



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson

Divine Purpose

TRANSCRIPT

“Structure of Dispensational Theology (9): Distinctive Features: Inception and Departure of the church - II”

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for the word of God and we give Thee thanks for the divine plan of the ages, revealed in Holy Scripture, and for the divine purpose that is seen in the word. We thank Thee for the privilege of pondering it and reflecting upon it. We pray that the Holy Spirit may give us guidance and direction as we consider the things that are found in Thy word. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon each one present. We pray that the things that concern our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may have their proper place in our lives, and we ask that in this day in which we live, 1986, that we may have the kind of testimony that will glorify Thy Name. We are especially thankful for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, may He have the preeminence in all that we say and all that we do. We recognize we are still sinners, we fail Thee so often. We have disobeyed Thee. We ask, Lord, for forgiveness. May the Holy Spirit convict us further of the ways in which we have walked, contrary to the expressed will of God in Thy word. May we be brought to proper repentance after we have come to understand those ways in which we have gone contrary to Thy word. We pray for each one of us. We ask that we may glorify Thy name. May this particular class be useful in our understanding of Scripture and ultimately in our lives.

We pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now, for those of you who were not here last week, we were studying the Structure of Dispensation Theology, the sixth of the sections of our study of that particular theology. We were looking at Distinctive Features, and particularly at the Inception and Departure of the church. And those of you that don't have an outline; there are two or three outlines up here. And those who were here, remember, that we let you know at the beginning of the hour that we would look at this for two weeks, rather than one week, and so we are going to pick up our study right in the middle of where we stopped off last time. But, for the benefit of some of you who may be here for the first time, we'll give a brief review of what we decided, what we were talking about and where we stopped last time.

The purpose of these studies is not, necessarily, to defend dispensationalism at this point, but rather to set it forth historically and so, we were looking at the distinctive features and particularly at the Inception and Departure of the church. We tried to show, primarily, last time that there is biblical justification for belief that the church began on the Day of Pentecost. And I set out a particular formula by which we may, biblically, support that idea. First of all, we considered the fact that the church is called the Body of Christ, from Ephesians chapter 1, verse 22 and 23. We saw, secondly, that the church is entered by spiritual baptism; either by the baptism of the Holy Spirit or by Christ baptizing us in the Holy Spirit. That's a debatable point but the end result is essentially the same. Then, we turned to Matthew 16:18, and pointed out that according to our Lord's statement, "I will build my church," that the church evidently is future from the time of our Lord's pre-cross ministry.

We sought to show that Professor Burkhof was wrong in this instance, in suggesting that that is not a reference to the future. He, himself, made the statement that that particular text is one in which he said he would found the church in the future, but

also, he recognized it as an already existing institution, in Matthew 18:17. We tried to point out that that’s a contradiction, contrary to the laws of thought. Something cannot both be and not be at the same time. And that chapter 18’s reference to the church, the only other place where the term ‘church’ is mentioned in the Gospels aside from 16:18, is to be understood as explanatory of discipline in the church when the church should come into existence. In other words, chapter 18, verse 17, is to be interpreted by the preceding reference in chapter 16, verse 18.

We then saw that the church was future from our Lord’s pre-ascension ministry, from Acts chapter 1, verse 4 and 5, because there the Lord Jesus says the baptism in the Spirit or by the Spirit has not yet occurred. So since that’s the way you enter the church, obviously, if that has not yet occurred, the church is not yet in existence.

Then we suggested that the church was born on the Day of Pentecost, because first of all, when Jesus said, “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence,” that very temporal expression can only be explained by reference to the Day of Pentecost because there isn’t any other event that could possibly be the place at which the Holy Spirit came not many days from our Lord’s pre-ascension ministry.

But then, we did point out that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not specifically mentioned at Acts chapter 2, and so if you were looking for a leg to stand on, you might want to say, “Well, it doesn’t say that the church was baptized by the Holy Spirit then.” Acts 2, simply says the church was “filled” with the Holy Spirit.

You might, if you wish, point out that the term “filling” might today necessitate baptism, but it didn’t necessitate that baptizing ministry in the Old Testament times. And so that wouldn’t be too good an approach to make. I think, to lay stress on the temporal phrase would be sufficient, but then we turned to Acts 11, verse 15 and through verse 17, where Peter is recounting what happened in Cornelius’ house, and there he says that what happened in Cornelius’ house is what happened to them in the beginning. And then, he cites the very text that our Lord cited in Acts chapter 1, saying, in effect, that is

what that referred to; the things that happened to him in the beginning. And so Acts 11:15, verses 15 through verse 17, clenches the point that the spiritual baptism occurred on the Day of Pentecost.

And then, we saw in Acts chapter 5, shortly after this, Luke as he records the history of the early church begins to talk about the existence of a church. And up until that time, the existence of the church is not found in the Book of Acts or for that matter, in the New Testament at all. So the first historical occurrence of the existence of a church is Acts chapter 5, in verse 11, and that's thoroughly harmonious with what we have been talking about. And, therefore, there is, to my mind, very sound biblical justification for saying that the body that we know as the church, in the special sense in which it exists today, came into existence in that special sense on the Day of Pentecost.

Now, that's not the same as saying the people of God came into existence on the Day of Pentecost. And that's not the same as saying that in every respect the church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost. But there is a sense in which the church did come into existence on the Day of Pentecost.

Now, we talked about the manner of its birth and the ultimate basis of its birth; truths that I'm sure you are well acquainted with. And so now, we come to the second part of our outline, if you have it before you, if you haven't got it before you, you are penalized; docked ten points for on your grade. [Laughter] Since all teachers are being examined, now we're examining everybody who comes to class in Believers Chapel. So that's the word that comes from Mark White. He says, “Test those people who come to the Bible class.” So we'll have you brought to a reckoning one of these days.

The second part of our outline was continuity and discontinuity in the church in Israel. And, we'll talk about continuity for a few moments, because what I'd like to show is that there is a continuity between Israel and the church that is often overlooked by dispensationalists. And there is a discontinuity between the church and Israel that is often

overlooked by those who are opposed to dispensational theology. So, first of all, a few words about continuity.

Some of the elements of continuity between the church and Israel include these particular things. First of all, believers in the church and Israel, whether Jewish or Gentile, inherit the Messianic promises. In other words, the same promises that are found in the Old Testament, in the prophetic word, are the promises that are inherited by the Christian church, by believers within the Christian church, whether Jews or Gentiles.

Now, when we spend some time on Romans 11, we'll see plainly how that is set out in Scripture, but there is one text that sets it out, I think, just about as plainly as it could be set out, and it's in Romans chapter 11, and I'll just read it for you. It's near the beginning of Paul's statements concerning the illustration of the olive tree. And he states, in verse 17, of Romans 11, “Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive were grafted in among them.” Now, I say, we don't have time to talk about the context right now, but it's very plain that when he talks about a wild olive and then the natural branches, he's talking about Israel as the natural branches and the Gentiles as the wild branches.

So he says, “Were grafted in among them and became a fellow partaker of the root of the fatness of the olive tree.” Or to put it in better English, “the fat root of the olive tree.” Now, that plainly says that the Gentiles, who were natural branches, were grafted in among the believing Israelites and became a fellow partaker of the fat root of the olive tree. In other words, the same blessings that believing Israelites possessed, as the remnant, are the blessings that the Gentiles enjoy within the church of Christ.

So when we talk about the blessings, the Messianic blessings, we're talking about blessings that belong to the church and belong, also, to the nation Israel. Other passages that set out this relationship are Romans 4, 11 and 12. Romans chapter 9 in verse 6, bears on the point. Ephesians chapter 3, verse 5 and 6, also bears on the point as well. In fact,

we might turn over to Ephesians chapter 3, verses 5 and 6, just to see another text that bears on this point.

In Ephesians chapter 3 in verse 5 and 6, he says, “Which to other generations was not made known.” “Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

Now, you just notice those expressions and the use of the term “fellow.” The Greek preposition is the Greek preposition “sum” which means “with.” In fact, it’s the same preposition that was used back in Romans 11, verse 17, had become “fellow partaker,” that is, fellow partaker with them.

So when we talk about the Messianic blessings, those blessings are the blessings promised in the Old Testament, and they are blessings that God faithfully brought to pass, through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are available to believing people, believing people enter into the possession of them, if they are Jewish believers, they enter into them; if Gentile believers, they also enter into the possession of those promises.

What are those promises? Well, they include justification by faith, they include particularly the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, because that’s something fresh, as we’ll say in a moment. But other redemptive blessings also that required the shedding of the blood for the enjoyment of them; they also belong to the fulfilled Messianic promises. So that’s the first of the elements of continuity.

Now, secondly, we can spell it out a little more and say, the Abraham promises. While they receive further expansion and delineation, remain the fundamental promises of God and the possession of the believing people of God. Let’s turn over to Galatians chapter 3 in verse 14. Now, remember, Paul is writing to the Galatian believers, who are in the church and aside from pointing out the fact that the message of the good news

concerning the forgiveness of sins and justification, particularly, has been fulfilled to them through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, he says in verse 14 or verse 13, I'll read first, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having come to be a curse on our behalf, because it stands written, cursed is every one who hangs upon a tree: That the Gentile, that the blessing of Abraham might come unto the Gentiles in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

Now, notice, “That the blessing of Abraham might come unto the Gentiles that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” So inclusive or included in the Abrahamic promises were the promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit and his indwelling. They are the fundamental promises of God found in the Abrahamic promises, and they are the possession of all believing people. Galatians 3, verse 14, and Galatians, verse 16, locate them in Christ. And then in verse 29 of chapter 3, the Apostle writes, “And if you belong to Christ then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” So we are children of Abraham, and we possess the promises that God has promised to Abraham. Other passages that bear on it are Hebrews chapter 3, or Hebrews chapter 2, verse 5 through verse 18, where we have reference to the seed of Abraham as that body for whom Christ died.

Now, one other element of continuity that we might mention is that both of these entities, Israel and the church, form part of the one overall purpose of God that deals with the nations. In other words, there's one overall purpose of God in which God deals with the Gentiles and Israel; and that is the one purpose of God concerning the nations. Romans chapter 11, verse 28 through verse 32, details that and concludes with the statement that God has arranged things in the divine plan of ages in such a way that he might have mercy upon all.

Now, it's evident that when he says “all” he doesn't mean every single individual. Not everyone without exception but everyone without distinction. That is, both Israel and the Gentiles are included within the program of God. So both entities, Israel and the

church, form part of the one overall purpose of God. At one point, Israel is predominant. The Gentiles are minority. At another point, the Gentiles are in the majority and Israel is a remnant. At still a later point, as we shall see, the nation Israel shall again be saved as a nation. And as a result of that, there will be worldwide blessing of the Gentiles and the resultant glorification of the Lord God as the one who's had mercy upon all, both Jews and Gentiles.

So you can see, there's a lot of continuity between Israel and the church. In fact, you would know that if you just reflected upon how the New Testament writers used the Old Testament. When they write about the blessings of the church, they almost inevitably go back to the Old Testament promises and say those Old Testament promises are being fulfilled to the members of the Body of Christ today. So one can see that in the way they use the Old Testament Scriptures. They don't say, like so many people say, “The Old Testament has been fulfilled and is no longer something to which we should pay much attention.” That's very common in some particular parts of professing Christendom today, for people to say, “Well, the Old Testament doesn't really have much application to us and we can safely dispense with it.” But that is not the way, of course, that the apostles regard the Old Testament. In fact, they regard the Old Testament as a living vital book, which is still unfulfilled, so far as its complete fulfillment is concerned.

But, now, let's think about discontinuity. Among the elements of discontinuity, between the church and Israel, there are these, to my mind: First of all, there does take place a change in the national character of the people of God, as the history of the church unfolds. As one reads the New Testament, the Book of Acts and then the epistles, it's quite evident, it seems to me, that the national character of the people of God changes. When the church begins, the church is made up of almost entirely Israelites. It's a Jewish church in the beginning on the Day of Pentecost when the church is formed into the unity of the one body with Christ the head; all members indwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit. At that particular point, the church is largely Jewish. It's a Jewish church. But as

you read the Book of Acts and as history unfolds, you can see that the nation has turned away from the Lord, as reflected in the crucifixion. It becomes even more evident in the Book of Acts. God lays his hand upon the Apostle Paul, calls him as the apostle of the Gentiles, and the Apostle goes into synagogue after synagogue, preaches the Gospel, is rejected, and he turns to the Gentiles. That's the pattern of the Book of Acts; that's the historical pattern. And so the Book of Acts ends that way, with the ministry going to the Gentiles. And after the apostle has been ministering for some time, it's evident that the members of this body, now, while beginning as a Jewish body, largely, are now largely Gentiles. Because in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, he will refer to the Jewish believers as a remnant, according to the election of grace. So an historical change has taken place in the church, insofar as their national origin is concerned.

Israel was the nucleus of the church. It's become the remnant within it. The fullness of the Gentiles, by Israel's falling away, becomes the goal of the present work of the Holy Spirit. And as Paul will say in Romans 11, “Until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, we may not expect anything unusual to happen. But when the fullness of the Gentiles comes, the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, we should then expect all Israel to be saved.” In other words, there will be a turning, something similar to that which has already taken place.

The mass of Israel has been excised from the olive tree, but in the future, the mass of Israel will be re-grafted to the olive tree. Paul states that again in Romans 11. So that's one of the elements of discontinuity to keep in mind.

A second element: There's a change in the administration of the Kingdom of God. Remember, the Lord Jesus told a little parable, near the end of his ministry when it was evident that Israel as a nation had rejected his ministry. In Matthew 21 in verse 43, the Lord Jesus in this parable of the vineyard and the tenants says, “For this cause I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation producing its fruits.” So the administration of the kingdom is taken from the nation Israel and is given

to a nation giving forth the fruits thereof. Mark, I think, when he records this says simply that the kingdom shall be given to others. But it's clear from this that the administration of the kingdom, which belonged to the nation Israel, has now been taken from them because of the disobedience of the nation as a whole and handed over to the church of Jesus Christ. And so that's why we read in the apostle's language in 1 Timothy chapter 3, and in other places, similar types of things, that it is the responsibility of the church to guard the truth, to be the pillar and ground of the truth of God in the present time. Israel's privileges then are given to Gentiles until their restoration. Matthew 21:43. Romans 11, again, expresses this as well. One finds it, I think, also, referred to, although not as precisely, in many passages in the Old Testament but particularly Hosea chapters 1, 2, and 3.

A third thing: there has taken place a change in the relation of Israel to the Gentiles. In other words, within the people of God, there have been some significant changes that have taken place. Let me give you just one simple illustration. Israel was given the Law of Moses; now, the Law of Moses has been done away with. The church, the people of God, are no longer under the Law of Moses. In the Old Testament, if a man became a believer in Christ, he would unite with the nation Israel. That is no longer a necessary thing. The mental wall of partition, as Paul states in Ephesians 2, has been broken down and, therefore, and the Book of Acts records how this is spelled out in history, therefore, while a believing Gentile may enter the church of Jesus Christ on the same basis, in the same way, that a member of the nation Israel enters the church through faith in the Messiah who has come and is to come. The two national entities, Israel and the Gentiles, share equally in the promises, a fact not clearly seen in the Old Testament. That is the thing that Paul calls a mystery; the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the body, the church. It's not that the church is a mystery; it's the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church that is the mystery. That's the secret that the apostle talks about when he uses the term “mystery.” Passages like Colossians chapter 1, verse 24

through verse 29. Ephesians chapter 3, verse 5 and 6. Romans chapter 16, verse 25 and verse 26 or verse 27, 25 through 27, I think spell out some of the details of this.

One final element of discontinuity: A change has taken place in the divine ordinances. In the Old Testament, when a person united or was born as an Israelite, a male, in order to signify that he belonged to the covenant people of God, his parents had him circumcised on the eighth day of his life. Circumcision became the sign of membership in the Abrahamic covenant. That was the covenantal sign. Now, Paul points out that it was not a saving sign, but it was a sign. It signified that there was such a thing as the Abrahamic covenant, and that that family was objectively believing that those promises would ultimately be fulfilled.

Now, in the present day, the circumcision has been replaced as an ordinance by water baptism and, also, the observance of the Lord's Supper. There were certain sacrifices that were observed by the children of Israel in the Old Testament; some of them had more resemblances to the Lord's Supper, like the peace offering and the particular requirements that were set forth in connection with the peace offering, but nothing really similar to this except, perhaps, the Passover supper. But now, we observe the Lord's Supper and we observe water baptism. So a change in the divine ordinances has also taken place.

I think, also, we can add one final note of discontinuity, and this is largely, again, because of the progress of divine revelation. There is a change in the individual experience of salvation. The believer today enjoys an access to God that believers in the Old Testament did not enjoy. For example, in the observance of the Jewish cultus, it was the high priest alone who had the privilege of entering into the holy of holies. And only he could enter on one day out of the year, the Day of Atonement. That very fact signified to the people that the work of redemption is not yet completed. Now, we don't suggest by this that individuals could not live a life of faith and a very fruitful life of faith, because it's evident that they do. And, furthermore, the New Testament authors used these men as

illustrations of men who lived by faith. Abraham and others, particularly, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the 11th chapter, are set forth as illustrations of men who lived by faith. But, I think, if you read the Old Testament you will see that the kind of life that they lived, while a life of faith, doesn't not reach the heights of the New Testament believing man.

How many wives did David have? Well, let me tell you, we don't know how many wives David had. But, you can remember Bathsheba, maybe you can remember Michal and, yes, and Abigail and do you know that actually the text of Scripture says that he had other wives. You know, he has a long list of wives. The kind of life the Old Testament believers lived was not the kind of life set out for us in the New Testament. But I wouldn't want to use that as a final comparison between the two because I don't even mention Solomon. But, David, of course, is said to be a man after the Lord's own heart; so one can see that the education of the Law of Moses is still applicable for even the leaders in the nation Israel. David's the man who gave us those magnificent Psalms. But in his private life, his private life is quite a bit different from what we would say are New Testament standards.

So the New Testament believers today have access to God that believers in the Old Testament did not have. They have personal and permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which was not available to anyone in Old Testament times in the children of Israel. Listen to what the Apostle John writes in John chapter 7, verse 37 through verse 39, just to take one of the texts of importance.

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any one thirsts, let him come to me, and let him drink. The one who believes in me, as the scripture hath said, rivers of living water shall flow from his belly.”

Now, John adds an interpretive word.

“Now, this he said concerning the Spirit, which they were about to receive who had believed in him: for the Spirit was not yet; because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

Now, of course, he didn't mean that the Spirit wasn't in existence, because it's evident from what John has written and what others have written that the Spirit was in existence; but he was not yet in the sense as this book unfolds as the permanent possession of all believers because that awaits the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. That, in itself, shows us that there is a discontinuity between the spiritual blessings of saints who lived in Old Testament times and those who live in New Testament times.

The very idea of union with Christ becomes the characteristic term of the New Testament, which could be consummated only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which was promised by our Lord in His earthly ministry. So there are ways in which the New Testament church shares things with Old Testament Israel, and there are things that are true of the New Testament church that go beyond the spiritual blessings of the believers in the nation of Israel before the time of our Lord's death. So there is continuity and discontinuity.

Anytime that we overstress these two things, and it's not easy to know precisely where to draw the lines, but anytime that we overstress them, we, I think, go contrary to the balance of the word of God. There are people who conceive of the church as an absolutely new thing, which began on the Day of Pentecost, new in its entire sense. In that sense, I think, it's obvious, that's wrong. But there were certain things that were new; new at the cross, new on Pentecost.

On the other hand, there are those who say that there's really nothing new. I have a friend with whom I've argued for about five years. He insists that the saints of the Old Testament had every blessing that the New Testament believers have. We've argued this so many times, he knows my arguments and I know his. And he knows I'm wrong and I know he's wrong. [Laughter] But we go through this all the time and at the

judgment seat of Christ, when we get to heaven, the Lord will let us know who was right and who was wrong. I'm confident; but, unfortunately, he's confident, too. So anyway, you can err both ways. After all, we are students of the word of God. We don't understand it perfectly. At least, I don't. Maybe some of you do, but I don't.

Now, there's one last thing and I hope you will remember that what I'm trying to do is to set forth what dispensationalists have tried to set forth. Dispensationalists, in my opinion, have not paid enough attention to the continuity that exists between the Old Testament believers and the New Testament believers. And many of them have often suggested that the church is an entirely new thing. And, in fact, some have even gone so far as to make the church, as I mentioned last time, begin not on the Day of Pentecost, but actually with the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, whom I revere, and look forward to being with when we get to heaven, I loved Dr. Chafer, still love him, he was a man of faith. But,= he tended in that direction. And, in fact, at times said things that could only be understood if one understood that particular point. And what is interesting about it is that today, the people that we call ultra-dispensationalists appeal to Dr. Chafer for support of their doctrines. That's a rather disheartening to some who like Dr. Chafer and don't think he absolutely went as far as they would like to make it go.

Now, let me talk just a little bit about the departure of the church. There's a great deal of confusion and a great deal of complexity, surrounding the rapture of the church. As you know, most believers, down through the centuries have believed that there are two comings of our Lord. A coming at his first coming, when he accomplished his work on Calvary's Cross; the incarnation, and then his death, burial and resurrection, his first coming. His second coming, when he comes to the earth in order to judge the enemies of the divine program and establish his kingdom upon the earth. About a hundred and fifty years ago, a body of individuals, not simply identified with J. N. Darby, but a body of individuals began to propagate the doctrine of a pre-tribulational rapture. That is that

there would be a two-phase coming of the Second Coming. And so there would be a coming preceding the tribulation period or what we would call the seventieth week of Israel according to Daniel chapter 9, that our Lord would come and catch up the believing church members, to meet him in the air, at that point. And then, approximately seven years later, at the conclusion of the great judgment set out in the Book of Revelation, 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter and some other passages, the Olivet Discourse, as well, he would come to the earth with his believers and establish his kingdom.

One of the difficulties of this particular doctrine and of this particular matter is that everything seems to hinge upon inferences. But it's a very, very confusing and a very complex question. And, obviously, in fifteen minutes, it cannot be handled.

I'm reminded of something said by a child when faced with a problem too difficult to handle. She was in a classroom and she had been given some lesson, some teaching on airplanes for the first time, and so the teacher had asked them to comment. And they wrote a lot of answers in response to the teacher's request. And one young girl wrote, "Correct my being wrong, but tell me: true or false. As an airplane is flying, does the high pressure air sweep over the plane's wing, or under it? I wracked my brain trying to think which." [Laughter]

Well, I think that when one considers some of the biblical doctrines, one gets the same kind of impression. "I wracked my brain trying to decide which of these doctrines is really the biblical doctrine." There are actually three well-known views concerning the rapture. There is the pre-tribulational rapture that I just mentioned. There is a post-tribulational rapture viewpoint, which I just mentioned. Both of these, incidentally, are premillennialists. They believe in a kingdom of God upon the earth but they differ in the relationship of the tribulation period to the coming of our Lord. And then there is a view held by some very good men that our Lord is going to come in the middle, approximately, of the seven year period of time.

There is a very good book, which, I think, expresses some of the issues that face a student, very plainly and quite well, just issued a few months back by Zondervan. And it is written by three of the professors at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: Douglas Mouw, who argues for a post-tribulational rapture. He's one of the professors of the New Testament. Paul Feinberg, son of Dr. Charles Feinberg, who argues for a pre-tribulational viewpoint. And Dr. Gleason Archer, professor of Old Testament. Dr. Feinberg is one of the professors of Systematic Theology. And, Dr. Gleason Archer, professor of Old Testament, who argues for a midtribulational viewpoint. And, it's called something like, “Rapture: pre, post, or mid.” And, I heard, not only have I read the book, but I heard the lectures that were first given in a meeting in Chicago for ministers. And what is nice about the book is that each presents his viewpoint and then is critiqued by the other two individuals. So I suggest you get it and read it. And you will maybe be able to make up your mind or maybe not. But, I think, you'll see, it's not an easy question. So I'm just, in the few moments, going to present some of the arguments pro and con for a pre-tribulational rapture and then a post-tribulational rapture; or, vice versa. I'll do the post first and then the pre. And, in that way, you will have some idea of the problems that exist.

But, now, for our purposes; just remember this; that almost without exception, dispensationalists have opted for a pre-tribulational rapture. One can find a few who say, “I am a dispensationalist, but I believe in a post-tribulational rapture.” It's conceivable that such a position could be maintained, providing you are free to define your own terms. But, generally speaking, ninety-eight percent of those who say, “I am a pre-tribulational rapturist,” will also say, “I lean to dispensational theology.” And, I think, also the same is true that if a person who is a post-tribulational rapturist, almost ninety-eight percent of them will say, “I'm not a dispensationalist.” I lean more towards either his own particular brand of theology, which is a mediating brand of theology, or he acknowledges

that he is covenantal in his theology. Often, doesn't understand exactly what that means but sometimes uses the term.

So the arguments for the post-tribulational rapture. I'll just set them out very briefly. They are these, I think. First of all, those who believe in a post-tribulational rapture argue from the nature of the tribulation. Their argument, simply stated, is something like this. The Old Testament's clear and specific references to the tribulation indicate that there will be believers upon the earth at that time. They will acknowledge that there is no instance of the wrath of God afflicting the saints. In fact, there are indications that the saints are exempted from the wrath of God, during that period of time. But there is much evidence that the saints will suffer persecution and affliction during that period of time. So from the nature of the tribulation itself, they argue the nature of the tribulation does not demand that one be exempt from presence on the earth during that time.

Another argument, this one we could call the argument from specific passages, turning to some of the specific passages of the New Testament, post-tribulationalists like to point out that the New Testament passages which describe the tribulation and describe the future, do not contain any reference to a pre-tribulational rapture. For example, in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 51 and 52, there it is stated that the rapture of the church takes place, and all can agree with regard to that. But if one examines carefully that passage, in exegetical detail, he will discover this rather significant fact. That the apostle in verse 54, states, “Now, when this corruptible shall put on incorruptibility, and this mortal shall put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the word that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. Where O death, is thy victory? And where, O death, is thy sting?” And, if he will examine that, he will discover that that's a citation from the Old Testament.

And, further, it's a citation from passages which clearly in the context do not have to do with a pretrib rapture, but have to do with our Lord's coming to the earth. And so

the apostle takes texts that are in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 25, and Hosea chapter 14, apply to our Lord's coming to the earth. And he links them with the things that happen here in 1 Corinthians 15:50 and 51. Now, that's not a bad argument at all. In fact, that's a very good argument.

Another argument that is often used is an argument from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 13 through verse 18. I think all will grant that 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, 13 through 18, doesn't specifically answer the question of the time of the rapture. It speaks about a rapture; but if one will simply look at this passage and then read the parallel passage in the Olivette Discourse; he will see that the same things are mentioned; angels, clouds, trumpet, the gathering of the people of God. And, therefore, by these rather numerous parallels, since it's evident from the Olivette Discourse, that Jesus is talking about the coming of our Lord to the earth, it would be natural to assume that the apostle, using the same language, would be speaking about the same event. And, furthermore, even the term “to meet” is a term that generally means to go out to meet someone and to come back to the same place from which you have come. And so that would suggest that the saints meet the Lord and come to the earth, rather than are with the Lord in heaven for the period of approximately seven years.

Turning to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 in verse 1 and verse 2; here believers are given rest in the first chapter at the revelation of the Lord. Well, according to the view that the church is caught up before the tribulation begins, they should have been given rest long before then. But Paul links the rest with the revelation of our Lord. But further I wanted to turn to chapter 2. In chapter 2, he says, “Now we beseech you, brethren, on behalf of the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gather together to him, that you be not quickly shaken in mind,” and so on. And then in verse 8, speaking plainly of the Second Advent time, he says, “And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall destroy with the breath of his mouth, and shall bring to naught by the appearance of his coming,” or presence. The same term *parousia* that is found in verse 1, in behalf of

the coming of our Lord is said in verse 8, to be the time of the Second Advent. So, again, that text would seem to suggest that the time of the coming and the time of the gathering together is the time when our Lord comes to the earth. Further, the same kind of argument is used with reference to the Apocalypse. We don't have time to turn to the Book of Revelation but, again, the same parallels are found in the description of the coming of our Lord that are found in these chapters, with the Olivette Discourse. So you can see, it's not an open-and-shut case. It's a matter of the exegesis of the passages of the word of God that bear on it; and it's not all that easy.

You might be interested to know that I had a telephone call, these fellows from Dallas Seminary, they won't mind, this is truth so they won't be upset, but I had a telephone call from an individual who talked with one of the faculty members, officially, just a couple of days ago. And the faculty member was saying that in the light of the fact that this young man, he was thinking about coming to study at Dallas, in the light of the fact that he couldn't affirm a pre-tribulational rapture, then the faculty member said to him, “Well, we would find it very difficult to accept you. In fact, couldn't unless you came to that as your conviction.” And, this young man went on to say, well, he really found it very difficult because he just didn't think at this stage of his study he could find it in the Scriptures. Then the faculty member said, “Well, I'll be happy to let you know that there are a number of us, on the faculty, who also believe that. But, as long as we're here, we are required to say that you must believe that.” And so, that's the way he presented it to him. I pass it on, and I won't tell you who the faculty member is, or anything like that, but you can see that there are people, right within the bastion of that particular viewpoint who are not convinced at all that that is the biblical teaching.

Now, for the other view, the pretrib rapture. When a man wants to defend the pre-tribulational rapture, he generally will do something like this. He will say that the Scriptures promise us exemption from wrath, divine wrath. He has not appointed us to wrath. First Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 9, but for the obtaining of salvation through

our Lord. Then he will generally say this, “If you will read the Book of Revelation, from chapter 4 through chapter 19, and see those great and massive worldwide judgments that will be poured out from heaven, in which, literally, millions of people will be destroyed, and hardly anyone could help from being affected in some way.” He will say, “It’s inconceivable that a person could go through the tribulation and be kept from the wrath of God.” And one must admit that it does seem a very difficult thing for a person to go through all of those judgments and not be touched by them.

As I pointed out a moment ago, it’s the position of the post-tribulation rapturists that God will deliver the saints from the wrath of God, but they’ll not be delivered from the persecution that will be part of that tribulation period. So the statement that we are not appointed unto wrath, in the one case, by the post-tribulationists, mean they are not appointed to the wrath of God, but they are appointed to suffer because of their testimony and through persecution during that period of time.

There is another argument from the Book of Revelation that I’ll set out for you very briefly; and I think I can do it fairly well, in just about three minutes. It’s a rather good argument. Have you ever looked at use of the term “church” in the Book of Revelation? Well, if you were to graph it, you would find something like this. The first three chapters, the term church occurs quite frequently. Suddenly, at chapter 4, through chapter 21, no occurrence of the term church is found. Finally, in chapter 22, in about verse 16 or so, the term church is found, and it’s found in this reference. It’s found, “I, Jesus, sent my messenger to testify to you these things, concerning the churches.” In other words, it’s a statement, since the revelation is now over in which the angel is saying, “I have been sent to give you this revelation for the churches,” but nothing is stated about the church being upon the earth during this time of this great period of judgment. From chapter 4 through chapter 19 is the great period of tribulation judgments, but the church, the term “church” is absent from the descriptions that John gives of that period of time. Furthermore, you may remember, that the characteristic address to the churches

that our Lord gives in chapters 2 and 3, concludes with something like, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” In other words, the term “church” is found, mentioned, after every one of those letters in that little formula.

But, now in chapter 13, in the midst of the tribulational period, in the descriptions of it, John writes, “If anyone has an ear, let him hear.” But the expression, “Let him hear with that Spirit saith to the churches,” is omitted. That doesn’t prove anything, but that would be harmonious with the fact that the church would not be upon the earth at that time.

Furthermore, in Revelation chapter 3 in verse 10, there occurs a highly debatable text, which I, of course, cannot deal with now. Just simply say that some feel that this is a promise of deliverance from the tribulation. Listen to the word given to the Philadelphian church by the Lord Jesus. “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole inhabited earth, to try the ones who dwell upon the earth.” That text has been vigorously and heavily debated and at least one could say this; there’s no consensus of viewpoint concerning what it teaches.

There’s one feature, concerning that other argument that I perhaps should mention, to show you the nature of the way these things have been argued. When the argument is made that the term “church” does not appear in the Book of Revelation, from chapter 4 through chapter 19, when the tribulation is being described upon the earth, a good friend of mine, Robert Gundry, replying to that criticism has said, “It’s true, the term church is not found in the descriptions of the things that are happening on the earth.” In other words, John never says, nor does the angel in his revelation say, the church is on the earth during that time. But Professor Gundry is a very keen person, very smart and intelligent man and a Christian, and he’s, by the way, been in Believers Chapel in our meetings here, the last time the Evangelical Theological Society was here, he attended our morning service.

Professor Gundry makes the point, “But for my friends, the church is not mentioned as being in heaven, either.” And so I have a little argument for Bob. We are very, as I say, very good friends and I said, “Yes, you’re right. It’s not. And that’s a good reply. It’s a clever reply. But I would like to remind you that those chapters are not intended to describe what’s happening in heaven. Those chapters are intended to describe what happens on earth.”

Now, I haven’t heard his reply to it. He’s probably got a very intelligent reply to that but, at any rate, our time is up. We’ll have to stop at this point. In fact, I probably have defeated the tape tonight, Roy. I’m sorry.

Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word. We thank Thee for this time together. And we pray as we continue our study to learn more of the divine purpose that Thou wilt continue to give us enlightenment.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.