

Bauder, Kevin T., and R. Bruce Compton, eds. *Dispensationalism Revisited: A Twenty-First Century Restatement*. Plymouth, MN: Central Seminary Press, 2023. 278pp. + 15pp. (front matter).

This book is a festschrift for Charles Hauser Jr., who taught at several institutions, including Denver Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary (an institution now carried on by Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa) and Central Baptist Theological Seminary. The authors of the various chapters were students and/or colleagues of Charles Hauser. The authors include both traditional/revived and progressive dispensationalists, but the book reads more traditionally since the progressive dispensationalists wrote on topics of dispensational agreement whereas some of the traditional dispensationalists argued for points of distinction in the intramural dispensational discussion.

Some of these chapters are excellent statements of standard dispensational positions. Ryan Martin provides a fine exegetical survey of Romans 9–11 that ably demonstrates that these chapters disallow any form of supersessionism. Edward Glennly contributes a clear articulation of the premillennial position coupled with brief but cogent critiques of amillennial readings of Revelation 20. This chapter provides a superb introduction to the premillennial position, and those who would take the time to track down the sources mentioned in the footnotes would be led to some of the best resources from all sides of the debate. Jonathan Pratt provides a solid defense of the pretribulational rapture. The latter part of the chapter, where Pratt makes his case from Revelation 3:10 and 1 Thessalonians 4–5, was more convincing than the arguments mounted earlier in the chapter from 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 and Revelation 12:5.

Other chapters argue for distinctives of traditional dispensationalism. Douglas Brown explains why the glory of God was included as a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism, though it is also a significant feature of other systems of theology. Brown notes that this was an effort by the traditional dispensationalists to posit a unifying principle of history in response to charges that dispensationalism undercut the unity of Scripture by having two purposes for two peoples of God.

Roy Beacham defends a very specific understanding of the literal interpretation of prophecy: “Any hermeneutical viewpoint that espouses any form of other-than-, less-than-, or more-than-literal fulfillment of God’s foretelling negates the declared purpose and evidentiary worth of this genre” (41). There is wide agreement among dispensationalists with Beacham regarding “other-than” and “less-than” fulfillments, but the exclusion of “more-than” is a point of contention among dispensationalists. If everything God predicted happened exactly as God said it would, but more happened in addition to what God predicted, how does the “more-than” negate God’s purposes for prophecy or violate the integrity of the Promiser? In a footnote Beacham explains his view of how “more-than” interpretations work: “God promises to do *x* but instead he does *y*, which, in their view, is $> x$ ” (51n32). But promising *x* and doing *y* does not describe an *expansion* of the promises; it describes *replacement* under the label of expansion. Nonetheless, Beacham concludes the footnote by arguing against *expansion* in principle. However, it is difficult to see how *expansion* can be eliminated without predictive prophecy being exhaustive. For instance, is not the fact that the fulfillment of certain prophecies regarding Christ is

divided into events that happened in the first advent and events that will happen in the second advent an expansion upon what was revealed in the OT?

Beacham is also critical of canonical interpretation. He is right to be concerned about appeals to canonical interpretation that negate promises made to Israel. But canonical interpretation seems simply to be the way that related texts are read. If a person is reading a series of novels and one character seems ambiguous or evil in earlier volumes while a later volume reveals him to have been a secret agent working for the good, that later information will necessarily reshape how those earlier scenes are understood. Likewise, when the seed promise of Genesis 3:15 is read in light of the progressive revelation that develops that promise, readers gain a richer understanding of the promise. The abuse of canonical readings does not negate its proper, even inevitable, use.

Bruce Compton makes the case that the kingdom of heaven/God refers only to the rule of Christ on earth in the coming millennial kingdom. He denies that the kingdom is present in any sense during the church age. Compton makes the best case for the millennium-only view of the kingdom that can be made, and if one feels compelled to accept such a viewpoint, the exegesis can be made to work. However, the biblical text itself seems to push interpreters in another direction. Matthew 13, for instance, is a problem for Compton's thesis, for it seems that its parables do precisely what Compton proposes Jesus never did: teach that there will be a phase of the kingdom in the inter-advent period. These parables envision a time when Christ's kingdom will appear insignificant and invisible and in which the sons of the evil one co-exist with the sons of the kingdom. Compton does land significant critiques against those who limit the reign of Christ to his spiritual rule in the lives of believers. But his objections do not land with those who believe that the realm of the kingdom is the earth even in this inaugurated stage when Christ rules in the midst of his enemies. Compton concludes his chapter by observing that his approach helps keep the church on mission by not giving the church a social mandate. However, there are those who hold to the presence of the kingdom who also are reticent about a social mandate for the institutional church. The kingdom is a broader category than the institution of the church, and sphere sovereignty provides a theological category to distinguish the mission of the institutional church from the mission of Christians in other institutions.

Kevin Bauder's chapter on Israel, the church, and the people of God was the most thought provoking. Bauder notes that *people* can be "plural for *person*" with "people of God" meaning "the sum total of all saved individuals." However, it is another usage of *people* that is in play when discussing the church and Israel: "*people groups*" (72). Israel was identified as a people of God because it was a nation chosen by God. The church is also identified as God's people, even though it is a multi-ethnic group. Bauder argues that the church can be considered an ethnic-group equivalent because all of its members are united to Christ. After the return of Christ there will be many peoples of God as the nations turn to God for salvation *en masse*.

Bauder's chapter provides an excellent survey of the evidence that shifted my thinking from a simple affirmation of a single people of God to a more complex view. A weakness of the chapter is the absence of the role that covenant plays in forming a people of God. Israel was God's people because God entered into a covenant with Israel (cf. Exod 19:5). In the NT, Israel can still be identified as the people of God (e.g., Luke 2:32), but the people terminology can also be applied more broadly to all

of the redeemed because all the redeemed are in covenant with God (e.g., Matt 1:21; Heb 2:17). The church is also referred to as the people of God, often in passages quoting OT texts that referred originally to Israel (cf. 2 Cor 6:16–18; 1 Pet 2:9–10). Contrary to Bauder, it is not necessary to find a way to make the church another ethnic group in order to apply the *people* language to it. Rather, terms that were ethnic when originally applied to Israel are applied to the church metaphorically because the church is the New Covenant body of people possessed by God just as Israel was the Old Covenant people possessed by God.

Though initially dubious about Bauder’s proposal of many peoples of God, I found myself persuaded by the evidence. For example, the most plausible textual variant in Revelation 21:3 refers to peoples of God: “God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God” (CSB). Thus, in this last statement of the covenant formula the plurality of the peoples of God is emphasized. And yet, this phrase is announced from heaven at the descent of the new Jerusalem, which is described in terms that reinforce the unity of the people of God. So is there one, two, or many peoples of God? The answer is “yes,” depending on the sense in view. The Bible uses the “people of God” terminology in various ways. It can be used of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. It can be used of the church as the New Covenant people of God. It can be used of all the redeemed throughout the ages. And it can be used of redeemed nations in the new creation. This formulation differs somewhat from Bauder’s but is indebted to his thought-provoking chapter.

Other essays in *Dispensationalism Revisited* cover topics such as the covenants, Israel and the church in Acts, and patristic views of Israel. Overall the book contains a number of excellent, persuasive essays. Other essays, though less persuasive in my view, nonetheless provide strongly argued cases for traditional dispensational positions.

Brian C. Collins

Biblical Worldview Lead Specialist | BJU Press