

# Two Views of Old Testament Fulfillment

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There are two major frameworks of interpretation regarding the fulfillment of the Old Testament law and kingdom prophecies. There can be many variations within each system and to some degree there can be combinations of pieces from each system's interpretation.

## 1. Premillennial Dispensationalism

- a. The Mosaic law is not continued. The Old Covenant Mosaic law has been fulfilled by Christ and is not applicable to the New Covenant believer in the same Old-Covenant form.
  - i. The Old Covenant law is an indivisible unit that has been fulfilled by Christ. The eternal moral law of God that applies to the Christian is the law of Christ administered through the New Covenant versus the law of Moses as administered through the Old Covenant to Israel (Jn 1:17; Gal 6:2).<sup>1</sup>
- b. The Kingdom prophecies are fulfilled in three periods. Kingdom prophecies in Old Testament (OT) are fulfilled in three successive ages: 1) this current church age, 2) the millennial reign of Christ on earth, and 3) the new heavens and new earth
  - i. Some partially fulfilled by the church (e.g., the new covenant)
  - ii. Many fulfilled in an earthly Jewish Millennium after Christ's coming<sup>2</sup>
  - iii. Some fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth
- c. Old Testament prophecies are to be interpreted literally. A literal interpretation takes verses to mean what they say on their face as they would have been normally understood by the original writers and readers--otherwise verses have no meaning in the specifics (e.g., Eze 40-48) or can be subjectively interpreted to mean most anything. Furthermore, the truthfulness of God to Israel is called into question if their scriptures mean something completely different. A consistent literal interpretation of the OT points forward to a glorious, earthly messianic rule with temple worship and unsaved heathen under the rule of Messiah. The apostles' application of OT prophecies that sometimes expands and adds to their literal natural meaning, does not negate their literal fulfillment. Luke 1:31-33, Matt 19:28, Acts 1:6-8, Romans 11, and Rev 20 are New Testament (NT) verses that together corroborate the expectation of a future earthly kingdom. More New Testament corroboration is not needed because of the prophecies' clear and repeated mention in the OT scriptures which are equally authoritative.
- d. The church is new and doesn't erase functional distinctions of Jews and Gentiles within it. The church is a new man making both Jew and Gentile one in Christ (Eph 2:15) through Spirit baptism which began in the New Testament era (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5; 1Cor 12:13). Gentiles have become partakers of the Jewish promises through faith but there can be a functional difference of saved Jews and saved Gentiles in the body of Christ (just as male and female functional distinctions remain in the oneness of Christ [Gal 3:28; Acts 15:19,23]). The eschatological salvation of Israel described in Romans 11, being based on the irrevocable promises of God (Romans 11:25-29), guarantees the fulfillment of *all* the unconditional, irrevocable promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenant with the nation of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

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### 2. Covenant Amillennialism

- a. The Mosaic law is continued. The ten commandments (i.e., the Decalogue) are still in force in the New Covenant
  - i. The Old Covenant law can be divided into three pieces: civil, ceremonial, and moral. The civil and ceremonial laws have been fulfilled and abolished in Christ but the ten commandments (i.e., the Decalogue) represents the eternal moral law binding on all mankind for all ages (Matt 5:17-19; James 2:28; Eph 6:2-3). The same law written on stones in the Old Covenant is now written on the heart (Heb 8:10).
  
- b. The Kingdom prophecies are fulfilled in two periods. Kingdom prophecies in the Old Testament are fulfilled in two successive ages: this church age and the new-heavens-and-new-earth age to come
  - i. Many already fulfilled literally (e.g. land promise Josh 21:43)
  - ii. Many completely fulfilled by the church (in a non-literal, spiritual, and non-Jewish way)<sup>4</sup>
  - iii. Some conditional on Israel's obedience and was forfeited by their continued disobedience<sup>5</sup>
  - iv. Some fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth
  
- c. The New Testament often reinterprets the Old Testament in a non-literal manner. A non-literal interpretation of many OT prophecies is necessary due to their reference by New Testament apostles (e.g., The temple is now Christ [Jn 2:19] and the Church [1Cor 3:17; 1Tim 3:15]; Israel is now Christ [Gal 3:16] and the Church<sup>4</sup>). A future literal fulfillment would subvert the progressive advancement of redemption, reverting back to the inferior shadows of the Old Covenant (e.g. priests and animal sacrifices) which have already been fulfilled in Christ and the church (Heb 7:12; 8:13; 10:1-10, 18). Understanding the typological nature of the Old Covenant, the apostles gave many OT concepts a different meaning than their Old Covenant meaning.<sup>6</sup> The OT prophets did not clearly see their true spiritual meaning as did the apostles (Luke 24:45; 1Peter 1:9-12; 2Cor 3:14-16).
  
- d. The church is the saved of all ages and erases all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles within it. The church is the saved of all ages and thus there has always been only one people of God. Unsaved ethnic Israel's promises are either already fulfilled in the past, forfeited due to unbelief, to be fulfilled in the new heavens and earth, or fulfilled through the church without a Jew-Gentile distinction (Gal 3:28; Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:10-11). Israel's salvation in Romans 11 simply speaks of them becoming Christians; nothing is mentioned of a Jewish geo-political kingdom. The kingdom has been permanently taken away from Israel and given to the church (Matt 8:11-12; 21:43; Gal 6:16). The New Testament leaves no room for a millennial age after the second coming but teaches the resurrection and judgment of all believers and unbelievers and the burning up of the earth at Christ's coming at the last day.<sup>7</sup>

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1. Dispensationalists view the Mosaic law as indivisible (James 2:10; Gal 3:10) and is an integral part of the Old Covenant which has been replaced by the New Covenant (Heb 7:18 Disannulled; Gal 3:19-26 No longer needed; Heb 8:13 Decaying and ready to vanish; Heb 7:11-12 Changed law necessitated by changed priesthood (Levi to Melchizedek); Heb 2:15 Abolished; Col 2:14 Blotted out; Matt 5:17 Fulfilled; Rom 6:14; 7:4 Not under law, but grace instead; Rom 10:14 Christ the end of the law; 2Cor 3:7-13; Done away, abolished, even that on tables of stone; Acts 15:5,19, 24, 28; 21:24-25 Gentile believers not to keep it; Gal 3:2-3 Neither justified nor sanctified by it; Rom 14:5-6; Gal 4:9-11; Col 2:13-17). Sabbath keeping, for example, is not a new covenant command to Christians (Col 2:16; 2Cor 3:6-14; Rom 14:5-6). The seventh day sabbath rest was a sign to Israel that served as a type of the Christ-fulfilled rest of salvation that Christians enjoy (Ex 31:13, 17; Heb 4:1-10).

2. Dispensationalists understand Revelation 20:1-6 to mean an earthly 1000-year period to follow the second coming of Christ. This millennial period when the saints reign with Christ is deemed to be the period when many unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled (Gen 13:15; Isa 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:6-9; 65:17-25; Micah 4:1-5; Jer 30:9; Eze 34:23-24; 36-39; Hosea 3:5; Zec 12-14). Without this millennium spoken of in Revelation 20:1-6, there is no place for many of the kingdom promises to be fulfilled literally (e.g., Isa 2:2-4; 65:17-25; Micah 4:1-4; Zec 12-14; Eze 40-48). While not all people on earth are saved during this period, Satan is bound and Christ rules the unsaved with a rod of iron. Israel will be restored as the ruling nation under Christ who will reign from His throne in Jerusalem (Obad 12-21; Isa 2:3; 24:23; 33:17). Hence dispensationalists believe in a future tribulation period followed by Christ's coming, followed by a thousand year reign (the Jewish kingdom is restored) with Israel leading the nations (Deut 15:6; 28:1, 13; Isa 14:1-2; 41:8-16; 49:15,16,22,23; 60:1-3,12; 61:6-7; Ezek 40-48, etc). Although the Old Covenant has been abolished forever, in the millennium, according to scripture, some of the rituals of the Old Covenant will be reinstated, including animal sacrifices (Ezek 43:13-27) and circumcision (Ezek 44:9). Evidently these sacrifices will serve as memorials, looking back to Christ's all-sufficient completed sacrifice.

3. Dispensationalists believe God made the nation of Israel unconditional, unilateral promises in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants (Abrahamic covenant: Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-16; 15:8-21; 28:10-15; Gal 3:17; Eze 16:60-63; Deut 7:6-9; Psalm 89:1-3, 30-37; Rom 11:26-29; Davidic covenant: 2Sam 7:12-17; 23:5; Psalm 72; Psalm 89; New Covenant: Jer 31: 31-37; Eze 36:24-38; Zech 12:10).

4. Amillennialists believe many Old Testament kingdom prophecies are fulfilled in the church (the new covenant: Jer 31:31 with Heb 8:17-13; Davidic kingdom: Acts 2:29 with 13:32; Gentiles subdued: Rom 15:16; Exiles return to Zion: John 11:52 with Romans 9:27; peace and prosperity: John 14:27; 16:33; Eph 2:14-17; Temple worship: Heb 7:12; 10:1-10, 18; salvation and restoration: Rom 11:25-26; Everlasting duration: 2Cor 4:18; Heb 5:9).

5. Amillennialists may view many of God's promises made to Israel in the Old Testament to be *conditional* (Ex 19:5-6; Num 14:30-34; Deut 28:13-25, 45-46, 68; Jer 18:9-10; 1Sam 2:30). Even when the condition is not repeated in every promise, the condition of obedience is to be understood in light of repeated previous mention (e.g., Jonah 3:4).

6. Amillennialists and Covenant theologians believe the apostles gave many OT concepts, particularly regarding the messianic kingdom, a different meaning than their Old Covenant meaning (for example, the Abrahamic land promise is universalized to the whole world [Rom 4:13]: the children of Abraham are now defined as all believers in Christ [Matt 3:9; Jn 8:39-40; Rom 2:28-29; 9:6; Gal 3:7-9,16]; the heavenly Jerusalem and the mountain of the Lord is the church [Gal 4:26; Heb 12:18-24]; David's throne has been assumed by Christ in his resurrection and ascension [Acts 2:30-36]; true Israel is Christ (Gal 3:16); the true temple is Christ [Jn 2:19]; the water from Ezekiel's temple is Christ who gives living water [Ezek 47:1-12 ; Jn 4:10-14]; the new temple is the church [1Cor 3:17; 1Tim 3:15]).

7. Amillennialists believe the New Testament precludes the interpretation of an intermediate 1000-year period between Christ's second coming and the final judgment. The final judgment and resurrection and burning renovation of the earth occurs at Christ's coming (2Peter 3:10-13; 1Cor 15:22-26; 2Thes 1:7-10; Matt 25:31-46). Most verses on the resurrection would suggest that both the just and unjust are raised at the same time--at the last day (Dan 12:1-4; Jn 5:29; 6:39-44, 54; Act 24:15; Rev 11:18).