

In Bateman's *Three Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, professors from Dallas Theological Seminary interact with each other's views. They focus mostly on eschatological [end times] issues, but from their arguments we can discern differences in their hermeneutics [principles of interpretation].

As Bateman said, while the hermeneutical debates regarding eschatological prophecy in the middle of the last century were primarily about whether to use a literal or allegorical technique, recent debates include parties that all "alike employ a literal hermeneutic in their respective application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic" [37]. The issues now are how the New Testament authors used the Old Testament and how to integrate the teachings in the two testaments for today [37].

Non-dispensational evangelicals typically rely on the New Testament to interpret the meaning of the Old Testament. This is reasonable, considering all that Jesus and the apostles did to promote more accurate understanding of the Old Testament in their day.

The traditional dispensationalist believes the Old Testament anticipated subsequent revelation, and so it is by understanding the meaning of the Old Testament that we can discern the meaning of the New Testament [38-39]. This contrast is important both for interpreting the use of Old Testament passages in the New Testament as well as for interpreting passages in both testaments which relate to common themes. The traditional dispensationalist assumes the meaning of the Old Testament passage [what we believe the original author intended to communicate] remains stable regardless of any further revelation; such further revelation might expand our understanding, but not change the original meaning [67]. This is reasonable, considering God's revelation in the Old Testament wasn't incorrect, just the understanding of the people in Jesus' day; so if we understand what God was revealing in the Old Testament, then we can use that as the foundation to build upon for understanding what Jesus and the apostles – who based their faith on the Old Testament – were saying, not only when they used Old Testament allusions, but also when they provided new revelation.

The progressive dispensationalist believes the New Testament authors sometimes added meaning to the Old Testament revelation. Thus their technique is to use each testament to further refine understanding of the other, which is appropriate for understanding how meaning operates in the context of the entire canon [107-108]. These new meanings applied to the church in the New Testament do not negate the original meanings applied to Israel in the Old Testament [107-108]; rather, concepts from the Old Testament come together in the New Testament in a way that completes and expands what was presented in the Old Testament, preserving the Old Testament meaning but allowing for progressive revelation of expanded meaning [90].

The progressive dispensationalist believes that understanding the New Testament's use of the Old Testament requires understanding the intertestamental literature [as part of the historical context], and that understanding the Old Testament completely requires understanding the new revelation of Christ and the Holy Spirit as given in the New Testament [40-41]. Thus they use the Old Testament to inform interpretation of the New, but also use the New to inform interpretation of the Old.

The influence of the non-canonical intertestamental literature is a concern to the traditional dispensationalist, because that literature – uninspired by God – often makes false interpretations of the Old Testament. The progressive dispensationalist advocates using discretion and discernment, and notes that this literature does help inform the historical context in which Jesus and his apostles operated, and thus helps explain some of the idioms and symbols they used.

It is unfair to question whether the progressive dispensationalist is truly dispensational [as some traditional dispensationalists do], since he continues to believe in dispensations and in the distinction of the church as separate from Israel [41]. It is true, though, that the progressive dispensationalist's conclusions apparently do move toward the center of the divide between the traditional dispensationalist and the covenant theologian.

Thus, from this reading alone, one can discern two important hermeneutical distinctions. First, the question is whether the Old Testament revelation leads to understanding the New Testament revelation, or they both help interpret each other. Second, the question is whether the New Testament authors refined and elaborated on the meaning of the Old Testament authors but left that meaning stable, or the New Testament authors expanded the meaning of the Old Testament authors due to progressive revelation.