wrong is not only are they inconsistent and contradictory but their scheme does great violence to the spirit of the New Testament. Eventually, I discovered that it is much worse than I even then suspected. But before I get to the main point of this essay, I want to consider another dispensational idea because it greatly irritates me to know that our spiritual leaders support it.

The 144,000 sealed Israelites are said by the dispensationalists to be wholly future. They will be converted to Christ only after the rapture and the present church age has ended.

Now for some characteristics. This group is said by John to be sealed. He also called them ***the firstfruits unto the Lamb and unto God.***

Paul, in three places, tells us that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, dispensationalists deny that this is the way the 144,000 are sealed. Why are they so vehemently opposed to that? Because they have this totally erroneous theory that the Holy Ghost baptism is solely a phenomenon of the sixth dispensation, the church age. They believe that no Old Testament saint before Pentecost was ever baptized with the Holy Ghost. Likewise, when this age is ended with the rapture, no future kingdom-age saint can be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Even though some of them may be sealed, it is not the same seal with which we are sealed.

Mary, please listen. This is so typical of their teaching. They distort, wrest, bend, and ignore the Scriptures if they conflict with their theory. The first thing to be noted is that the New Testament itself tells us that John the Baptist, his mother Elizabeth, and his father, Zacharias, Old Covenant saints all, were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and this several years before Pentecost (Luke 1:15, 41, 67). Jesus, Peter, and Paul all depict the prophets speaking by the Holy Ghost or being filled with the Spirit of Christ. Moses was filled with the Holy Spirit and imparted it to seventy elders.

Secondly, it is believed that these 144,000 Israelites who were sealed without being filled with the Holy Spirit would evangelize the world of Gentiles and do in three and a half years (in no case more than seven) what we, the church filled with the Holy Spirit, have been unable to accomplish in nearly 2,000 years. Mary, that is simply hogwash. It is an insult to the church and to those who faithfully and with great sacrifice have labored to preach the gospel. It is an insult to Jesus to say that his church, of which he said the gates of hell should not prevail, was wholly inadequate for the great task of evangelizing the world. Don't you see the evil in this theory? And yet thousands of Pentecostal ministers believe this lie.

I received a little publication from a minister in Canada once. I wish I hadn't thrown it away now because of a statement he made that I would like to quote. However, I can tell you what he said: he was praying and hoping for the soon termination of this present "unprofitable age of grace"—his exact wording—which, after all, is going to end like all the rest of the dispensations in total failure. He was looking forward to the

kingdom age when millions and millions of people would be converted to Christ. This minister, was, of course, a staunch dispensationalist.

I believe I know who the 144,000 are; they are definitely not who the dispensationalists say they are. The 144,000 Jews are said to be the **firstfruits** unto the Lamb. I don't think there is any disagreement over who the Lamb is: it is Jesus himself. Well, then, who are his firstfruits? Are they not those Jews who were saved beginning with Pentecost and ending, more or less, with the fall of Jerusalem about 40 years later? The book of Acts mentions at least 8,120 along with several other large groups who became converted. All Jews. Surely, these were the firstfruits unto the Lamb. To support this, James says, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). Who was he talking to when he said that? He begins his epistle as follows: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to **the twelve tribes** which are scattered abroad, greeting" (James 1:1). In other words, to those Jews who had been scattered into the neighboring countries around Judea from the time of the Babylonian exile in 586 BC until that moment. Palestine had possibly two million inhabitants during the days of Jesus, but there were millions more in the surrounding countries. It is really quite simple: those Jews who believed the gospel preached by the apostles became the firstfruits of all the **creatures** to whom the gospel was to be preached. ("Go ye into all the world," said Jesus, "and preach the gospel to every **creature.**") All in perfect agreement with what Paul said in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; **to the Jew first**, and also to the Greek," and with the fact that it was only after John saw the 144,000 sealed Israelites that he saw a great multitude of Gentiles around the throne. Nor do I question the dispensational belief that this great Gentile multitude are the disciples and converts of the 144,000; no, it is the timing that is wrong. The great multitude is quite simply the Gentile Christians, of which you and I are members, from the days of Paul's ministry until the second Advent. They are the direct result of the word of God being preached by the 144,000 Jewish disciples of the first century. (I have also unearthed some other texts that definitely support me but space here forbids a complete exposition.) The great multitude also came out of great tribulation, which implies that the entire church, from Pentecost to the Second Advent will have undergone great tribulation. That, of course, agrees perfectly with other statements in the New Testament.

No, Mary, the 144,000 are not some group of Jews yet to be saved in the future; they are history, and ancient history at that.

Let me tell you where their theory came from. In the second century, Tertullian, who was a pagan philosopher from North Africa, became a Christian. He is the originator of the doctrine of the Trinity. He said that God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, had intervened on earth from Adam to the birth of his Son. Then he went back to heaven while the Son, the second person, intervened on man's behalf for a period of time. After the Son went back to heaven, he sent the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost, to intervene on man's behalf. John Nelson Darby, the creator of dispensationalism in the mid nineteenth century, only modified this just a little. He added that the Holy Spirit would end his ministry at the rapture and ascend back to heaven. This would leave the earth wide open for Satan, for neither the Father, the Son, nor the Holy Ghost would be present to hinder him. This period of time, which he said was seven years in length, would lie between the rapture and the setting up of the millennial kingdom, during which the Jews would suffer a great tribulation and be restored.

But why, do you suppose, did Darby place them in the future? Because he has reserved the millennium, the so-called kingdom age, for the Jews, an age to begin with the rapture, during which God's concern and working will be directed primarily to the Jews. The 144,000, which he says immediately follow the rapture (this without any sort of proof whatsoever) will therefore be the first Jews of that age to believe, making them the firstfruits of his imaginary kingdom age. Well, that is pure baloney for the simple reason that his conception of the kingdom of God is erroneous.

Let me stop right here and say one thing. You may be thinking, "Well, Leo Jordan, just who do you think you are to be so critical of our inspired and anointed Bible teachers?" To which I say, we must prove all things and hold fast that which is good (1 Thess. 5:21) and know them that labor among us (1 Thess. 5:12). Paul also said for every man to prove his own work (Gal. 6:4). That is what I am trying to do. I honestly believe that if more people would spend the time and effort I have spent to understand, they would come to pretty much the same conclusions that I have come to. As a matter of fact, I have more or less independently arrived at some of the same general doctrinal points that have been believed by Presbyterians and other mainline Christian denominations for centuries.

I would like here to relate an incident concerning my father. He taught for 50 years most of what I have outlined above. But towards the last, he began to doubt many things. About a year before he died, I asked him what Jesus meant when he said that he was coming with his angels and the sound of a great trumpet to gather his elect *immediately after* the tribulation of those days? He said, “Leo, I never did understand that Scripture.” I went ahead and told him that I believed Jesus rather than the dispensationalists. He seemed to agree. A year later, he told me that he had taught many things wrong in times past. I felt really sorry and told him not to worry, for none of us were perfect, and that his life was worth more than his teaching. I knew he had done the best he could do. Then he said, “But what I mean is this: there are a lot of churches and faiths out there, aren’t there?” I agreed. Then he said, almost inaudibly, “They can’t all be wrong, can they?” I nearly danced for joy. I said, “No, Dad, they are not all wrong, and I never really believed that, either.” I have always been glad for that opportunity to see how my father had matured in his thinking. One month later, he was dead. After we had moved to Boston, many of the members of the church he pastored told me that he agreed with my new findings and was inspired to teach some very good Bible lessons towards the last. He was an humble man, Mary. How many fathers ever listen to their sons?

By the time I had pretty well arrived at the conclusion that our whole system of eschatology was faulty, I went to Jerusalem to visit the Marshalls. One day, he handed me a book to read, called *Prophecy and the Church*, an exposé and a refutation of dispensationalism by that great Presbyterian scholar Oswald T. Allis. I began reading it and was dumbfounded. It was only then that I finally realized the truth: our whole system of thinking was based entirely on dispensationalism. Oh, we had a few trivial variations, especially since we believed in tongues and Darby didn’t, but essentially we were dyed-in-the-wool dispensationalists. Our doctrine was not the result of “revelations” given to Pentecostal, Holy Ghost filled ministers but were acquired directly from those who actually opposed the Pentecostal experience. (Let me hasten to add this: I am not saying that Darby and his peers were not Holy Ghost filled men of God, but whether they were or not, they were still wrong. It is a mistake to suppose that the baptism of the Holy Spirit somehow makes the man of God infallible, though I know some who so believe.) The reason we embraced dispensationalism was primarily because the Bible schools, in particular A.B.I. in St. Paul, used dispensational text books to teach prophecy. (There is another reason to

be discussed later.) I am still astounded and amazed at this. How could Bro. Norris uphold such an unscriptural theory? For example, Clarence Larkin, who authored the main textbook they used, made this statement (I will have to paraphrase from memory since I don't have a copy present): "The three unclean spirits like frogs that emanate out of the mouths of the beast, the dragon, and the false prophet represent the tongues movement that has gone forth to deceive the whole world." How could Bro. Norris use that man's text? Do you know that his grandson is now a staunch anti-dispensationalist? He has informed David Nevins that dispensationalism is no longer being taught in many UPC churches and that there is a gradual realization among the UPC that it is wrong. I certainly hope so. It is about time.

I could continue on and on, for there are many, many details that could be discussed and debunked, but I really want to get to the point: none of these details I have mentioned could qualify as false doctrines—using my definition—but are merely "wrong" doctrines. In other words, wrong though they may be, I don't foresee anyone losing his soul, with one possible exception, because he so believes. But, as we shall see, ***dispensationalism itself, taken as a whole, does qualify as a false doctrine.***

When I first began seeing how wrong it really was, I felt that our teachers who supported it were honest but mistaken. I was willing to grant that it probably made little difference what they believed or taught. But I have changed my mind. I came across a small booklet some time ago that voices my reactions exactly. It is titled *Why I Left Scofieldism* (another name for dispensationalism) by William E. Cox. He had been raised a Baptist and had been indoctrinated with dispensationalism primarily through the medium of *The Scofield Reference Bible*. When he served time in the military during World War II, he felt that God had called him into the ministry. He said, "With my call to the ministry came the jolting realization that I would be called upon to say to members of my congregation, 'This is why we believe thus and so about the Bible; here is the verse and chapter for our belief on a given subject.' With this thought in mind I deliberately took my theology apart to see whether or not I could put it together again, *based on the Bible*. My thinking was that if I could not convince myself, then certainly I could not convince others. In other words, I asked myself, concerning each and every major doctrine in which I believed, 'What saith the scripture?' (Romans 4:3)"

The result of this reexamination of his church's doctrine was that he abandoned dispensationalism (or, as he calls it, *Scofieldism*) as being

totally in error. He discovered too that it is a minority belief, but, because its proponents are so vocal, they appear to be in the majority. He learned that some of the strongest opponents of dispensationalism came from men who had at one time supported it. Then he says, "Having come out of Scofieldism, I passed through at least three stages to arrive at my present position. My first feeling was that, although many things my former hero taught were not so, the good points (and he has many of these) in his system outweighed the bad. From this stage continued study led me to believe that I must leave *The Scofield Reference Bible* alone completely, but that I should not make an issue of it with equally sincere Christians. Further study led me to the position which I now hold. That position is that Scofieldism is heresy, and that, since God has given me this light, I must seek in love to warn others of the household of faith against this subtle, intriguing heresy."

Rev. Cox has exactly described the path that I have followed. At first, I regarded the errors of little consequence, as just misguided interpretations of otherwise sincere people. With more study, I came to the conclusion that it was bad enough to warn people about. Finally, I realized that it is one of the most subtle and dangerous heresies to ever arise in the church.

After I finish the next section, I shall come back to this little booklet and quote some more remarks. Rev. Cox is only one of many I have read about who have abandoned the tenets of Darby, Irving, Scofield, and Larkin. If I do not grow too weary writing this essay, I will give you a few notes on the origins of the doctrine which, I think, show as much as anything else why we should be suspicious of it and why it should be critically appraised and discarded.

I am not going to go into any further detail with this system of thinking. It would take a fair sized book to do so. Besides, it has already been done (for example, the previously mentioned *Prophecy and the Church*). I wish, however, to proceed to the very heart of dispensational teaching and to show that its founding principles are woefully in error.

What I have outlined to this point pretty well covers all that I knew about dispensationalism until I began to study it, and even so, I was not aware that it was dispensational. However, the very heart of the system, the bed-rock assumptions on which it is founded, were never explicitly taught in any of the churches I attended, though, as I look back on it, I can see little hints and unstated assumptions of these principles underlying their teaching. I don't really know why. Two or three possibilities come to mind: the most likely is that the preachers simply

did not know that much about the system. Most of the ones I was acquainted with thought these were “revelations” given to Holy Ghost filled brothers and were to be accepted as divinely inspired. They merely repeated one another and did almost no research into the subject. The second possibility, but one I discredit, is that they knew but didn’t accept the basic premises (to be shortly delineated). The final possibility is that they both knew and accepted but thought it was too difficult a subject to teach their people; perhaps they even thought it was not important. I knew one minister who so believed, and I suspect there are several like that.

Ok. What are these premises? One of them is that the Bible is to be read and understood quite literally unless explicitly told otherwise. For example, the river Euphrates is to be dried up (literally) to prepare a way for the Chinese to invade Israel. Ha, ha. Our country is even at this very moment spanning a 3,000 mile ocean with a fully equipped 250,000 man army with modern weapons including huge tanks, artillery, missiles, and air craft. How could a dinky little river hold back a modern army? See what I mean? They take this quite literally because there are no Biblical indications (so they think) to the contrary, and fail to search out the correct (and spiritual) meaning.

As a result of this premise of literalism, they have concluded that every time the Bible uses the word *Israel* it refers to the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It never refers to the church, that is, spiritual Israel.

Their second premise, which is actually derived from the first, is that in addition to seven dispensations, God has two peoples, two kingdoms, and two sets of promises. One group is the natural, earthly people known as Israel, who have received via Abraham very special promises, some of which are to still be fulfilled. The other group is the church with its own set of promises of a spiritual nature. An oft made remark is that the church has robbed Israel of her promises! One promise they make a big fuss over is the restoration of national Israel wherein she will reclaim all the territory first promised Abraham. This, they say, is even now taking place as God is bringing the native sons of Abraham back to their own land. When this is accomplished, God will terminate his dealings with the church and will reinstate his chosen people, the Jews, to favor. The result of this will be the final restoration of Israel into fellowship with Himself with Christ as King. The Jews will reign supreme over the earth throughout the millennium with the Gentiles who have survived Armageddon as their abject slaves.

When Israel is at last restored, she will rebuild the so-called third temple, reinstate the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices, and reimpose the trappings of the law of Moses. It will be in this new temple that Christ will someday reign for a thousand years.

One further point: dispensationalism maintains that Jesus offered the kingdom to Israel, but, because she refused it, God postponed that kingdom until the church age was fulfilled. The church was added as kind of an afterthought, the initiating of plan B after plan A failed. They call this insertion of the church age a “parenthesis” in the plan of the ages, describing it as an interruption of God’s timetable for making the Jews into a kingdom. This is often compared to the ticking of a clock. At Calvary, the clock stopped, as far as Israel is concerned, but will begin ticking again at the rapture. The Jews’ willful disobedience and rejection of Christ has only postponed the inevitable for a while.

There are even some Christians who are saying that Israel will not be required to accept Jesus as the Messiah; God loves them because they are the sons of Abraham, and, as such, he is duty bound to fulfill all his promises to them regardless of their disobedience and lack of faith. After all, are they not worshipping exactly the same God we are? People like this forget what Jesus said: “For except that ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). And again, he said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber . . . . I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:1, 7). And yet again, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

I need not go much further. It is this that underlies their entire thinking. I believe you can see for yourself that practically all of the previous points I have discussed—the pre-trib rapture, the restoration of the nation of Israel, the identity of the 144,000 sealed Israelites, etc—rest entirely upon this assumption.

You may be thinking, “But who really believes this? I have never met anyone who does.” Well, I have. Just this summer, we had two visitors (at different times and who did not know each other) who claimed to be missionaries to Israel. The first lady had given me the distinct impression from her correspondence that she was a converted Jew. For one thing, she had a Hebrew name. It turned out, however, that, though she did have a Jewish ancestor, her family was American with an English name and she had been raised a Christian. It was obvious that she was trying to establish her image as being Jewish. Both missionaries believed that the Jewish nation that now exists is a direct fulfillment of

God's promise to Abraham, and that all the Jews will be saved. One did express some concern over the Jews killing off the Palestinians but apparently felt that it was necessary to establish the Jewish state. One lady told me this: because the first fruits will be saved, then God will save all the rest regardless whether they believe in Christ or not. She bases this primarily on Romans 11:16. When I didn't agree, she grew so angry with me she jumped up and wagged her finger right in my face, shouting, "You're wrong, you're wrong . . . ." several times. Then she said my natural deafness was due to my spiritual deafness. I would not hear and believe the Scriptures, so God took away my hearing. She was supposed to go with us to church to speak but she grew so angry that she had us take her back to her room.

No, I am not speaking vacuously, Mary. These things are real, not imaginary. What I see is a very strong urge among Christians of this type to identify themselves with the Jews, to side with them on scriptural matters, and to engineer some way for them to be saved without actually coming in the door of Christ. And I think this trend will continue to intensify until many Christians actually apostatize, renounce Christ, chip in their lot with Judaism, and be lost. They will "depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils" exactly as Paul prophesied. I must hasten to add here that I, too, hope that Israel, naturally speaking, is saved, but they must be saved exactly the same way we Gentiles are saved. There are no special privileges for them apart from the church. In particular, their salvation does not in any way depend on their repossessing the holy land.

I need only cite two or three verses to shatter their claims. Paul says,

For all the promises of God in [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us (2 Cor 1:20).

That is, all of God's promises are fulfilled in Christ; as Jesus himself said, he came to fulfill the law, not to destroy. The second verse is this:

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

To remove all doubt, Paul also says,

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ . . . . (Rom. 8:17).

These remarks were made to the Gentiles. If we or any man, Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, are in Christ, then we are just as much of a Jew as he who is naturally born a Jew; in fact, Paul goes so far as to say that not all who are born natural Jews are counted as Jews; it is only faith in Christ that makes one a Jew. The implications are very obvious: if there are any promises made to Abraham or any one else, they are now the sole possession of Christ who will share them with his disciples regardless of their ethnic, national, or social status. Therefore, natural Israel has no more claim to favor with God than we do. There are no promises made to them that do not also belong to us. We have not robbed Israel of anything. And if we are not to receive a natural kingdom in this life, then neither are they. I mean, of course, with God's approval. I am totally persuaded that the Jews will indeed acquire a kingdom and repossess the land they once had, but it will become a tragedy and a curse unto them. Since I have written this up in another document, I will not elaborate here.

The great mistake of the dispensationalists is to confuse God's kingdom with the natural kingdom of Israel that first was organized under King Saul. But this is not the kingdom God has promised his people. He was sorely displeased when they went to Samuel and requested a king. He accused them of rejecting himself as King. In one place God says, "I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath" (Hos. 13:11). When the crowd would seize Jesus and forcibly make him King, he refused. (Dispensationalists have this exactly reversed: they say that Jesus offered the kingdom to the Jews but they refused it.<sup>3</sup>) He told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. He made Peter to put up his sword. No, that land of Israel was not God's kingdom, neither for the Jews nor the Gentiles. At most, it was but a type and a shadow of the new and far better kingdom yet to come. True, God did promise Abraham a territory for his children, but God had already fulfilled that in the days of David and Solomon, a land that was contingent upon their obedience. In fact, the promises God made to Abraham concerning the land were fulfilled in Joshua's day. See Joshua 21:43-45. Had they remained obedient and accepted their Messiah, I see no reason why they would not still be in the land of Palestine to this day. But because of their willful rejection of Jesus and the gospel, they lost it,

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<sup>3</sup> In one sense, they are right. Jesus did offer Israel a kingdom, but it was a spiritual one—not of meats and drink but of love, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost. They wanted a carnal and political kingdom.

and I find absolutely no promise in the Scriptures that they are to ever reclaim it with God's blessing. Most of the Old Testament Scriptures that mention a restoration to the land were written before or during the Babylonian captivity, to comfort the people in exile that they would eventually return to their land. Salvation was promised them when that happened. And indeed, after the return from exile, the Jewish nation survived until there arose a Savior and a Prince who brought salvation. After they rejected him, they lost even that which they seemed to have when rebellious Jerusalem was totally destroyed in AD 70 and the entire land in AD 135. No prophecies promise any other restoration, territorially speaking, with God's blessing.

Even if they had retained possession of the land, it would not have been the kingdom of God that Jesus preached. I think that this is very important for our thesis. It is the most fundamental mistake of the dispensationalists and shows their ignorance of the spiritual things of God. They are only looking for a carnal fulfillment.

But, you say, are not the Jews back in Palestine? Is this not a vindication and a proof that the dispensationalists are right? No. I will not try to prove this next statement, for I have written it up elsewhere. But what we see in the making is not God's people and nation, but a restoration of Babylon the Great and the rise of Satan out of his pit. I am persuaded that Satan will work with and through this people, his "synagogue" (Rev. 2:9, 3:9), a people who continually reject Jesus as the Christ, to establish his universal kingdom just prior to the second Advent (only to be destroyed at Armageddon). Of course, this statement will greatly offend many, but I have gotten to the point of not really caring very much. I see no way of getting the truth to them short of being very blunt.

What then was the kingdom of God? It was to be a kingdom of priests, or, as the Septuagint phrases it, a royal priesthood (Ex. 19:5-6). In this passage, God designates Israel as "a peculiar treasure," "a kingdom of priests," and "an holy nation." All of this is prefaced by "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant." One of the statements made by the dispensationalists is that God must unconditionally fulfill his promises to Israel. But in this passage, the promise is contingent upon their obedience. The implication is that they will lose it if they persist in disobedience, a warning that is spelled out elsewhere in great detail. The "kingdom of priests" is the kingdom which Jesus said would be taken away from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43). Peter confirms this. He

tells the Gentiles of Asia Minor that they are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, and a peculiar people, all terms that formerly were reserved exclusively for Israel (1 Pet. 2:9). He even calls the Gentile Christians the “elect” (1:2) and uses the same word to describe them as “a chosen,” that is, “an elect,” generation. The point is obvious: the Jews in ancient times were the priests of God, reconciling man unto himself. They were a chosen nation, the elect, a peculiar treasure unto God. At that time, these good things were essentially restricted to the Jews, but there were provisos that indicated they were to minister to the Gentiles as well. This they neglected to do, becoming vain, arrogant, selfish, racist, and conceited. It was then that God took away the priesthood and gave it to the disciples of Jesus, himself being the high priest. One of the tenets of the Protestant Reformation was the “priesthood of the believers,” a priesthood not restricted to the elitist few. The Gentiles—actually, the disciples of Jesus regardless of their natural ancestry—became all the things once formerly reserved for Israel; they became the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the elect, the chosen generation, and God’s peculiar treasure.

But have the Jews thereby lost out? Paul says no. All they have to do is turn to Christ and they will be reinstated, not to a natural kingdom a la Darby, Scofield and Larkin, but to a far greater kingdom, the true kingdom of God. They may still attain to the priesthood, just as God meant for them to be, but only in Christ. Failing that, they have lost all, both natural and spiritual.

May I insert one other thought here? The dispensationalists make much of the failure of God to fulfill all the promises unto Abraham. They feel that God is duty bound to fulfill these in spite of Israel’s disobedience and lack of faith. This is exactly what the Jews themselves believed. Even though they were completely immersed in idolatry during the days of Jeremiah and had perpetrated horrible crimes against the Lord, they thought since they were his chosen people he was duty bound to protect His holy temple, the holy city, the holy land, and the holy people from the Gentiles ***in spite of their refusal to repent.*** We of course know what happened; God didn’t spare them. Just a few survived the Babylonian siege only to be carried off as slaves to Babylon, remaining there for many years. The holy land, city, and house was left a desolation.

We then ask: has God indeed been unable to fulfill any of the promises? Paul says no. See Romans 9:1–8, 11:1–7. Here he states that, though Israel as a whole failed to receive that which they sought, the election of grace, of which Paul was a member himself and which

consisted of all those Jews who did believe and accept Jesus, was sufficient to exonerate God. His promises were fulfilled, even though the majority of the Jews failed. This is consistent with other Scriptures. It only took one man who obeyed God to fulfill God's plan for mankind. Of course, that man was Jesus; it is because of his faithfulness that God allows us to share all those promises—provided only that we repent and believe on him.

The New Covenant has swallowed up and included within itself all the promises of the Old. It has enlarged these promises and made them spiritual and far greater and nobler. Did the Old Covenant promise a land? The New far more: it promises the whole earth. Did the Old promise rest? The New promises an eternal and far more excellent rest. Did the Old involve a temple? The New has a greater and more glorious living temple made of people instead of stones and mortar. The Old had its priesthood; the New has a better one. The Old commanded animal sacrifices that the Lord grew sick of; the New commands spiritual sacrifices that are pleasing unto the Lord. The Old showed no mercy for transgression. The New guarantees forgiveness upon repentance. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

Time and space does not permit me to list and comment on these except for two: the promise of rest and the promise of a land. In Joshua, we read several places that the Israelites received rest after they conquered the Canaanites and settled the country. They obtained rest from their bondage in Egypt and their weary wanderings in the wilderness. They obtained rest from warring with the natives (though this was not actually completed until the days of Solomon).

But the book of Hebrews (how I love that book!) tells us that this was not the rest that God really had in mind. As for the true rest, God swore that some would not enter into it because of unbelief. The author ends by telling us there yet remains a rest for the people of God. It is this rest, a rest from the works of the flesh and from the burden of sin and death, that has completely obsoleted any natural rest of a small ethnic group in the land of Palestine. This rest, when it finally arrives, will be universal in scope and will include all who have obeyed God and Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. It will be eternal, ushering in quietness and assurance forever.

Neither is the promise of the land to Abraham's seed limited to the land of Palestine. Even Abraham knew this. The book of Hebrews tells us that he looked for a better country, that is, a heavenly. He saw the promises afar off and embraced them and confessed he was but a pilgrim

and a stranger in this world. No, those old patriarchs and saints were looking for exactly the same thing we are looking for: the true kingdom of God, not some piece of real estate on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean.

Isaiah contains two verses (at least) that bear upon this. In the first, Zion's second generation of children (the ones she received after the first were lost) remind her that the (home) place is too confined for them; they need more room to dwell (Isa. 49:20). In another oracle, Zion is told to enlarge the place of her tent and stretch forth her curtains; lengthen her tent cords and strengthen her stakes (Isa. 54:2-3). Both oracles are saying the day will come when Palestine is too small to hold the children of Zion. She will be receiving sons and daughters from the east, west, north, and south. The Gentiles will bring them to her on their shoulders and bearing them in their arms (Isa. 49:22). Mary, that means you and me. Inside of this body of Gentile flesh there is a new man in Christ. We, the Gentile servant, are carrying this new child of Zion back to her tent "upon our shoulders and in our arms." But there will be so many of us that she will have to enlarge her tent and remove the borders of her country. In fact, the whole earth is to be the dwelling place of God's children. It must be, because Abraham was to be the father of many nations, not just the Jews in Palestine. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

To repeat, the New Covenant has superseded and swallowed up the old. Why, then, should anyone want to go back and limit themselves to the Old Covenant with its natural and literal promises? Paul said that anyone who built again the things which they had destroyed were transgressors (Gal. 2:18). If they persisted in being circumcised (or adopting a Hebrew name, for instance), that is, becoming a Jew naturally speaking, then Christ is become of no effect unto them; they were fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

When I was much younger, I would read Galatians and wonder why God saw fit to preserve it for us. We were under no threat of Judaizers trying to convert us back into Judaism and the law even if it had been a problem in Paul's day. But I was wrong. We have just such a doctrine in our midst that elevates the Jew above the church and tries to tell us that the Old Covenant is still in effect, at least for the Jew.<sup>4</sup> Their salvation

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<sup>4</sup> The Jews are still under the Old Covenant, for that matter. But not like they think. Since they are unable to keep the law, they are under the curse of death. It is only in Christ that the curse is removed, where life is given instead of death. But that is precisely the New Covenant. As Paul said, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that

depends on obeying the Old Covenant. Mary, I personally know two converted Jews who believe that! And they indicate to me that most of the Christian Jews so believe. Kosher Christians! I can understand this to a point; it is quite natural for one who has all his life been raised in Judaism to attempt to support at least some of it. He will not immediately renounce the whole, though he may see fault with some of it. Even some of the apostles were guilty of this. I believe in this case that God will lead the honest hearted Jew on out as far as is necessary, a process that may take the rest of his life. But what disturbs me is the Christians who support this kind of thinking and who actually preach a form of Judaism to them.

Let us now take a quick look at the most fundamental premise of dispensationalism: that *Israel* always means the natural children of Abraham, never the church. In fact, their whole system would topple to the ground if this could be disproved. According to them, the word *Israel* occurs approximately 77 times in the New Testament and, with only one possible exception, always refers to the Jewish people. Likewise, the word *Jew* occurs 191 times and never refers to a Gentile Christian. Let us see what the apostles say:

First, we must recognize that when speaking of their brethren according to the flesh, they had to call them something, and what could be more natural than to call them what they called themselves? I see no issue here. On occasion, Paul distinguishes between Jew and Gentile, naturally speaking, as the circumcision and uncircumcision. Paul says that if the circumcision breaks the law, their circumcision becomes uncircumcision; likewise, if they of the uncircumcision fulfill the law, their uncircumcision is counted for circumcision. In other words, Jewishness is dictated not by fleshly circumcision but by fulfilling the will of God and the law. He ends this by saying,

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28–29).

Later, in the same epistle, he laments the fact that his Jewish brethren have failed God, they to whom pertain the adoption, the glory,

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believeth" (Rom. 10:4). Those who do not believe have not reached the end of the law but remain under its curse of death.

the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises. Then he says,

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel (Rom. 9:6)

and proceeds to show that the promises of God are to the children of promise, not those of the flesh. Paul also says that God willed to “make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles” (Rom. 9:23–24).

To prove assertions that some promises are strictly limited to the Jews, the dispensationalists make much of two statements of Paul: that the Jews are beloved for the father’s sake and that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Rom. 11:28–29). They take this to mean that, regardless of Israel’s disobedience and unbelief, God has promised to restore their position as his favored elect people, giving them back their land, temple, and priesthood.

I do not doubt that God loves them because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When, for example, the Israelites sinned grievously in making a golden calf, God offered to destroy the Israelites and substitute a greater people springing from Moses. Moses interceded for them by reminding the Lord they were the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to whom he had sworn that he would multiply their seed as the stars, and give them a promised land to inherit forever. Once again, he pleaded with the Lord that if he wouldn’t forgive them, “blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou has written.” The Lord forgave the people but added, “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Ex. 32:10–14, 32–33). In other words, God was fully justified in annihilating those people and starting over with Moses. Yet, for the sake of the fathers, he did not. However, though he preserved the nation, that generation all perished in the wilderness. Once again, at Calvary, the people sinned so grievously that the Lord was fully justified in destroying them from off the face of the earth, making “the remembrance of them to cease from among men” (Deut. 32:26). See also Malachi 4:6. But, because they were beloved for the fathers’ sake, he mercifully and graciously preserved them so that they could partake of the New Covenant. He did not exclude them from the greater and more glorious promises to be enjoyed through Christ. Did he call the Jews to the priesthood? He is calling them still. They may attain unto the far better

priesthood after the order of Melchisedec if they so choose. He has not revoked that calling. Furthermore, the priesthood under the Old Covenant was limited to the tribe of Levi. Under the New, every Jew regardless of tribal ancestry may be a priest. How much better. That proves they are the beloved for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and that their calling is without repentance. However, it also proves that every sinner among his people, Jew or Gentile, shall be destroyed if they do not repent. I am going to quote Amos here because it is so pertinent:

Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us (Amos 9:8–10).

The very next verse is a prophecy of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus—he was the tabernacle of David that fell into ruin but was raised up.<sup>5</sup> It is only because some few Jews did believe on Jesus that he has not utterly destroyed the house of Jacob. God is not willing that any should perish, and the longer the second coming of Christ is delayed with its promised destruction of all who have not obeyed the gospel, the more opportunity Israel has for salvation.

Paul ends the discussion by saying that God has concluded all, both Jew and Gentile, in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all. Still no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The line that separates God's people from the world is now drawn by belief in Jesus Christ, not according to their physical ancestry.

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul further elaborates on this theme: we, who were onetime without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, have, in Christ Jesus, been made nigh by the blood of Christ, who has torn down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, making in himself of twain one new man (Eph. 2:11–18). Paul concludes by saying:

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<sup>5</sup> I mention this because dispensationalists say it is the most important verse in the whole Bible (as quoted by James in Acts 15:16-17). They believe this is a prophecy of the building, yet future, of a "third" temple. But James used the verse to support the recognition of the Gentiles who were daily being admitted to the church.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19)

. . .and proceeds to include the Gentiles in the spiritual temple itself, an habitation of God through the spirit.

Practically the whole of Galatians is devoted to the subject. Paul makes such statements as,

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26–29)

John also notes the fact that not all who are of Israel are Israel. He mentions those who say they are Jews and are not but do lie (Rev. 2:9, 3:9). He calls them the “synagogue of Satan.”

I could cite many other references, some already used in this essay, to show the same thing: he is not a Jew which is by natural birth, but which is one by faith in Christ Jesus, the spiritual new birth, regardless of his natural ancestry. Nothing could be plainer. What are we to conclude, then? Simply that God does not have any special favors or plans for the natural Jews to be saved apart from that available to the Gentiles as well. God is not willing that any should perish. He is preserving the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so that as many as possible can hear the gospel and be saved. But if they will not hear and obey the gospel, God simply cuts them off, disinherits them, and no more considers them Jews.

Let us now take a look at the current scene. The world may be divided into four classes of people as follows: (a) those who do not profess to be either Jews or Christians; (b) those who profess to be Jews but not Christians; (c) those who do not profess to be Jews but are Christians; (d) those who profess to be both Jews and Christians.

Only those of (b) are officially recognized by the state of Israel as Jews. From its inception in 1948, the Jewish state has had an immigration policy that grants citizenship to all Jews, regardless of place of birth, who desire to emigrate to the country. But officials quickly recognized the need for some test to distinguish exactly who are Jews and who are not. It was not easy. They concluded that Jewishness is not a matter of race. Perhaps the vast majority of living Jews are not

Hebrews nor even related to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but are descendants of a tribe in Asia called the Khazars who had been forcibly converted to Judaism in the dark ages. Even Jewish historians concede this fact. Nor is Jewishness determined by the language. Nor by the observance of the law. Some Jews are atheists. Even among those who acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, there are all degrees of observing the customs and the rituals of Moses, from very loose to very strict. What then, distinguishes the Jew?

It boils down to this: with rare exceptions, one must have been born of a Jewish mother, but, as I understand it, that is the extent of the confirmation. I don't think they go back any farther to see if she was also born of a Jewish mother, etc. One can be a Jew and yet be an atheist, even a Buddhist; he can be at least half Gentile on his father's side; he can be from any culture or land, speak any language, and use his own judgment as to the extent of his observance of the law, from none at all through the strictest of the Orthodox. ***There is, however, one exception.***

He can not be a Christian. The Israeli Supreme Court has ruled that one cannot be a Jew and a Christian at the same time. So would-be Christian emigrants, though born of Jewish ancestry, are forbidden citizenship in Israel. I know of at least one citizen of Israel who is a Christian, but he was an Israeli citizen first. Had he been converted in America before he emigrated to Israel, he would not have been accepted.

Mary, it is quite simple: Paul says that only Christians are Jews, regardless of ancestry: Israel says just the opposite: only those born of a Jewish mother and who are not Christians are Jews.

Now when I speak of the Jews, I mean this latter group. When I speak of the church, I mean those who are Christians, be they Jews or Gentiles by nature. We can now state the difference between dispensationalism and traditional Christian doctrine as follows: dispensationalism holds out a promise for the Jews on a national basis that will involve a political state and a land, the land of Palestine. God is leading them back to "their" land and kingdom as a result of his promises to Abraham.

On the other hand, traditional Christianity says that the Jews have been replaced by the church, whom God treats as the true Jews. The church is the inheritor of all the promises. God does not regard political states or lands in his plan; he accepts all believers in Christ into his kingdom. This notion is denigrated by the dispensationalists with the

epithet “replacement theology”; I, for one, gladly accept that epithet as being essentially correct.

In other words, if we persist in using Old Testament names to distinguish between God’s people and the world, the name *Israel* must be used to designate God’s people, his elect or chosen ones, which is the church. Likewise, unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile, should be called Gentiles. So, as to terminology, though Paul in effect calls both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ the true *Israel*, he himself goes a bit farther: in truth, God’s people are neither Jew nor Gentile, but constitute a new man made of the two.

A last point that I feel ought to be addressed is this: some dispensationalists claim that all Jews who are alive at the second phase of the second coming will be converted at sight when they see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven to defend them from the antichrist. Well, the Jews also said to him, “Come down off that cross and we will believe.” This is exactly the same spirit. Furthermore, Paul says that when the Lord comes, it will be with his flaming angels taking fiery vengeance on them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:8). If any Jew has not obeyed the gospel up to that time, he has waited too late. Nothing but fiery vengeance and banishment from the presence of the Lord awaits him. It is as if the Lord at last answers their plea to come down off the cross. Had he done so at Calvary, he no doubt would have called upon the twelve legions of fiery angels he knew he could request. It would have been instant destruction of those wicked rulers; but his love and mercy kept him nailed to the cross. At last, God’s patience will be exhausted, and when Jesus does “come down off the cross,” he will indeed bring with him legions of fiery angels; it will be not to their salvation but to their eternal sorrow. To preach otherwise is to offer the Jews a second chance, a chance not available to anyone else. But God is no respecter of persons.

Now back to Cox’s little confession. Here are the first two paragraphs of a section he has entitled,

**SCOFIELD DOWNGRADES THE CHURCH  
AND HER ROLE IN GOD’S PLAN.**

Historic Christian teaching always has been that the church was the antitype of national Israel. This teaching goes on to say that the church succeeded Israel at the first advent, and that all unfulfilled promises to Abraham will be fulfilled in and through the church.

Scotfield admits that this is the historic Christian teaching, then proceeds to teach that it is erroneous. He says: "Especially is it necessary to exclude the notion—a legacy in Protestant thought from post-apostolic and Roman Catholic theology—that the Church is the true Israel, and that the Old Testament foreview of the kingdom is fulfilled in the church" (p. 989, S.R.B.).

Cox then discusses Scotfield's notes and shows how inconsistent, arbitrary, and unscriptural they are. He points out that Scotfield admits that the church is the body and the bride of Christ, but even so it will end in failure. But Paul says that the church is destined to glorious victory: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). He asks, "Should one believe Scotfield or the apostle Paul?" He points out that Scotfield makes a distinction between the wife of God and the bride of Christ. Precisely, Mary. A certain pastor in Kingsport made exactly that point. I asked him, but don't you believe that Jesus is God? He said yes. I said, then the wife of God and the bride of Christ are exactly the same people. He said no. I said, "Then you must believe that God is a bigamist with two wives." It was at this point that he went out on the porch where I heard him tell one of the saints that they should avoid me at all costs because I was a false prophet. He had been caught in a contradiction and couldn't handle it. But as I look back on the whole scene, I am sure he didn't care what the truth was; all he was after was power and money, and it made no difference to him what he actually taught as long as it wasn't questioned. He was a staunch dispensationalist, of course. He made so many other irrational statements that I came to regard him as totally incompetent to teach the Bible to anyone.

One of the most important points I can make is that dispensationalists cannot find support for their doctrine of the restoration of the land of Israel in the New Testament. True, Paul suggests that the day may come when the Jews will be reinstated, but he mentions nothing about a national restoration. He is merely saying that some of the Jews, perhaps not every individual but enough to qualify as a true revival, will return to Christ. I repeat: this is not a support for the statement that God will restore the Jews into their land complete with temple, priesthood and sacrifices. Where, then, do they get their ideas? Principally out of the Old Testament. Indeed, if one unacquainted with the New Testament read the Old Testament, he would find many

statements by the prophets that God would ultimately bring the Israelites back into the holy land, never more to be plucked up. I can easily find a half dozen or so myself. We must remember, however, that the New Testament is our guide for interpreting the Old. There are many Scriptures that seemed to say one thing but which the apostles interpreted differently. The Old Testament promises of a national restoration fall roughly into two groups: those that were fulfilled by the return of the Jews from Babylon and those that are to be fulfilled, not literally, but spiritually, by the church. If the New Testament says nothing about so important a subject as the restoration of the kingdom of Judea, then there probably is no such thing. I think the dispensationalists must assume that here is a deep truth that was left out of the New Testament, a truth that was revealed only to Darby and his colleagues. However, Peter says that,

According as his divine power hath given unto us ***all things that pertain unto life and godliness***, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature . . . (2 Pet. 1:3–4).

Peter thus affirms that “all things” pertaining to life had been given to himself, the rest of the apostles, and to the church. These remarks were addressed to the Gentiles of Asia Minor. If there had been a promise of the restoration of national Israel, why did not Peter or one of the other apostles tell us about it? Surely, if it is as important a subject as the dispensationalists claim, they would have devoted some of their writings to it. But no, search as you may, you will find absolutely no promise of such a restoration.

While I do not in all cases understand some of the Old Testament oracles concerning this point, I have the utmost confidence that the New, by ignoring the subject, is telling us that there ain't no such a thing, literally speaking. I have been at times able to unravel some of these “restoration” prophecies and to see that they are indeed talking about the church. Darby, incidentally, declares that the church was not prophesied in the Old Testament nor mentioned at all. Of course he would say that. To admit otherwise would be to destroy his doctrine. But there are many prophecies pertaining to the church in the Hebrew Scriptures. Some have been explained by the apostles. Some of them I have deciphered. There are yet others that I still find puzzling. But I am confident they will ultimately be seen to establish the principle that the

church has indeed supplanted or “replaced” the old Jewish economy in God’s plan.

I think I must stop this particular discussion of dispensationalism. Though I, of course, discarded it a long time ago, it was only in the past 10 years or so that I have concluded it to be a dangerously false doctrine. It is like one inheriting the old home place. After he takes possession, he notices the dilapidated state of the house, the rotting door frames, the leaky roof, the broken window panes, etc. He begins to repair the damage. One day, while in the cellar, he notices that the foundation is rotten and riddled with termites. Sadly, he decides there is nothing else to do except bulldoze it to the ground and build a new house. Very little of the rubbish can be salvaged.

I wish to finish this essay by a brief analysis on why I think dispensationalism is a false doctrine. To be honest, at the present time it may not be so dangerous, for I do not see any one being led into open rebellion against God nor willful disobedience of his commandments as a result of believing in it. But that all may change. I foresee Israel becoming the world’s most prominent and powerful country. Though many Jews may become Christians, the citizens of Israel will be principally non-Christian Jews, a people who actually hate Jesus Christ. Jerusalem will be the most influential city in the world, perhaps even the world capital, as her messiah reigns over the whole earth as its chief spiritual, and perhaps, political, ruler. He will teach them how to be prosperous. Any one who accepts him as the messiah will become, like the Jews, wildly prosperous and rich beyond anyone’s imagination. Wars will be a thing of the past. The Jews, who have been the foremost proponents of peace for millennia, will be given the full credit for the universal cessation of war.

Now consider a confrontation between a Christian and a Jew. The Jew more or less ridicules the faith of the Christian, pointing out his poverty and powerless condition. (Remember how Pilate told Jesus that he had the power to release him or to execute him.) The Jew will remind the Christian that in spiritual matters, the Jews were first; to them alone had God revealed the law and made a covenant. As for this Jesus, he was thoroughly examined by Israel’s wisest scholars who determined beyond any doubt that he was an imposter and a blasphemer. To prove the point, it will also be noted that Jesus has long since been dead. No one has seen him around, have they? Then the Jew will offer the olive branch. “Come on over to our side, renounce Jesus of Nazareth, accept Judaism, and you, too, will prosper.”

Now further suppose that this Christian has been brought up on a good solid dose of dispensationalism. He will think, “Well, I must admit that God has given them back their land, their temple, and their priesthood. It is also obvious that God must be highly pleased with them, for just look how they are ruling the earth and are rolling in wealth. I can’t escape the fact, either, that they, at last, have succeeded in abolishing war. Surely, this must be the kingdom of God. But what about Jesus? Hmmmm. Well, they may be right. I may have been foolish to have believed in him. It is for sure that I am, as they say, impoverished and powerless.” With just a bit more time and pressure, that poor deluded Christian renounces his Lord and Savior and goes over to the side of the enemy. Why?

Because he has the wrong measure of godliness. He is equating God’s blessings and approval with material things. His understanding of the Scriptures is primarily at the literal and natural level, and he is measuring God’s kingdom by the standards of this world. He, in short, is carnal, not spiritual. In such a weakened condition, the strong man will overcome him.

He was literal where he should have been spiritual. Why didn’t he know any better? Probably because he failed to “study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” He would not leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ nor go on unto perfection, a perfection that can only be obtained by studying all the Scriptures. He failed to let his garden be watered by the word and thorns and briars—that is, covetousness, also called materialism whose first cousin is literalism—have taken their toll.

But since that day has not quite arrived yet, then is there nothing to worry about? I think this doctrine is so rotten that it is bound to affect all who believe it.

Back to the present. First, let me say that I do not condemn the thousands, or millions, of good, sincere, godly Pentecostals—nor any other denomination—for not knowing any better than to accept the tenets of dispensationalism. I feel that God will protect them, as long as they are honest before him, and at the proper time will lead them out if it seems necessary. But I can not say that for the present generation of leaders. I feel that here are men who have the wherewithal to know better. They are educated and have both the resources and the responsibility to study out the mysteries of God’s word. In as much as they fail in this, I blame them. I corresponded for a number of years with a certain Pentecostal minister. When I pointed out some of the

inadequacies of dispensationalism, he responded that indeed it was probably defective in many ways, but it served to convert many into the church. Can you imagine using a false doctrine to attract disciples into the church? My principle, that every doctrine creates its own spirit, is amply borne out in the character of many I have known. Dispensationalism is arrogant, conceited, cruel, jealous, and divisive, especially the latter. All the teachers I have ever known who are avid dispensationalists are exactly the same way. Their churches are constantly in a turmoil, splitting and dividing every which way. I have read biographies of John Nelson Darby, the main creator of dispensationalism, and that describes him to a "T." He was the main Bible teacher of the Plymouth Brethren (they did not believe in having a pastor); subsequently, that sect split into at least eight other Brethren sects. I understand that for many years they were simply designated as Brethren I, Brethren II, etc. The original group had no fellowship with the others, neither accepting their baptism nor their confession of faith. One of the most hateful characteristics of dispensationalism is its insistence on blind acceptance of its doctrines or else be disfellowshipped. It displays absolutely no tolerance for disagreement. That one fact alone proves to me that it is wrong.

I have labelled several of the side issues of dispensational doctrine as wrong rather than false. Even so, some of them can be a threat. Back in the thirties, a Chinese minister, Watchman Nee, evangelized extensively in China, gaining several thousand, perhaps millions, of converts. He was a dispensationalist and taught that the Lord was coming before the great tribulation started. When the Communists took over, he was imprisoned for several years, at last dying in prison. Millions of Chinese Christians were tortured and killed, and many had their property and children confiscated. They thought the great tribulation had arrived. Many of them renounced their faith, apparently for two reasons: one, obviously, since Watchman Nee was wrong about the tribulation, he was probably wrong about everything else; two, some of them may have thought that Christ had already come and they had missed the rapture.

I must emphasize that I hold out the hope and the desire that many Jews will be saved. For years I felt that a revival was impending among them and that my wife and I may have some part in it. I have just about given up hope that we will be involved; but regardless of how it happens, those Jews who are saved will have to get salvation exactly like the rest of us: belief in Jesus, followed by repentance and baptism; given this, they too will be filled with the Holy Spirit and added to the church.

There is no other way. I would be a liar to tell them they had a second chance after the rapture or that they did not need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I would be a liar to tell them that God is highly pleased with their efforts to oust the Palestinians and occupy the land of Palestine.

I will conclude with a brief, and I mean brief, historical outline of dispensationalism. Darby, its main creator, maintained that he was espousing forgotten apostolic truths. Try as we may, we can find nothing apostolic about it. Rather, the very first suggestion of the doctrine seems to have been due to a book written in the sixteenth century by the Jesuit priest Ribera. The Pope gave him the job of countering the Protestant charges that the Roman Catholic Church was Babylon the Great and the Pope was the antichrist. Ribera's main line of proof consisted in interpreting most of the Revelation as unfulfilled prophecy and that its visions were for the future. Therefore, the Roman Church could not be Babylon nor the Pope Antichrist. Thus was injected into Christian thinking the idea of "futurism." Up to this time, Christian scholars had assumed that the Revelation spanned the entire gospel age. Around 1800, another book was published by the Spanish Jesuit priest Lacunza under the Jewish pen name Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra (he was supposed to be a converted Jew). He followed the same line of thinking. I do not know how much of the previous book he copied, but he anticipated Darby and Irving in most of the points they developed. (I have a few photocopied pages of this book.) It was discovered in England by Edward Irving, a Presbyterian minister in London. He fell in love with the book and spent two years on a crash course in Spanish so he could translate it, circa 1827. Irving is called the father of modern Pentecostalism because he introduced speaking in tongues and the other gifts of the Spirit into his congregation. For this reason, and for some wild doctrines he is reported to have taught about the person of Christ, the Church defrocked him. He died about 3 years later (1834). Though he taught much of the same thing that we call dispensationalism, evidently his literature was not widely published and, upon his death, much of it was suppressed by his disciples.

Meanwhile, John Nelson Darby, a dissenter from the Church of England, aligned himself with a small group of Irish and English dissenters that called themselves *The Brethren*. Since the main congregation was in Plymouth, they are today known as *The Plymouth Brethren*. Though Darby rejected the gifts of the Spirit including tongues and healing as being unscriptural, he accepted most of Irving's teaching on eschatology. He greatly enhanced it, publishing many volumes of

commentaries over the next 40 years. His writings have been widely circulated. He acquired several disciples who were also educated men (though some of them eventually deserted him, calling his teachings absurd and unscriptural.) Darby would probably have never been very influential if he had not met Dr. C. I. Scofield, an American lawyer who became converted to Christianity. Scofield quickly took up with Darby's teachings, scribbling many notes in the margin of his Bible by way of explanation. Someone saw them and convinced him to publish a reference Bible based on his notes. He was given six or seven other scholars, all but one being dispensationalists, and they published the first edition of the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909. It has been revised at least once, and I think twice, since then. It has sold literally millions of copies. Most scholars believe that this reference Bible has been the main instrument in spreading and popularizing dispensationalism, often called *Scofieldism* for obvious reasons.

It is significant, I think, that practically all converted Jews subscribe to the doctrine of dispensationalism. Indeed, the ideas expressed, with the sole exception that Jesus is the Messiah, are purely Judaistic. For over 2000 years the Jews have taught the coming of a millennium, a great golden age, with themselves being the chief nation (the head and not the tail, as Moses said). They are looking forward to a restoration of the kingdom they had under Solomon. Is it then to be wondered at that Lacunza attributed his work to a converted Jew, Rabbi Ben-Ezra? David Nevins and I both think that perhaps Lacunza was not dissimulating but that he received most of his ideas from some otherwise unknown Jew. But even if not, it is definitely a Catholic document. For both of these reasons, I would look with suspicion upon Irving's and Darby's great eschatological scheme.

There is another fact that I believe is very significant. At about the same time that Darby was putting the finishing touches on dispensationalism, a Jew, Theodore Herzl (1860–1904), campaigned all over the world to arouse the Jews into emigrating to the holy land and to reclaim it as their own. His movement is still alive today and is known as Zionism.

There also arose in the nineteenth century something which for want of a better name I am calling "liberal theology." This theology, which had its main impetus in Germany, began to consider the Scriptures as a miscellaneous collection of myths, folk tales, oracles by the "prophets" that were more politically than morally motivated, and inaccurate history. It fell their lot to disentangle this mess to arrive at the core

truth, such as the true Jesus apart from all the legends that sprang up about him, the true origins of the Israelites, etc. Denied is the divinity of Christ, the miracles, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the predictive element in prophecy, the resurrection, angels and devils, etc. This brand of theology was, and is yet, highly influenced by Jewish scholars. One good example is the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. A Jewish scholar sat on the board of translators. One result is the translation of Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a young woman shall conceive, and bear a son . . . .," in spite of the fact that Matthew translated "young woman" into the Greek as "virgin." Well, who are we to believe, modern Jews, or Matthew? The liberals support Judaism as a religion with equal validity as Christianity, in fact, maybe a bit more so since it was first. See the attached news clipping.

While dispensationalists decry liberal theology, their system is little better. It appears to me that Satan is working both ends against the middle: while he is endeavoring to collect his people back into a centralized place (Palestine) to provide himself with a more effective tool to establish his kingdom, at the same time he must convince both the intellectual and the fundamentalist Christian of the validity of Judaism. Liberalism appeals to the intellectual; dispensationalism appeals to the fundamentalist. So far, he can count on thousands, if not millions, of Christians to come to his support. I know this is strong speech, Mary, but I believe it is so. Of course, those Christians do not realize what they are doing, and perhaps many of them will wake up in time. Nevertheless, I see that some Christians will continue to support that Christless religion to their own peril. One thing the apostles were very definite about: in the last days, many shall fall away (or apostatize).

Several other doctrines of the Pentecostals were on the list that I originally wanted to discuss, but will not do so at this moment. This essay is already several times larger than I anticipated. I do want to say, however, that I believe I have deduced the reason for so many wrong interpretations that are the heritage of Pentecostals. The ones I have examined in detail all have one element in common: the interpretation is designed to give the Pentecostal the aura of power. Their speech is peppered with the word "power": power with God, slain under the power, the power of God is all over him, the word of God is powerful, the pastor preached a powerful sermon, he was healed by the mighty power of God, he is a powerful witness, etc. They mistake their enthusiasm and emotionalism for the power of God and call it "being spiritual." Pentecostals are forever talking about the signs that follow the believer,

signs that prove that they are the sons of God. This in spite of Jesus' statement that the kingdom of God did not come with observation; it is not possible to pick out those who are citizens, for the kingdom is within us, invisible. Nevertheless, Pentecostals yearn for vindication, for some sort of ironclad proof that they alone possess the absolute truth about Christ and about salvation.

Dispensationalism lends itself to this mental attitude. It purports to give the student an inside track on the future. One of its mottos is "Prophecy is prewritten history," and assumes that one can determine all the details of the future from the Scriptures. Furthermore, its literal approach to the Scriptures greatly appeals to the uneducated student who cannot see below the written words to discern the spiritual meanings.

May I point out what Jesus thought of this fault? One time he and his disciples were going across the Sea of Galilee. He said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." They began murmuring among themselves, wondering what he meant. Finally, they concluded that it was because they had forgotten to bring bread on board. Evidently, they thought that Jesus was warning them not to buy bread from their enemies the Pharisees for it would be poisoned. When Jesus saw this, he was very angry. Read about it in Mark. He said, "Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?" (Mark 8:17-18). He then reminded them of the great miracle of the loaves and fishes he had just performed in which there were twelve baskets of fragments remaining (one basket for each apostle?) after feeding 5,000. When they affirmed that, he said "How is it that ye do not understand?" The same incident is found in Matthew where it is explained that by the leaven of the Pharisees Jesus meant their hypocritical and deadly doctrines.

My point is: we have many people in our midst who are always taking the sayings of Jesus, the prophets, and the other scribes of the Bible as literal statements, not attempting to discern the spiritual significance of those oracles. No wonder they subscribe to such silly, inane, and inconsistent doctrines. Again, I say, dispensationalism promotes exactly this misconception.

I don't think I will go any farther in refuting this attitude. Let me say once more, I firmly believe the majority of Pentecostals are just as saved and just as Christian as anyone. I just don't go along with their superior ways or their smugness in believing themselves the sole recipients of the

true gospel and the power of God. Pentecostals are living in fantasy land: all talk and little to show for it.

I said I would not discuss any other doctrines. I just can't resist pointing out one more because it so aptly illustrates the above points. In Haggai, the statement is made that the latter house would be filled with more glory than the former. Many Pentecostals use this to support their notion that the twentieth century Pentecostal movement, as a revival of the true apostolic church of the first century, will ultimately exceed it in signs and wonders. God will show through the modern Pentecostal movement a mighty display of miracles, healings, etc., to a greater extent than he did in the first century. That, they say, is the greater glory of the latter house.

Closely related to the above interpretation is the one I used to hear frequently, called ***the latter rain-former rain doctrine***. Its proponents claim that the church begun on the day of Pentecost underwent a period of decay and apostasy that became total about AD 325 at the Council of Nicaea. This "apostolic" period was the former rain. Then, around the end of the nineteenth century, the latter rain broke out, namely, the Pentecostal movement. In between, a period of about 1500 years, was a dry spell in which the truth of God's word had almost entirely expired. In other words, God's truth has been blacked out for by far the largest portion of the church age.

Two things are wrong. First, the church is not two houses, a former and a latter, but is just one. Besides, the former rain-latter rain doctrine not only shows the contempt of Pentecostals for other Christians, but ignores Jesus' own words that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church.

But this is also a typical dispensational technique: instead of correctly interpreting a passage, they split and divide ages, events, visions, and oracles, often inserting intervals of arbitrary length between them, then assign an independent meaning to each fragment. Here, they have split the true church age into two houses and three intervals, a former rain, a dry period, and a latter rain. When we realize that dispensational theory has already declared the church age a "parenthesis" between God's dealings with Israel, then we have here a parenthesis within a parenthesis. The technique of dividing an entity into ever finer and finer fragments is called ***analysis*** and has its rightful function in research if properly done. But dispensationalists are not using it properly. Besides, there is another method, called ***synthesis***, that assembles fragments together to get the whole picture. It is this

technique that finds far more fruitful application to Bible study, but it is a technique that has found little favor with dispensationalists.

Secondly, the interpretation they place upon Haggai displays a complete lack of knowledge of the history of the Israelites. Haggai was a prophet in the days when the exiles were returning from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem, the temple, and the land. Many of the older men had seen Solomon's temple (the former house) before Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it, and they were present when Zerubbabel began its restoration (the latter house). They were ashamed at the paltry building Zerubbabel was erecting, and wept with shame as they remembered how the temple used to be. This incident is found in the book of Ezra.

Haggai was trying to encourage the people to proceed with the construction of the temple. It is then that he promises them that this latter temple they were building would exceed the former, that is, Solomon's temple, for glory. The Lord said that he would fill this house with glory. He also promised them that in it would he give them peace.

However, if we restrict our interpretation to that literal building that Zerubbabel was then erecting,<sup>6</sup> Haggai appears to be a false prophet. That temple never reached the glory of Solomon's, even though Herod completely remodelled it, and only six years after its completion, it lay in ruins once more, this time by the Romans. Furthermore, the Jews never really had any peace except a brief interlude under the Maccabees.

But when we consider that Jesus came while that temple was still standing, then the whole picture begins to make sense. Jesus was actually the temple that Haggai was referring to. He was (and is) filled with the glory of God, a glory so bright that no man can approach unto it. He has brought peace through his blood which has abolished the enmity between Jew and Gentile and between sinner and God.

This is the kind of thing I am talking about. Pentecostal interpretation almost invariably paints a picture for its adherents as the mighty, power filled, and glorious sons of God, who alone of all men possess the keys to eternal life. (Since there were few, if any, Pentecostals down through history, the modern movement has been forced to contrive some sort of scriptural explanation.) These people cannot wait for God to exalt them in due season, which will be at the

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, though the dispensationalists like to interpret each passage literally wherever at all possible, the Pentecostal brand of dispensationalism has here ignored the obvious literal meaning in favor of what they fancy is a spiritual interpretation. They would indeed have fared far better had they stuck to a literal understanding. I feel that their failure was due to a lack of understanding of the historical background, as well as their desire to always make the Pentecostals appear to be the only true church.

resurrection—as Paul said, sown in weakness, raised in power. However, in this world we have no guarantee of mighty exploits and glorious miracles. Sure, there are some, but they are random, occurring just as often among non-Pentecostals. Perhaps there is some mellowing now, but I think you can still find this superior and exclusive attitude fairly prevalent throughout the Pentecostal churches.

This is not the only doctrine taught by Pentecostals that betrays their dispensational background. Their doctrine of tongues also exhibits the same propensity to split into two things what is in reality only one. I have another essay written on this subject which you may request, named *Why Tongues?*

A final thought before closing: you may be troubled by something that also troubled me. If dispensationalism is so wrong, why do the vast majority of Pentecostals believe it, to say nothing of millions of Baptists and other fundamentalists?

Speaking of the Pentecostals, I think there are several reasons, any one of which is sufficient but taken *in toto* become well nigh irresistible. First, many, if not most, of the original teachers, pastors, and leaders, were uneducated. Many of them actually decried education, a form of “sour grapes” philosophy. Their learning was from each other with very little outside research. They justified this by saying that their men were Spirit filled and anointed and therefore had “the truth.” Nor has this attitude completely disappeared. One of the ladies whom I mentioned above pointed this out to me, saying that I was entirely too dependent on the opinions of men who were not Spirit filled (how does she know they are not Spirit filled?), nor did she like for me to quote scholars who were educated. Some of our earlier teachers were consequently poor readers. I have personally caught some of them in simple reading errors, errors that totally confused them as to the true understanding of the Scriptures. They did not understand the Greek or the Hebrew languages, nor did many of them know how to use a concordance or other helps to study, claiming such devices as worldly and unspiritual.

Secondly, and I really think this is the primary reason, Pentecostals have separated themselves from other Christians with the “we against them” attitude. They think because they are Spirit filled, they have private access to the secrets of God. Other men, not Spirit filled, speak only from a “carnal” understanding. How do they know these men are not Spirit filled? Because of another erroneous Pentecostal doctrine—they did not speak in tongues! And in their desire to be thought of as wise, they willingly accept the doctrine of dispensationalism because it

makes them feel they are on the inside track of things. Again, it all goes back to their desire for power.

Another reason is that the *United Pentecostal Church*, in the name of unity, greatly discourages independent research. Since dispensationalism is the standard doctrine for the body, every pastor and teacher is expected to conform.

Well, I have finished, would you believe.