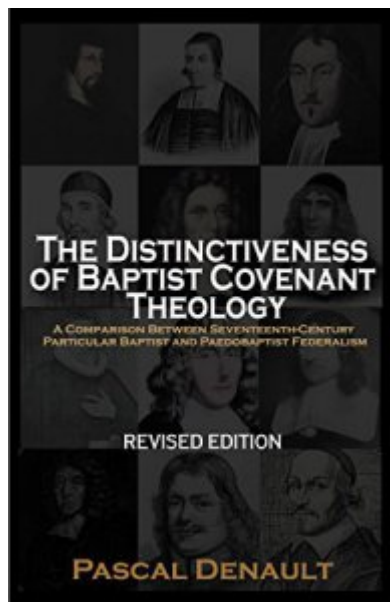


In one of the best books I've ever read, Pascal Denault compares paedobaptist covenant theology with that of the seventeenth-century Baptists. Certainly, not all twenty-first century reformed Baptists hold to the view put forth by the early Particular Baptists (although the endorsements of prominent Baptist theologians are noteworthy), but my motives for reprinting Denault at this point are primarily to show how (1) dispensationalism is an inadequate hermeneutic to compete with covenant theology, and how (2) dispensationalists have often misunderstood (or misconstrued) reformed teaching concerning Israel and the church.

In the discussion, some additional points are made which speak to dispensationalism's failure to consistently distinguish between the old and new covenants, as well as the superiority of 1689 federalism (compared to paedobaptist federalism) in handling the objections of dispensationalists and the frequently erected strawman of "replacement theology". Most of the following text was relegated to just a footnote, and yet these points are so vitally important not only to Baptist vs. paedobaptist discussions but to any interaction with dispensationalism as well:



“Let us first notice the harmony between the Westminster theology and that of the 1689. The first evidence of this harmony concerns the prelapsarian origin of the

covenant of works and the postlapsarian beginning of the covenant of grace. Let us emphasize that both groups saw only one church and one chosen people in both testaments. **Thus, there is no duality between Israel and the church as there was in dispensationalism nor is there a replacement of Israel by the church.** The church has existed since the beginning of the covenant of grace; the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament churches consisted in the extent of the nations to which the covenant of grace was announced and not in the identity of the church being different from one testament to another.[i]

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of this point in order to avoid the failure to which the dialogue between Reformed and dispensationalist theology has so often led. The dispensationalists accused the Reformed of creating a theology of replacement by giving the church Israel's place, while Israel's place had to be permanent. Actually, **historically, the Reformed did not teach that the church replaced Israel, but that the Gentiles joined believing Israel in the covenant of grace at the moment when the new covenant replaced the old covenant. It is, therefore, not the case of one people replacing another people, but the case of one covenant replacing another covenant when the promises revealed by the covenant of grace from Genesis 3:15 on were accomplished, when the old covenant ended, and when a large group made up of Jews and non-Jews entered into the new covenant.** One must refuse the opposition between Israel and the church and rather emphasize the scope of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament (primarily within Israel) and the scope of the covenant of grace in the New Testament (openly extended to inhabitants of every nation). The opposition that is found in the New Testament is between the old and new covenants and not between Israel and the church, which is rather an **artificial opposition coming from dispensationalism.**

We think the Presbyterians have a harder time trying to demonstrate that dispensationalism erroneously uses the discontinuity or opposition between the testaments since their own theology simply blurs this opposition, thereby denying, at least in the dispensationalist view, the biblical affirmations of this discontinuity (Rom. 6:14; 2 Cor. 3; John 1:17; Heb. 10:9). As for the Baptist approach, it allows for the vigorous assertion of the continuity of the covenant of grace and, consequently, the continuity of only one church in both testaments, while simultaneously affirming, in concert with the Bible and the dispensationalists, a discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

The dispensationalists, for their part, accentuated the discontinuity between the

testaments to the point of separating Israel and the church while giving a status as people of God to Israel while abolishing the old covenant (Israel's covenant). **They then find themselves in a theological impasse: on one hand, they affirm the cessation of the Old Testament system during the era of the church; on the other, they must maintain the permanent validity of this system in order to justify the continuity of the existence of Israel as God's people. This contradiction is the main ambiguity of dispensationalism: the end of the Old Testament at the same time as the maintaining of it.** Their solution consists in separating Israel from the church and temporarily putting the former aside during the time of the church while preserving its initial status. This seems to us to be an artificial construction that does not take into account the definitive abolition of the old covenant without the abolition of its promises. **These promises were accomplished, unbeknownst to the majority of the Jewish people, in Jesus Christ in the new covenant and, while they first referred to Israel, they do not exclusively concern it, but extend themselves to all nations. Only the Baptist understanding seems to bring a solution that takes into account the biblical, continuity and discontinuity.**"[ii]

[Bold text added for emphasis.]

[i] Denault, P., *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism* (rev. ed.), Solid Ground Christian Books, Vestavia Hills, AL, 2017, pp. 81–82.

[ii] Denault, ref. 6, footnote 67.

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