

The Postponement of the New Exodus Theory in Non-Dispensational Hermeneutics

BJU Seminary Theological Symposium: Neal Cushman, PhD

One of traditional dispensationalism's much maligned teachings is that the kingdom was "postponed" due to the Jewish rejection of the King's offer, as recorded in the Gospels.¹ Some non-dispensational theologians infer from this that dispensationalists believe that since Israel's national restoration was postponed for a future time, God turned his attention away from the Jews and created the church. Plan "A" did not work out, so plan "B" was initiated.²

They further observe the dispensationalist view that the church was unknown to the prophets of the Old Testament, so on this basis plan "B" is not even mentioned in the Old Testament. Therefore, they assume that dispensationalists believe that God initiated some type of spiritual kingdom at this juncture of human history since Israel rejected his original plan.³

Likewise, since many dispensationalists call the church age a "parenthesis" in God's timetable, it appears to non-dispensationalists that dispensational theology seriously downgrades the church and all that comes with it. From a grammatical standpoint, a parenthesis in a sentence typically denotes a word, phrase, clause, or

¹ This essay compares and contrasts the traditional dispensational view of the offer, rejection, and postponement of the kingdom with some of the views of non-dispensational theories of the kingdom. For ease of conversation, I do not always qualify "dispensationalism" with the term "traditional" to distinguish it from progressive dispensationalism since the comparison and contrast that I wish to accomplish is between dispensational and nondispensational views of postponement.

² In his analysis of dispensationalism, Timothy Weber goes so far as to accuse dispensationalists of believing that God was "forced" to postpone the kingdom as a result of Israel's rejection of her Messiah ("Dispensationalism," in *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, edited by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price. 129-31 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, rev ed. 2003; *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, 1992], 130). Philip Mauro omits the dispensational belief that Israel need to repent as a nation prior to any inauguration of the kingdom: "Did your Lord, during His earthly ministry ever present or announce Himself as an earthly king? Did He ever offer to the oppressed people of Judea, either in person or through the lips of His disciples, the earthly kingdom they had been taught to expect? Had he ever, by word or act, sought to incite insurrection against the rule of Caesar, or given any countenance whatever to the political ambitions of the Jews? Manifestly, had the Lord uttered a single word that could have been construed as a proclamation or suggestion that he was about to claim the throne, or would accept it, there would have been thousands of witnesses to prove the accusation. But there was no proof forthcoming" (Bruce K. Waltke, citing Philip Mauro (*God's Present Kingdom*) in "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual." In *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* 263-87 [Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988], 271).

³ Bruce Waltke claims that Scofield and Chafer are the originators of the postponement theory of the kingdom. Waltke summarizes both dispensationalists: "when Israel rejected Christ, he withdrew the earthly kingdom, postponing its coming until after his second advent and in the interim intercalated a spiritual kingdom, the church, which was unforeseen by the prophets" ("Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," 271).

sentence that is less important than the rest of the text. Essentially the sentence retains its meaning in the absence of the parenthesis. In the order of English grammatical significance, this punctuation communicates ideas that are less important than ideas connected to the independent clause by colons, semi-colons, and even dashes. So why would we bracket the church age as a parenthesis in God's program?

Therefore, non-dispensationalists accuse dispensationalists of reducing the church's existence and its task of fulfilling the Great Commission for the past few millennia to a placeholder in time until God resumes his original plan, which is to inaugurate the mediatorial kingdom. However, although traditional dispensationalists use the terms, "postponement," "mystery," and "parenthesis" in their descriptions of how the mediatorial kingdom relates to the church, they do not view the church age as plan "B" nor do they minimize its significance in the overarching purpose of God.

It is not my intent in this paper to 1) address the postponement theory broadly from the standpoint of teaching in the Gospels and Acts; 2) discuss supposed theological inconsistencies with reference to a dispensational framework of postponement;⁴ and 3) argue for a new point to add to Ryrie's *sine qua non*. My more modest goal is to suggest that since both dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists embrace particular postponement theories, the idea should not be considered odd.

Offer, Rejection, and Postponement

Traditional dispensationalists emphasize three related ideas in the Gospels and Acts that are related to these terms: 1) the genuine offer of the mediatorial kingdom to Israel; 2) Israel's rejection of her Messiah; and 3) the eventual retraction of the offer of the kingdom to Israel and postponement to a later time. Although they may disagree on how each of these themes are developed in the Gospels and Acts, especially as related to timing, they agree that there must be an offer, a rejection, and a postponement of the kingdom to the Jewish people.

⁴ For example, non-dispensationalists argue that 1) postponement reflects poorly on God's ability to accomplish his purposes; 2) if the offer of the kingdom was accepted during the three-year ministry of Jesus, how would his sacrificial death be accomplished? 3) if Peter offers the kingdom in Acts 3, then what would happen to the creation of the church (Acts 2) and Jesus' promise to build it (Matt 16)? Covenant theologian Oswald T. Allis objects strenuously that Peter's sermon in Acts 3 could not possibly be an offer of a geopolitical Jewish kingdom, for the church age had already begun as recorded in Acts 2. He insists that it is preposterous that the kingdom would be offered to the same Jews who had blood on their hands from killing the Messiah (*Prophecy and the Church: An Examination of the Claim of Dispensationalists that the Christian Church is a Mystery Parenthesis which Interrupts the Fulfillment to Israel of the Kingdom Prophecies of the Old Testament* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001], 140). One might retort, how is it possible that God would offer salvation to these same Jews in this context? What is the difference in terms of God's gracious offer of forgiveness?

Contingency and the Kingdom

Stanley Toussaint makes a case for contingency in the promise of the kingdom to Israel by examining contingencies in scripture that fulfill the pattern of a divine promise to man coupled with conditions for its fulfillment. If these promises were unconditional, then they would have to be fulfilled at some time in the future, albeit not necessarily through the individuals who violated the conditions.⁵ Toussaint posits that if these examples are frequent enough in scripture, then the case for interpreting the Gospel writers' offer of the kingdom to Israel as a genuine offer that was rejected and thereby postponed would be strengthened.⁶

An example that Toussaint alludes to but does not develop is particularly relevant to this question. Following Israel's journey from Mount Sinai where God established the Mosaic Covenant with his people Israel, Israel found itself positioned to enter the land that had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The terms of the Abrahamic covenant had been reiterated to Moses while still in Egypt so that Moses understood that Yahweh would surely deliver the Hebrew people from the Egyptians, bring them to the land, and conquer the nations who resided there so that Israel would inherit this land forever.⁷

However, since Israel failed to believe that Yahweh would deliver the nations into their hands, he postponed their entry into the promised-land for 40 years while causing the entire male adult population (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) to die off in the wilderness (Num 14:28-39). Thus, Israel inherited the promised-land after a 40 year postponement. The original offer of the land was genuine; if Israel had believed the Lord and had rejected the evil report of the ten spies, they surely would have entered the land immediately. Disobedience and unbelief brought about the tragic loss of the blessing of the exodus generation inheriting the land, thereby becoming the paradigm by which unbelief would be measured in generations to come.⁸

One might ask, if Israel had believed the Lord, and had entered the promised-land at that point, how would Moses have died? Would he have led Israel across the Jordan and into Canaan? For since Israel rejected God's offer of the land, its inheritance was postponed, and Moses was forced to face a situation in which he failed to treat Yahweh as holy (Num 20:13).

⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," Dyer, Charles C. and Roy B. Zuck, eds., in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 225-27. Toussaint lists 1) the repentant or unrepentant response of nations (Jer 18:7-10); 2) of Jereboam (1 Kings 11:38); 3) of Israel as God's treasured people (Exod 19:5-6); and generally of the spiritual response of Israel as a people (Deut 28).

⁶ Toussaint briefly cites Deut 28:1-68 and Josh 23:11-16 (*ibid.*, 226).

⁷ 1) God remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:24-25); 2) He affirms the covenant by promising to deliver his people from Egypt (Exod 3:6-8), bringing them to Canaan (Exod 3:8-9); 3) He assures his people of victory over the inhabitants of the land (Exod 23:20-33; 33:2; 34:11; Deut 7:1; 20:17); and 4) the land is promised as Israel's possession forever (Exod 32:13; Lev 25:34).

⁸ See Psa 95:7-11; Heb 3:7—4:16.

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”⁹

As a result, he died on Mount Nebo, and was allowed only to view the land from this mountain; in his place Joshua led the people into the land. However, if the people had accepted God’s promise of the land, then the time and place of Moses’ death would be altered, and Joshua’s role in leading Israel in the conquest of Canaan would be uncertain. Of course, speculation on matters like this one seems pointless.

Likewise, traditional dispensationalists believe that it is pointless to raise questions about the death of Messiah had national Israel repented and accepted Jesus at his first advent.¹⁰ The sacrificial death of Christ was essential to every aspect of God’s redemptive program: the salvation of the Gentiles, the founding of the church, the restoration of Israel, and the removal of sin’s curse on creation. Numerous predictions in the law, the prophets, the writings, and in the words of Jesus tell us that the Messiah would suffer, die, and rise again.

Furthermore, the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews is also predicted, and so it happened as God had planned: John the Baptist and Jesus offered the kingdom based on national repentance; the Jewish nation rejected the offer; Jesus was crucified; and the offer of the kingdom was suspended and postponed. However, from the perspective of a sovereign God, no postponement occurred.

Traditional Dispensationalists’ Language about Postponement

Traditional dispensationalists’ language related to kingdom postponement clarifies Jesus’ offer of the kingdom at the beginning of his ministry. Mark writes, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). In this announcement Jesus does not offer individual salvation or even a spiritual kingdom; he does not announce the beginning of the church. The offer that Jesus presents is the inauguration of the Jewish earthly kingdom with the Messiah as its king.

Although Darby does not use the term “postponement” or “delay” to describe this phenomenon, he suggests that an offer of the kingdom was made and then rejected by the Jews; as a result, humanity exists in “a period during which the world is not ordered

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, scripture references in this paper are taken from the English Standard Version, 2011.

¹⁰ See Toussaint’s answers to Enrich Sauer (*From Eternity to Eternity: An Outline of Divine Purposes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], 175-76), in “Contingency,” 235-37. Walter Kaiser, Jr., argues that the necessity of the death of Christ during Jesus’ first advent is the “most serious objection” to the idea of a genuine offer of the kingdom to Israel. Moreover, Kaiser concludes based on his reading of the Gospels that he sees “no evidence for such an offer. (“Kingdom Promises as Spiritual and National,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, edited by John S. Feinberg [Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1988], 298).

according to the righteous judicial power of the Son of man's kingdom."¹¹ Darby continues by stating that the church operates in "the interval between the rejection of the Son of man upon earth and his reigning upon the earth."¹² Thus, although Darby does not use the term "postpone" in this discussion, he infers it by affirming the offer, the rejection of the kingdom by the Jews, and the resulting "interval" in which the church is the focal point of God's work. Following this interval, the Son of Man takes up his role as the king who governs the world from Jerusalem.

It is likely that Lewis Sperry Chafer was the first to present an extended defense of the offer, rejection, and postponement of the kingdom.¹³ Chafer emphasizes the veracity of Yahweh's promises in the Old Testament, and how although the kingdom that was promised to the Jews was postponed, God's plan will not be defeated. Moreover, Chafer insists that God's plan has not changed:

These new conditions flowing from, and made possible by, the cross are not a readjustment of defeated Old Testament purposes, or the merging of the old order into the new. What was purposed in the earthly kingdom is still following its own divine order and development to its own mighty consummation. Its present form is exactly what God intended it to be at this hour, and all this will lead as certainly to the fulfillment of every predicted manifestation in the earth.¹⁴

Therefore, Chafer is cautious in his use of the term "postponement" in respect to the Davidic kingdom, not wanting to give the impression that God was forced to change his plan because of the rejection of the Jews. Rather, God's plan was just as he had intended.

Charles Ryrie's discussion on the offer of the kingdom includes "postponement," although he is hesitant to embrace this term and goes so far as to say that it is "inadequate" because it only describes the kingdom from Israel's perspective, and not from God's perspective. However, he states, "Though one could wish for a more inclusive word, there does not seem to be sufficient reason for rejecting it completely."¹⁵ For Ryrie, the term is suitable because it distinguishes the Davidic kingdom from other forms of God's kingdom rule. A dispensationalist can believe that the rule of Messiah on

¹¹ William Kelly, ed. *Collected Writings by John Nelson Darby*, vol 2 (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publications, reprint: 1971), no pagination. Accessed online on Sept 2, 2018, at www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/11501.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ I cannot confirm it, but it is possible that he is the first to use the term "postpone" in relation to the promised Jewish kingdom (*The Kingdom History and Prophecy* [Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1915], 23).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵ *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995, revised and expanded [original, *Dispensationalism Today*, 1966]), 159, n 13.

earth has been postponed while believing that the universal kingdom is present and active.¹⁶

J. Randall Price, who writes a compelling essay on the postponement of the Davidic kingdom from Daniel 9, is not averse to using postponement language as long as one regards “such a delay [as] only temporary, and *prophetic*, because we understand a purposeful, preordained act in the divine program.”¹⁷ Price also dispels the notion that the term “parenthetical” as applied to the church places this institution in an inferior place as compared to Israel. On the contrary, “parenthesis” is used only to indicate a chronology of God’s plan, and not a position.¹⁸

We may summarize that when traditional dispensationalists speak of the postponement of the kingdom, they do so from a human perspective. God’s plan is not overturned by man’s failure to respond to God’s offer of the kingdom. Since we would not avoid the term “postpone” in reference to describing other biblical events where human contingency is involved, neither should we avoid using the term for the postponement of the kingdom concept.

Non-Dispensational Postponement Theories

The New Exodus theologies that have grown in popularity in recent years essentially affirm eschatological frameworks in which national Israel has no future. On a broad level of analysis, they assert that the Gospels were written to show that just as Moses led the people of God out of the bondage of Egypt, Jesus leads a new people of God out of the bondage of sin in order to live under the perfect reign of their king. The church, therefore, receives the transformed promises of the covenant that had once been restricted to the nation of Israel.

As part of the framework for this reading of the Old and New Testaments, some New Exodus studies suggest that particular elements of the return of the Jewish captives from Babylon were disappointing or incomplete. In other words, the response did not rise to the condition established by Yahweh for Israel’s complete and glorious restoration. As a result, the fulfillment was postponed or fulfilled partially.

Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*

Gentry and Wellum suggest that the release and return of the exiles from Babylon occurs in two stages. The first is initiated by Yahweh’s servant, Cyrus, while the second is initiated by Yahweh’s perfect servant, Jesus Christ. The first deliverance is essentially

¹⁶ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 156.

¹⁷ I am grateful for the suggestion of Mike Stallard that I examine Price’s essay in respect to my thesis (“Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, edited by Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master. 133-165 [Chicago: Moody, 1994], 136).

¹⁸ Price, *Prophetic Postponement*, 138.

physical, while the second is spiritual. Taken together, the exile ends.¹⁹ In their approach to the seventy weeks of Daniel 9, they state:

Before the new exodus, there will be a longer period of exile. Thus the real return from exile, a return including the forgiveness of sins, renewal of the covenant, and consecration of the temple, will not take just seventy years, but rather seventy ‘sevens,’ i.e., a much longer time. This *fundamental point* of the vision has unfortunately escaped the attention of proponents of both dispensational and nondispensational treatments in the last hundred years.²⁰

Gentry and Wellum’s framework for understanding Daniel’s vision of seventy weeks is essentially to divide the time prophesied into two segments: the first, 70 years, extends until the commission of Artaxerxes to Ezra, who decreed that he could return to Jerusalem and restore temple worship. The remainder of the prophesied weeks, the sixty-two week segment, and the one-week segment, are grouped together and considered as one unit, accomplishing the spiritual objectives of the prophecy. The authors argue that the sixty-two week period is segmented as such because nothing significant happens during this time. Messiah is cut-off in the seventieth week. It would be interesting to discuss here the identity of the “anointed” one(s) in Dan 9:25-26, or how both the crucifixion of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem could occur in the seventieth week, but space does not allow.

However, it is germane to this discussion to note that Gentry and Wellum divide the restoration of Israel into two segments, an “already/not yet” framework. The physical restoration of Israel occurs during the era of the return from Babylon, but the spiritual restoration of “Israel” occurs during the ministry of Christ as recorded in the Gospels. Given other “already/not yet” schemes in biblical studies that place the spiritual fulfillment of the prophecy first with the physical fulfillment coming later, it is interesting that Gentry and Wellum reverse this framework.²¹ By placing the physical aspects of fulfillment first, they downplay the importance of the return from Babylon, claiming that “the real return from exile” is the spiritual one that occurs at the first advent of Christ.²²

The net effect of Gentry and Wellum’s two-stage fulfillment of the prophecy regarding Israel’s return from exile is delay. What happens under Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Ezra is inconsequential compared to the supposed “second exodus” that occurs in the Gospels. According to Gentry and Wellum, the true release from Babylonian exile does

¹⁹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 538-40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 541.

²¹ See Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 97-98. G. E. Ladd is credited as the one who originated the idea of an “already/not yet” framework for viewing the fulfillment of prophecy (*The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974]).

²² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 541.

not take place for more than four hundred years after the original prophecy begins to be fulfilled. Although they do not use “delay” or “postponement” language to describe this process, it stands to reason that this theory requires an interval between its initial and its complete fulfillment. From a divine perspective, Gentry and Wellum would argue that no delay occurs; from a human perspective, the fulfillment of the prophecy is delayed or postponed. Although this analysis of Gentry and Wellum’s thesis may not seem fair-minded to them, my critique is similar to the accusation that nondispensationalists bring against the traditional dispensational theory of the postponement of the kingdom.

G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*

G. K. Beale asserts that the kingdom that was prophesied in the Old Testament was “beginning to be fulfilled” at the start of Jesus’s ministry (Mark 1:14-15). He opines that although Israel had been physically freed from its captivity in Babylon, it was still in spiritual bondage, only to be released during the first advent of Jesus Christ, a “new exodus” in the history of the people of God. According to Beale, it is at this point in time that the kingdom is “transformed.”²³

Perhaps one of the most striking features of Jesus’s kingdom is that it appears not to be the kind of kingdom prophesied in the OT and expected by Judaism. Part of the reason for the unexpectedness is that the kingdom had begun but was not consummated, and this lack of consummation was to continue on indefinitely. This stands in contrast to OT prophecies of the latter days whose events were predicted to occur all at once at the very end of history.²⁴

Beale suggests that the kingdom will only be consummated when the “entire world will be transformed into a new cosmos where the physical and spiritual realms completely overlap and form one reality.”²⁵

Like Gentry and Wellum, Beale posits an “already/not yet” framework for understanding the kingdom that places the physical aspects of the kingdom first (return from Babylon), with an interval of time in which nothing happens. At the coming of Christ, the spiritual phase of the kingdom begins, effecting an unexpected transformation of the kingdom that exceeds OT understandings. As in Gentry and Wellum’s thesis, Beale relies heavily on Ladd for his “already/not yet” approach to prophetic fulfillment. What is distinct in Beale, however, is the idea that the exile is never over until the new creation. In Gentry and Wellum, the exile terminates at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Beale’s two stage theory of kingdom fulfillment, with the second stage continuing to the new creation of heaven and earth, contains a period of delay that extends from the

²³ *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 431.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; 431, 527.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 433.

edict of Cyrus, the Persian, to the first appearing of Christ. As in Gentry and Wellum, this delay represents a postponement of the fulfillment of the kingdom.

Rikk E. Watt's and the Isaianic New Exodus

Rikk E. Watts presents a New Exodus schema in his book, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*,²⁶ that includes the elements of offer, rejection, postponement, and ultimate fulfillment. Although arguing from the assumption of the compositional unity of the book of Isaiah, Watts suggests that Isaiah contains contingencies between its three different times of composition.²⁷ The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah, although primarily oracles of judgment (some of them directed against Israel), nonetheless promise that Yahweh will redeem a remnant. This consolation appears to be within reach of the nation in chapters 40-55, if only it will receive God's plan of redemption, which includes acceptance of Yahweh's anointed servant, Cyrus. Deeming Yahweh's plan unacceptable, Israel's blind and deaf religious leaders reject Yahweh's wisdom, and his plan seems to languish (40-48). Even though a remnant returned to Jerusalem in response to God's provision through Cyrus, the turn-out was meager at best. Since the nation's response did not meet with Yahweh's expectation of a faithful remnant responding in faith, he "postponed" the proposed new exodus to Jerusalem.

Watts suggests that chapters 49-55 center on this theme of Yahweh's new exodus plan, mediated through the enigmatic servant of the Lord: "Chapters 49-55 then describe how Yahweh's new exodus plan, although postponed as suggested, will be realized through the agency of a new, faithful and suffering servant "Israel" who will deliver Jacob-Israel and execute Yahweh's plan for the nations."²⁸

Although Watts maintains that Second Isaiah²⁹ is unaware of the identity of this mysterious servant, there is no mistaking his function; his atoning suffering and subsequent victory will clearly make the NE possible. He is the one who will provide for a "restored Jerusalem-Zion" to which the nations will come to seek Yahweh.³⁰ According to Watts, Isaiah 56:6-8 clearly expresses the global implications of the new exodus.³¹

²⁶ *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). This section on Rikk E. Watt's treatment of Mark's Gospel is a moderately edited section of my dissertation, "A Critique of Rikk E. Watts' *Isaianic New Exodus* in the Markan Prologue," [Ph.D. diss., Baptist Bible Seminary, 2012], 232-39).

²⁷ Watts assumes multiple authorship, but believes that there is more unity in the prophecy than critical scholars have allowed in the past due to a final skillful redactor ("Isaiah" 40-55: Consolation or Confrontation? Isaiah 40-55 and the Delay of the New Exodus," *TynBul* 41 [1990]: 31-59).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹ I use the designations, first, second, and third Isaiah to facilitate discussion, but affirm that an eighth century prophet named Isaiah wrote all 66 chapters of this book.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹ "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their

Following this, Third Isaiah (56-66), having a post-exilic setting, combines themes of disappointment over Israel's failure to embrace Yahweh's plan for its return under Cyrus with reassuring new exodus statements of a greater redemption for Jerusalem than the nation has ever seen. This enhanced NE deliverance replaces the original exodus as the emblem of God's saving grace for his people. As Watts so clearly summarizes, "The goal of the new exodus is the enthronement of Yahweh in a restored Jerusalem-Zion."³²

It is significant to note that as the prophecy advances in the second section of SI (chapters 49-55), a shift of focus occurs. No longer does Yahweh dispute with his people over their rebellious ways. Regarding chapters 49-55, Watts claims there is a "virtual absence" of disputations in this section of SI.³³ This absence is significant because not only do the disputations fade from view, but also, so do Cyrus and the anti-idol polemics of earlier chapters. The servant figure, Yahweh's agent of deliverance, becomes the central interest of chapters 49-55. A new plan has been initiated—plan B?

Postponement of the New Exodus

To summarize, Watts proposes that Isaiah's consolation is initially rejected by Israel, given its poor response to Yahweh's anointed deliverer, Cyrus. The disputations of Isa 40-48 catalog Yahweh's case against his people, finally making necessary a new plan. The language of chapters 49-55 shifts to proclamations of salvation, thereby indicating that God's blessing is yet future. This new plan is effected through the enigmatic servant, to be fulfilled at a later time. However, as can be seen in Isa 56-66, Israel also refuses the atoning work of the enigmatic servant, thereby postponing Yahweh's new exodus.

Rikk E. Watts assumes a chronological progression based on a compositional framework that begins in the eighth century BC and ends sometime after the exile. If Third Isaiah was not a postexilic writing, it could hardly address the failures of the return of Israel from Babylon to Jerusalem. Lim's assessment of human responses in Watt's view of SI and TI clearly reveals this prophecy/fulfillment problem:

burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered." See Watts' *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, 318-32, for his approach to the temple cleansing incident, where Jesus cites Isa 56:7. Watts suggests that when Jesus focused his attention on cleansing the outer court, the court of the Gentiles, he did so because the religious leaders had hindered the Gentiles from worship. Since Jesus cites Isa 56:7 on this occasion, he evokes the inclusive teaching (Jews and Gentiles) of the INE.

³² Watts, "Consolation," 34.

³³ Watts tends to quantify data that would better be qualified. To say that there is a virtual absence of disputations in chapters 49-55 is misleading when there are two key sections, one of them appearing in the epilogue of SI (50:1-3; 55:8-13; Watts calls the second one "brief" although it is longer than the average disputation in chapters 40-48.). Given Watts' insistence on the literary significance of the prologue, middle, and epilogue of a text, it is surprising that he passes over these disputations, deeming them "insignificant."

The impression that SI announced a complete fulfillment of Yahweh's salvation promises only to be followed by the disappointment of unfulfilled prophecy resulting in its modification by the addition of TI fails to observe the conflict within SI as well as the theological implications of the theme of fulfillment of God's word (40:8; 55:11).³⁴

Watts' NE framework seems to suggest that Yahweh makes prophetic modifications along the way as Israel responds to his promises to restore the nation since each stage of the progression is dependent on the previous one. The following conditional sequence in Isaiah illustrates the problem of prophecy and fulfillment in Watts' schema:

Yahweh's Actions	Israel's Responses
God promises a full restoration of Israel, a new exodus (1-39).	Israel rejects God's wisdom, trusting itself (1-39).
Yahweh demonstrates his ability to control history by judging the nations as well as Israel (1-39).	Israel doubts God's wisdom and ability (1-39).
Yahweh hardens Israel's people's hearts (1-39, esp. 6).	Israel chooses to follow idols.
Yahweh comforts Israel and promises a new exodus (40-48).	Israel refuses to trust God.
God provides Cyrus, a deliverer for a new exodus (40-48).	Israel rejects Cyrus, God's instrument of deliverance (40-48).
God disputes with Israel, accusing it of trusting worthless idols (40-48).	Israel returns to Jerusalem in a very meager way (40-48).
God promises a new exodus more glorious than the original one, to be achieved through the righteous Servant of the Lord (49-55).	The people do not believe God (49-55).
God postpones the new exodus (56-66).	The prophet looks forward to the day when the perfect servant brings about the glorious new exodus as described in chapters 1-39.

³⁴ Bo H. Lim, "The 'Way of the Lord' in the Book of Isaiah." (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006), 137.

Without the space of time that is assumed in the composition of Isaiah, it is difficult to imagine Watts' scheme working because of the considerable number of contingencies.³⁵ Yahweh bases his promises in SI on human actions in FI. Likewise, Yahweh bases the content of TI on Israel's responses to God in SI. For instance, Watts opines that the imminent hope of Isa 40:1-11 is addressed to the Jews in exile regarding their return to Babylon (exilic audience), but since they are "blind and deaf" to Yahweh's wisdom in using Cyrus, a pagan ruler (expressed in chs. 40-48), they respond meagerly, so the INE is postponed. Isa 56-66 indicates to the next generation of Jews (post-exilic audience) that the INE did not eventuate, while Isa 49-55 explains how the new fulfillment will take place, through the work of God's Servant.

One wonders, then, if one could adapt Watts' reading of Isaiah to the traditional view of authorship that places the entire book under the pen of an eighth century prophet. Bowman, furthermore, points out the insurmountable interpretive difficulty of the first century reader of Isaiah (i.e., Mark), who most certainly would not have known Duhm's hypothesis.³⁶

We may summarize Watt's approach to the prophecy and fulfillment of Israel's restoration. Over a period of more than 300 years, Yahweh offers to restore his people Israel so that they can enjoy his favor and be a blessing to the nations. In response to each offer, Israel rejects Yahweh's plan in favor of its own way, thereby postponing the new exodus. Unlike Gentry, Wellum, and Beale, Watts frequently speaks of the postponement of Yahweh's new exodus plan. Therefore, one may summarize that Watts' thesis contains

³⁵ Watts assumes a date for Isa 1-39 in the latter part of the eighth century BC, while chapters 40-55 were composed about the middle of the sixth century, with chapters 56-66 being added sometime in the fifth century. The final stage of writing entailed editing of the work as a whole. Therefore, scholars estimate that this writing was produced over a period of nearly three hundred years.

H. G. M. Williamson wrestles with this concept: "If the prophet maintains that certain things which have been prophesied in the past have been accurately fulfilled, so that now one may have confidence in the reliability of the new predictions being made, the argument both presupposes an acceptance of the validity of predictive prophecy, and also demands that the speaker should himself be located after the fulfillment of those predictions" (*The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* [Oxford: Oxford University, 1994], 2). Although recent understandings of "compositional unity" in Isaiah seem to improve one's chances of understanding the overall message of the book, challenges related to promise and fulfillment remain. McEvenue observes the hermeneutical challenges for the reader of Isaiah: "The interweaving of texts from the three distinct periods of the book's writing is such that it is no longer acceptable to interpret the book in three parts. All three parts are hermeneutically present in each part. This is complex literature, requiring complexity in the reader [emphasis mine]." See also W. A. M. Beuken, "Isaiah Chapters LXV-LXVI: Trito-Isaiah and the Closure of the Book of Isaiah," in *The Congress Volume: Leuven 1989*, ed. J. A. Emerton, 204-21, VTSup 43 (Leiden: Brill, 1991); Rendtorff, "The Book of Isaiah," 8-20; and Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 25-29. Carroll suggests that human response in salvation oracles may result in situations that are different from their expectations (*When Prophecy Failed* [London: SCM Press, 1979], 140). He claims that the Babylonian captivity caused prophecy to collapse, as the people felt that Yahweh's promises to preserve Zion had failed. Second Isaiah's message, then, was one of adjusting prophecy to the reality of Israel's failure (ibid., 150-56).

³⁶ *The Gospel of Mark: The Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah*, StPB 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 62.

an offer, rejection of the offer, and finally a postponement of the plan which indicates an interval of time between the offer and the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Although Watt's theory is widely accepted by evangelical scholars, no one seems to be concerned about his postponement hypothesis.³⁷ Likewise, few exhibit concern over his multi-author view of the writing of Isaiah. Yet as previously noted, without the space of time given for the composition of Isaiah in three distinct time periods of Israel's history, Watts' thesis fails. Furthermore, one might add that according to Watts, had Israel accepted the original offer from Yahweh as recorded in Isaiah, then the new exodus would have been fulfilled in that era.

Conclusion

I have endeavored in this paper to show how nondispensationalists interpret postponement language related to the kingdom's delay. I have also demonstrated to a limited extent how traditional dispensationalists are themselves cautious about how they use postponement language. From a divine perspective, no postponement occurs. However, the concept is helpful for traditional dispensationalists because it indicates that the Davidic Kingdom is not being partially fulfilled during the church age. Finally, this paper has presented clear examples which non-dispensationalists tend to agree that there is an offer from God, a rejection by his people, and then an interval between its offer and its fulfillment. In the instance of the conquest of the promised-land, all would agree that there was a forty-year postponement of the promise's fulfillment. No one would consider this "Plan B." Furthermore, the New Exodus approaches of Gentry, Wellum, Beale, and Watts indicate that arguments that support various non-dispensational hermeneutical frameworks contain elements of prophetic delay, yet no critique on this point occurs in scholarly literature. Perhaps the scholarly analysis has been postponed for another time.

³⁷ This is especially evident in that he was selected to write the chapter on Mark's Gospel in the widely used, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* ("Mark," edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, 111-249 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007]). See also Paul S. Coxon, *Exploring the New Exodus in John: A Biblical Theological Investigation of John, Chapters 5-10* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2014), 122.

Bibliography

- Allis, Oswald T. *Prophecy and the Church: An Examination of the Claim of Dispensationalists that the Christian Church is a Mystery Parenthesis which Interrupts the Fulfillment to Israel of the Kingdom Prophecies of the Old Testament*. Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001.
- Bateman IV, Herbert W., ed. *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999.
- Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.
- Blaising, Craig A. and Darrell L. Bock. *Progressive Dispensationalism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.
- Carroll, Robert P. *When Prophecy Failed*. London: SCM Press, 1979.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *The Kingdom History and Prophecy*. Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1915.V
- _____. *Systematic Theology*. Vol 7. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1983.
- Coxon, Paul S. *Exploring the New Exodus in John: A Biblical Theological Investigation of John, Chapters 5-10*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2014.
- Cushman, Neal D. "A Critique of Rikk E. Watts' Isaianic New Exodus in the Markan Prologue." Ph.D. diss., Baptist Bible Seminary, 2012.
- Donaldson, Alistair W. *The Last Days of Dispensationalism: A Scholarly Critique of Popular Misconceptions*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- Dyer, Charles C. and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.
- Feinberg, John S., ed. *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988.
- Frank, Doug. *Less Than Conquerors: The Evangelical Quest for Power in the Early Twentieth Century*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

- Gentry, Peter J. and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Ironside, Harry Allen. *The Mysteries of God*. Self-Published, 1906.
- Kaiser, Walter, Jr. "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual and National." In *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, edited by John S. Feinberg. 289-308. Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1988.
- Kelly, William, ed. *Collected Writings by John Nelson Darby*. Vol 2. Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publications, reprint: 1971). Accessed online on Sept 2, 2018, at www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/11501.
- Ladd, G. E. *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.
- Lim, Bo H. "The 'Way of the Lord' in the Book of Isaiah." Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006.
- Moore, Russell D. *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004.
- Musser, Donald W. and Joseph L. Price, eds. *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, rev ed. 2003 [*A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, 1992].
- Ryrie, Charles C. *Dispensationalism*. Chicago: Moody, 1995, revised and enlarged; [orig pub., *Dispensationalism Today*, 1966].
- Stephen J. Nichols. "The Dispensational View of the Davidic Kingdom: A Response to Progressive Dispensationalism." *The Masters Seminary Journal* 7/2 (1996), 213-39.
- Price, J. Randall. "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts." In *Issues in Dispensationalism*. Edited by Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master. 133-165, Chicago: Moody, 1994.
- Saucy, Robert L. "The Crucial Issue Between Dispensational and Nondispensational Systems." *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1986): 149-65.
- Toussaint, Stanley D. "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom." Dyer, Charles C. and Roy B. Zuck, eds. In *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*. 222-37. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

- Waltke, Bruce K. "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual." In *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* 263-87. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988.
- Watts, Rikk E. "Isaiah 40-55: Consolation or Confrontation? Isaiah 40-55 and the Delay of the New Exodus." *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990): 31-59.
- _____. *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.
- Weber, Timothy P. "Dispensationalism." In *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*. Edited by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price. 129-31. Nashville: Abingdon Press, rev ed. 2003 (*A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, 1992).
- Williamson, H. G. M. *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1994.
- Willis, Wesley R. and John R. Master, eds. *Issues in Dispensationalism*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.