

## Israel and the Church

### The Core Divergence Between Dispensationalism and Historic Christianity

#### 1 What Dispensationalism Proposes

Classic dispensationalism teaches:

- God has two distinct covenant peoples:
  - **Israel** (earthly promises, land, national kingdom)
  - **The Church** (heavenly promises, spiritual blessings)

These two are not the same people under different administrations.

They are distinct programs.

#### Key Assertions:

1. The Old Testament promises to ethnic Israel must be fulfilled literally.
2. The Church does not replace Israel.
3. The Church is a “parenthesis” in God’s redemptive timeline.
4. After the Church is raptured, God resumes His national program with Israel.
5. Revelation 4–19 primarily concerns Israel during the tribulation.
6. The 144,000 are literal Jewish believers from the twelve tribes.
7. The millennium involves restored national Israel in the land.

So in this system:

- The Church age ends at the rapture.
- The tribulation is “Daniel’s 70th week” for Israel.
- Revelation after chapter 3 shifts focus away from the Church.

This framework arose in the 19th century through John Nelson Darby and later the Scofield Reference Bible. It is not patristic. It is modern.

That doesn't automatically make it wrong — but historically, it is new.

## **2 The Historic (Covenantal / Redemptive-Historical) View**

Historic Christianity — including the early church, Reformers, and most of church history — holds:

- There is **one people of God across redemptive history**.
- The Church is not a replacement of Israel.
- The Church is the fulfillment and expansion of Israel in Christ.

Ethnic distinction does not disappear.  
But covenant identity is unified in Christ.

### **Core Assertions:**

1. Jesus is the true Israel.
2. Believers (Jew and Gentile) are united into one covenant people.
3. The promises to Abraham are fulfilled in Christ and shared by all who are in Him.
4. There is no future separate redemptive program apart from Christ's completed work.
5. Revelation addresses the Church as the continuation of the people of God.

The Church does not replace Israel.

The Church is Israel fulfilled in Christ.

## **3 Where the Systems Actually Clash**

Let's get precise.

## **A. The Abrahamic Promise**

### **Dispensational View:**

- Land promises must be fulfilled literally to ethnic Israel.
- The Church does not inherit those national promises.

### **Historic View:**

- The land promise expands to the whole renewed creation.
- Abraham was promised the world (Romans 4:13).
- The inheritance becomes cosmic, not regional.

The promise grows, not shrinks.

## **B. The Nature of the People of God**

### **Dispensational View:**

- Israel = physical descendants of Abraham.
- Church = spiritual body formed at Pentecost.
- Two distinct identities maintained eternally.

### **Historic View:**

- True Israel is defined by union with Christ.
- Romans 9: “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.”
- Galatians 3: “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring.”

Ethnicity does not define covenant membership — Christ does.

## **C. Revelation 7 — The 144,000**

This is where it gets concrete.

### **Dispensational Interpretation:**

- Literal Jewish believers from each tribe.
- Converted after the rapture.
- Distinct from the Church.

### **Historic Interpretation:**

- Symbolic number (12 x 12 x 1000).
- Represents fullness of God's covenant people.
- Followed immediately by a great multitude from every nation.
- Two angles on one redeemed community.

The text lists tribes in a highly stylized and unusual way — which suggests symbolism.

## **D. The Tribulation Question**

### **Dispensationalism:**

- Tribulation = primarily Israel's experience.
- Church removed beforehand.
- God resumes Jewish national focus.

### **Historic View:**

- Tribulation characterizes the entire church age.
- Believers endure suffering until Christ returns.
- Revelation speaks directly to the Church.

This is massive pastorally.

If Revelation is not written to the Church enduring tribulation, then its warnings become secondary for most believers.

## **E. The Millennium (Previewing Chapter 20)**

Though we haven't reached it yet, this difference flows forward.

### **Dispensationalism:**

- Literal 1,000-year Jewish kingdom.
- Temple restoration.
- Distinct national role for Israel.

### **Historic Amillennial View (majority historically):**

- Millennium symbolic of Christ's present reign.
- One people of God.
- Final return and judgment are singular events.

## **4 What the Early Church Believed**

The early church:

- Expected tribulation.
- Did not teach a pre-trib rapture.
- Did not teach two eternal covenant peoples.
- Saw the Church as the fulfillment of Israel in Christ.

Even those who held premillennial views (like some early fathers) did not articulate Darby-style dispensationalism.

The strict Israel/Church separation is historically modern.

## **5 Why This Matters for Revelation 1–8**

If Israel and the Church are permanently separate:

- Revelation 4–19 is not primarily about the Church.
- The 144,000 are not us.
- The tribulation warnings are mostly about another group.

If there is one covenant people in Christ:

- Revelation speaks directly to the Church.
- The sealing in chapter 7 applies to believers now.
- The martyrs crying “How long?” are our brothers and sisters.

It shifts the relevance of the entire book.

## **6 The Deeper Theological Issue**

At the heart of this is Christology.

Is Jesus:

- The fulfillment of Israel?
- The true vine?
- The true temple?
- The true son?
- The true seed?

If so, then union with Christ determines covenant identity.

Or is Israel’s national identity still structurally distinct in God’s redemptive program?

That is the core difference.

## **7 What Both Views Agree On**

To be fair:

Both affirm:

- Future salvation of many ethnic Jews (Romans 11).
- Christ's physical return.
- Bodily resurrection.
- Final judgment.
- New heavens and new earth.

The disagreement is not about Jewish salvation.

It is about covenant structure.

## **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

### **Revelation 1–8: A Structured Teaching Commentary with Interpretive Divergence**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **What Kind of Book Is Revelation?**

##### **What We Propose**

Revelation is:

- Apocalyptic (symbolic, visionary)
- Prophetic (calling the church to faithfulness)
- Pastoral (written to real churches under pressure)

It speaks to the **entire church age**, not merely to a final seven-year period. Its visions often function as **recapitulation** — showing the same era (between Christ's resurrection and return) from multiple angles.

It culminates in a literal, visible return of Christ — but much of its imagery symbolically portrays recurring realities throughout redemptive history.

### **Alternative (Dispensational Futurist) View**

- Revelation 1–3 = Church age.
- Revelation 4 onward = future seven-year tribulation after a pre-tribulation rapture.
- Most events from chapter 6 forward are literal judgments in a short, future timeframe.
- The church is removed before wrath begins.

### **Core Divergence**

Is Revelation 6–18:

- A symbolic portrayal of the entire church age (with intensification at the end)?  
OR
- A literal, future tribulation period after the church has been removed?

That's the foundational interpretive split.

## **REVELATION 1**

### **The Glorified Christ**

### **What We Propose**

The opening vision reveals Christ in divine glory — echoing Daniel 7 and 10. This is not merely comfort. It establishes:

- Jesus reigns now.
- Jesus walks among His churches now.
- Judgment begins with the household of God.

The emphasis is present authority, not future escape.

## **Alternative View**

Dispensational interpreters largely agree on the identity of Christ here. The divergence doesn't strongly surface yet.

However, they often see:

- Chapter 1 as church-age introduction.
- The rest of the book pivoting to future Israel-centered events after chapter 3.

## **Divergence**

Minor at this point. Major divergence emerges after chapter 3.

## **REVELATION 2–3**

### **The Seven Churches**

### **What We Propose**

These letters represent:

- Real historical churches.
- A complete picture of the church in all ages (symbolized by seven).
- A warning that compromise, persecution, and lukewarmness are ongoing realities.

The promises to “the one who overcomes” point to final salvation — perseverance is essential.

The church is not promised removal from suffering, but faithfulness through it.

## **Alternative View**

Classic dispensationalism often teaches:

- The seven churches represent seven chronological eras of church history.

- After chapter 3, the church age ends.
- The church disappears from earth in chapter 4 (rapture inferred from John being “caught up”).

## **Divergence**

We see continuity:

The church remains central through the book.

They see discontinuity:

The church exits the scene in chapter 4.

## **REVELATION 4–5**

### **The Throne and the Lamb**

#### **What We Propose**

Chapter 4 shows heaven’s throne before any judgments unfold.

This establishes:

- God’s sovereignty over the entire age.
- Worship as central reality.
- History unfolds from heaven outward.

Chapter 5 shows the Lamb opening the scroll — meaning Christ’s death and resurrection authorize the unfolding of history now.

The seals represent the Lamb governing history during the present age.

#### **Alternative View**

- Chapter 4 = raptured church in heaven (represented by 24 elders).
- Chapter 5 = future tribulation judgments about to begin.
- The scroll represents the title deed to the earth, which Christ will reclaim during the tribulation.

## **Divergence**

We say:

The Lamb begins unfolding redemptive history immediately after His ascension.

They say:

The Lamb begins unfolding a future tribulation period after the church is removed.

## **REVELATION 6**

### **The Seals**

#### **What We Propose**

The Four Horsemen represent recurring realities:

- Conquest
- War
- Famine
- Death

These are not limited to one future seven-year window.

They describe the pattern of a fallen world between Christ's first and second comings.

The fifth seal (martyrs crying "How long?") fits every generation of persecuted believers.

The sixth seal (cosmic collapse imagery) uses prophetic language common in the Old Testament to describe divine judgment and world-shaking upheaval.

This seal likely portrays the final judgment from one perspective — which suggests the seals culminate at the end.

#### **Alternative View**

- The seals are literal future judgments during the tribulation.
- The four horsemen are specific future figures or events.
- The sixth seal may represent literal astronomical catastrophe.

This entire sequence happens after the rapture.

## **Divergence**

We see the seals as:

The church age escalating toward final judgment.

They see the seals as:

A literal future crisis period from which the church is absent.

## **REVELATION 7**

### **The Sealed People of God**

#### **What We Propose**

The 144,000 symbolically represent the complete people of God.

The great multitude from every nation is the same redeemed community viewed from another angle.

The sealing indicates spiritual protection — not removal from suffering.

They come “out of the great tribulation,” not around it.

This affirms:

The church passes through tribulation.

#### **Alternative View**

Common dispensational interpretation:

- 144,000 = literal ethnic Jews converted after the rapture.
- The great multitude = tribulation saints (not the church).
- The church is already in heaven.

## **Divergence**

We see one covenant people throughout.

They see:

Israel and church sharply separated.

Different groups saved in different dispensations.

## **REVELATION 8**

### **The Seventh Seal and the Trumpets**

#### **What We Propose**

The seventh seal introduces the trumpets.

The silence emphasizes gravity.

The prayers of the saints precede judgment — showing that heaven responds to the cries of the church.

The trumpets echo the Exodus plagues — partial judgments (“a third”).

This suggests:

- Restrained, covenantal judgments.
- Warning judgments within history.
- Escalation toward finality.

The repetition of similar end imagery suggests recapitulation rather than strict chronology.

#### **Alternative View**

- The trumpets are literal ecological disasters during the tribulation.
- They follow chronologically after the seals.
- These judgments are poured out after the church has been removed.

## **Divergence**

We see cyclical intensification throughout the age, climaxing at Christ's return.

They see a linear sequence of escalating catastrophes in a short future timeframe.

## **THE CENTRAL THEOLOGICAL DIVIDE**

It ultimately comes down to three questions:

### **1 Does the church endure tribulation?**

#### **Historic Orthodox View:**

Yes. The church has always endured tribulation and will continue to until Christ returns.

#### **Pre-Tribulational View:**

No. The church is removed before the great tribulation.

### **2 Are Israel and the Church permanently distinct peoples?**

#### **Historic View:**

One people of God across redemptive history, fulfilled in Christ.

#### **Dispensational View:**

Two distinct programs — Israel (earthly) and church (heavenly).

### **3 Are the seals, trumpets, and bowls chronological or recapitulative?**

#### **Historic View:**

They overlap and retell the same redemptive period from different angles.

#### **Dispensational View:**

They unfold in strict chronological order in a future seven-year period.

## **Why This Matters Pastorally**

If Revelation 6–18 is only about a future generation after the church is gone, then:

- Most of church history reads someone else's mail.
- The warnings about endurance apply mainly to others.

But if Revelation speaks to the entire church age:

- The martyrs' cry is ours.
- The call to overcome is ours.
- The shaking of nations is ours.
- The need for endurance is ours.

The book becomes immediately relevant.

## **Where We Still Agree**

It's important to say this clearly:

Both views affirm:

- A literal, visible return of Christ.
- Final judgment.
- Bodily resurrection.
- The defeat of Satan.
- The new heavens and new earth.

The disagreement is not about Christ's victory.

It is about:

- Timing
- Structure

- Identity of God's people
- And whether believers escape tribulation or endure through it.