

# Prophetic Postponement

Randall Price

Prophetic postponement or apotelesmatic interpretation understands that a temporal parenthesis has occurred in the messianic program of redemption with respect to ultimate fulfillment for national Israel. This interpretation explains the New Testament revelation of two phases for the messianic advent (a first and second coming) as the result of the incorporation of judicial hardening for national Israel (Isaiah 6:3-9; Matthew 13:13-15/Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:26-27; Romans 11:8-10) into the messianic program of redemption which produced an interruption in Israel's national realization of restoration program under the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-37). This is evidenced by the observation in the Old Testament that Israel's national restoration included the two inseparable elements of spiritual regeneration to the Lord (cf. Isaiah 49:1-7; 53-55; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:14, 23) and physical restoration to the Land (cf. Isaiah 49:8; 56:1-8; Ezekiel 36:24, 28; 37:24-28). The first phase of the messianic advent accomplished the basis for spiritual regeneration (Matthew 1:21; cf. Luke 2:11), which has been experienced by a Jewish remnant (Romans 11:1-5) in token of the later national experience after the program of Gentile inclusion in the Church has been completed (Romans 11:12-15, 23, 26, 31). With the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by Israel's leadership (Matthew 23:37-38, cf. Acts 3:13-15, 17; 4:25-27), the messianic program of restoration for the Nation was postponed, necessitating a second phase of messianic advent in order to complete the spiritual and physical aspects of restoration on a national scale (Matthew 23:39; cf. Acts 1:6-7; 3:19-21; Romans 11:25-27). Understanding this concept is crucial to a proper interpretation of prophetic texts in the Old Testament, such as Daniel 9:27 in which an interruption in fulfillment occurs between the end of the first sixty-nine weeks (fulfilled historically) and the beginning of the seventieth week (fulfilled eschatologically), for explaining the reversal of blessing in the Church (as opposed to Israel) under the New Covenant (Genesis 12:3; Zechariah 8:22-23; Romans 11:17-32), and for a correct understanding of the purpose of the Second Advent with respect to the messianic program of restoration, which was part of Old Testament prophetic revelation (Acts 3:19-21).

## *The Terminology of Postponement*

The technical expression for this delay in the fulfillment of the messianic program for Israel is derived from the Greek verb *apotelo* meaning, "to bring to completion, finish." The usual sense of *telos* as "end" or "goal" may here have the more technical idea of "the consummation that comes to prophecies when they are fulfilled" (Luke 22:37). With the prefix *apo*, which basically has the connotation of "separation from something," the idea is of a delay or interruption in the completion of the prophetic program. Therefore, *apotelesmatic* interpretation recognizes that in Old Testament texts that present the messianic program as a single event, a near and far historical fulfillment is intended, separated by an indeterminate period of time. Dispensational writers have referred to this as an "intercalation" or a "gap." However, prophetic postponement better expresses this concept. *Prophetic*, because we understand a purposeful, preordained act in the divine program, and *postponement*, because it retains the original idea of an interruption in fulfillment, while supplementing it with the notion that such a delay is only temporary.

Such a parenthesis was implied in those Old Testament texts concerned with Israel's hardening (Isaiah 6:9-13; Zechariah 7:11-12), and judicial exile (Deuteronomy 4:27-30; 28:36-37, 49-50, 64-68), yet not fully revealed until the New Testament (John 12:37-40; Acts 28:25-28; Romans 11:25-26). Accordingly, this postponement in the fulfillment of Israelite history is not so much an interruption of redemption as an *extension* of predicted hardening (Romans 11:7-10). The exile, which was a punishment for national disobedience, has therefore been prolonged during the present age of the Church until the appointed time for Israel's national restoration (Acts 1:7; 3:21; Romans 11:25-27). So that none can question the infallibility of the divine promise to Israel (Romans 9:6; 11:29), *individual* Israelite redemption is presently being fulfilled *within* the Church (Romans 11:1-5). This salvation of the Remnant (a part of the "all Israel") during the present age (Romans 9:8b; 11:24, 27) testifies to the ultimate salvation of the national entity ("all Israel") in the age to come (Romans 11:26). This previously unrevealed aspect of the messianic plan (Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:3-6), declares that the promise of national Israelite redemption (Romans 11:23b), will be accomplished by Messiah in the future as certainly as individual Jewish and Gentile salvation has been effected in Messiah at present (Romans 11:12, 15, 23, 31).

### ***The Expression of Postponement***

The expression of postponement is implied in Old Testament restoration texts that are cited or alluded to in the New Testament in terms of future fulfillment. For instance, the Old Testament promised that the city of Jerusalem would be delivered from Gentile domination by messianic intervention (Zechariah 14:1-4). This is an event that has never seen fulfillment in Israelite history in the literal terms of prophetic expectation. The New Testament, however, records that the Messiah at His *first* advent promised this fulfillment at His *second* advent (Luke 21:24b-31). In this New Testament prediction of fulfillment, given in response to questions concerning the future (verse 7), Jesus teaches that the destruction of the Temple (verses 20-23), the period of Jewish Diaspora (verse 24a), wars on an international scale (verse 10), natural disasters (verse 11), persecutions (verses 12-19), and celestial and terrestrial phenomenon (verses 25-26) will all *precede* the time of deliverance (national redemption) brought by the second advent (verses 27-28). Therefore, the final redemption for Israel ("this generation," verse 32) has been postponed until these events culminate, including the removal of national Israelite hardening with the conclusion of "the times of the Gentiles" (verse 24b; cf. Romans 11:25).

When the Old Testament records that the Messiah will be born (Isaiah 9:6) and will rule on the throne of David and over his kingdom (Isaiah 9:7), it portrays *one* messianic advent. However, in Acts 3:18-21 Peter explained that the messianic advent that will establish Messiah's rule on the Davidic throne has been postponed. Messiah *was* sent to Israel (from heaven to be born on earth), according to the prophetic word (verse 18), in fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6, and in the future *will be* sent *again* to Israel (from heaven to rule on earth) in completion of the prophetic word (verses 20-21), fulfilling Isaiah 9:7. Jesus Himself explained that this would not occur until the eschatological period known as "the Regeneration" (the Millennial Kingdom), during which time "the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne" and His disciples will share in His messianic rule over "the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28).

Therefore, one must ask why a *second* coming would be necessary if all the prophetic promises to Israel were fulfilled (as preterists and historicists contend) at the first advent? It should also be noted that the apotelesmatic approach is different from the “already ... not yet” dialectic, in that the latter would see a *partial* fulfillment of the *complete* promise, while the former would see a *complete* fulfillment of *part* of the promise. Therefore, rather than interpreting Jesus as *partially* fulfilling the promise to reign on David’s throne by His *present* heavenly session as Lord over the Church (Acts 2:34-36; Hebrews 1:3; 12:2), this is postponed for a *future* earthly enthronement, which completely fulfills the literal requirements of the Old Testament context with respect to national Israel (2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 89:4; Matthew 19:28; 25:31).

### ***Qualifications for Postponement***

It is important to remember that the messianic prophecies were originally directed to national Israel, and as such, have their ultimate fulfillment *exclusively with Israel*. While the Church occupies a parenthetical *period* in the fulfillment of Israel’s destiny, it is clear from both the teaching and the tenor of the New Testament epistles that the Church has not been relegated to a parenthetical *position* by this historical consequence (cf. Ephesians 1:12; 2:6-7; 3:9-10; 5:25-27; Colossians 1:26-27; et. al.). Rather, the New Testament revelation concerning the Church gives it a distinct purpose in the messianic plan, alongside that of Israel, in the consummation of the ages to the glory of God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:23-28). It is in the Church that the Elect (Jew and Gentile) have an equal access to God (Ephesians 2:11-22), a new revelation of God’s saving grace through Israel’s Messiah, which has incorporated Gentiles as fellow heirs of the messianic blessings (Ephesians 2:3-6), including the inheritance of the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5).

It must further be recognized that the restoration promises made to national Israel require a future fulfillment *in the same manner* as the redemptive promises have found past fulfillment. As Messiah’s first advent was originally directed to national Israel (Matthew 15:24), and was accomplished literally in terms of prophetic expectation (Isaiah 53; Daniel 9:26), so Messiah’s second advent will fulfill Israelite national restoration (Acts 1:6; Romans 11:26-27; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2:3-12; Revelation 19:11-20:9). If this was to be understood otherwise (e.g., in the first advent as the historicist interpretation), why did Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:30-31; 25:31) and Peter in Acts (Acts 3:19-21) project its fulfillment into a time attendant to the Second Advent? Or, if this text was intended to find its fulfillment in A.D. 70 (the preteristic interpretation) with the greater domination of the Gentiles (Romans) over Israel, how are “the times of the Gentiles” thereby “fulfilled” (concluded), and Israel’s fortunes restored? The only way to harmonize these discrepancies is to reinterpret historic fulfillment in terms different from the Old Testament prophets or to recognize a postponement of final prophetic fulfillment.

We must further note that apotelesmatic passages, where intervals in the fulfillment of prophecies occur, are common biblical phenomena, especially in the Prophets (where the messianic restoration of Israel is addressed). The length of an interval is inconsequential to the fulfillment of the prediction, as can be seen from past historical predictions that encompassed

many centuries (e.g., the prophecy of the exodus and establishment in the Land, Genesis 15:13-16).

### ***Postponement and Chronological Continuity***

The apotelesmatic approach includes both an *extension* of Israel's exilic condition and a *postponement* of the Israel's restoration, with a *parenthetical* period incorporated to fulfill the messianic salvific promises for those (whether Jew or Gentile) who have accepted Israel's Messiah. Since Israel's hardening did not permit the promise of national repentance toward Messiah at the first advent (John 12:37-40), this will be fulfilled at the Second Advent. An objection to this concept of postponement, especially in prophetic passages where a definite measure of time or space is specified (e.g., Daniel 9:24-27), has been that in such cases the units of time or space must be understood to run *continuously* and *successively*. However, postponement does *not* affect such fulfillment of measured events. The same chronological events are fulfilled in the same temporal order as if no interruption occurred. Dispensational writers have sought to illustrate this by the imagery of a "prophetic clock". If we reckon that this clock is keeping only "Israeli time," with the "times of the Gentiles" the hands on the clock froze in position, to resume their continuous run and complete the appointed hour "when the times of the Gentiles is fulfilled." From the human perspective it would seem that the clock has stopped, and the perceived interval may appear as a failure in fulfillment. From the divine viewpoint, nothing has changed, and all is proceeding according to schedule (since the "times of the Gentiles" was always an intended part of the fulfillment). Therefore, despite the apparent delay in fulfillment, the promise to Israel has not been prevented, simply postponed.

### ***Postponement and the Prophetic Perspective***

In I Peter 1:10-12, a text, addressed predominately to Gentile exiles (cf. 1:14; 2:9-10; 4:3-4), it is explained that the prophets of Israel had received revelation concerning God's intentions to bring Messiah's gracious salvation to the Gentiles, verse 10a (e.g., Isaiah 9:1-2; 19:21-25; 42:1-2; 56:1-8). These prophets had known that Israel's Messiah, "the Servant of the Lord," was to be a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6; 59:6), and had diligently sought to discover in their prophetic writings the appointed time for the Messianic Advent (verse 10b-11a), which for them combined both the first advent ("the sufferings of Messiah," cf. Isaiah 53), and the second advent ("the glories to follow," cf. Isaiah 11:1-5), verse 11b. These prophets could not clearly discern when the Gentiles would receive mercy (in the Church Age, cf. Colossians 1:26-27), for most of the promises to this effect were connected with the time of "the glories to follow" in the Messianic Age (Isaiah 11:10; 42:6; 60:3; Malachi 1:11).

This understanding informed James' argument in Acts 15:13-19 where the prophetic text in Amos 9:11-12 is used to explain present Gentile salvation. The context of the Amos passage is the eschatological restoration of national Israel: "In that day...I will restore the captivity of My people Israel" (verses 11, 13-14). James ground's his plea for the present acceptance of Gentile believers by the Jewish Church on the prophetic principle in this passage of God's acceptance of Gentile salvation in the restored Davidic (Millennial) Kingdom which contained no proselyte requirements for Gentiles. That James' understood the interpretation of the Amos passage as eschatological, rather than applying to the present age, may be seen in the words he used to

introduce the citation: “After these things I will *return*” (verse 16). The verb Luke used here, Greek *anastrepso*, is used of an actual return, as Luke demonstrates in his prior use in Acts 5:22 of officers who physically “went back.” Thus, Luke understood that Peter interpreted the Lord’s “return” in Amos 9 as the literal bodily return of the Lord at the Second Advent (cf. Acts 1:11), which coming “after these things ...” required prophetic postponement for fulfillment.

### ***Jesus Teaching of Prophetic Postponement***

Jesus instructed His disciples concerning two phases of messianic advent (to accomplish redemption and restoration) following the preview of the Messianic Kingdom (Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:26-27) presented at Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). The appearance of Elijah with Jesus (Matthew 17:4-5; Mark 9:4-5), coupled with Jesus’ statements concerning His rising from the dead (Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9-10) had confused the disciples and provoked the question “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” (Matthew 17:10; Mark 9:11). Jesus’ reply was made with respect to the two phases when He answered: “Elijah *is coming* to restore all things (cf. Malachi 4:5); but I say to you, that Elijah *already came*, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer” (Matthew 17:11-12; Mark 9:12-13). In other words, the response to the forerunner foreshadowed the response to the Messiah, and called for the postponement of the restoration specifically promised to national Israel. To explain, just as the coming of the messianic forerunner has two phases: one as John the Baptizer (for repentance), and one as Elijah the Prophet (for restoration), so the Messiah’s coming has two phases: one as Savior (to redeem) and one as Sovereign (to reign). Just as John the Baptizer’s rejection by Israel’s leadership ended his prophetic ministry without the fulfillment of national repentance, necessitating the future coming of the messianic forerunner (Elijah) to bring this about (Malachi 4:5-6), so Jesus’ rejection by Israel’s leadership ended His messianic ministry without the fulfillment of national redemption and restoration, necessitating the future return of the Messiah for its accomplishment.

Jesus also recognized the principle of prophetic postponement in His treatment of Isaiah 61:1-2a (Luke 4:16-21) where He differentiates the time of fulfillment for two messianic events that follow one another immediately in the text. In the Lukan narrative, Jesus, applying the Old Testament text to Himself in terms of fulfillment (verse 21), went against Jewish tradition in public reading, and abruptly ended His selected passage (Isaiah 61:1-2) in mid-sentence with the words: “to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord ...” (Isaiah 61:2a). The completion of the sentence in Isaiah 61:2b reads: “...and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” If the Lord’s purpose at the first advent was to redeem rather than to reign, then we can understand why the second half of this verse, which focuses on the Second Advent (with its attendant judgment on the nations), was omitted. It will not do, as some claim, that it was omitted in, order “to stress the grace of God,” for the words in verse 2b2: “to comfort all who mourn,” and especially those in verse 3, also stress the grace of God. It seems preferable to conclude that Jesus knew that the day of Gentile judgment was to be postponed and so read only that portion of the verse for which He could claim present fulfillment.

Opponents of this view claim that no “gap” was intended here, because even if the entire passage was not cited, “the day of God’s wrath as well as the day of redemption was inaugurated

by our Lord's ministry." Historicists and preterists would find this day of wrath fulfilled either at the cross or in A.D. 70. The argument has been made by proponents of this view that "acceptable year of the Lord," or "the year of YHWH's favor," refers to the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10; cf. Isaiah 49:8) and that Daniel's seventy weeks reflects a Jubiliary fulfillment in Christ. However, grammatically, the word "freedom" (Hebrew *d'ror*) in Isaiah 61:1 is the technical word for the *restoration* involved in this Jubiliary year (such as that which occurred at the end of the Babylonian captivity), and the prophetic understanding of "release" is not spiritual redemption, but is tied to the Land of Israel and its theocratic government, which will resume in the Millennium. The theological problem with this interpretation is that wrath fell on the *Jews*, not on the *Gentiles*, as predicted in Isaiah's text. By contrast, Isaiah 61 sees the nation of Israel revived and restored (verses 2b<sup>2</sup>-10) for a witness to the *Gentile nations* (verse 11), who in fact will *serve* the Jews (verses 5-6), not *destroy* them. Again, one must ask why the Parousia was postponed if two of its primary goals: the day of vengeance (on the nations), and the restoration of Israel, was *already* fulfilled at the cross (or in A.D. 70) and within the Church?

### ***The Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Prophetic Postponement***

The interruption in the divine program of Israelite redemptive history was clearly interpreted in early Jewish-Christian theology as a postponement of the messianic blessings originally promised to the Nation. This recognition of postponement is explicit in the earliest post-Pentecostal preaching of the apostles. For example, in Acts 3:18 we read of the fulfillment of the messianic blessings of redemption in the first phase of Jesus' advent in the words: "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Messiah should suffer, He has thus fulfilled." This redemptive proclamation is then tied in the text to the second phase of advent, which further fulfills the messianic blessings of restoration in verses 19-21: "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Messiah appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."

The phrases "times of refreshing" and "period of restoration of all things" are expressions for the messianic era or the promised restoration of national Israel to the divine ideal (cf. Isaiah 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 11:6-9; 62:1-12; et. al.). While these exact expressions appear only here in the New Testament and have no direct precedent in the LXX, parallel ideas of the Messianic era do exist in the Jewish apocalyptic literature: "times of refreshing" (4 Ezra 7:91, 95; 11:46; 2 Baruch 73-74; 1 Enoch 96:3); "the period of restoration of all things" (4 Ezra 7:75; 13:26-29; 1 Enoch 45:5; 51:4). The context of Acts 3, which equates both terms with one event, requires an analogous interpretation. The Greek term *anapsuxis* ("refreshing") is commonly used by Luke to refer to "the expectation of the time of salvation as *relief* following afflictions" (Luke 21:7-19, 28, 36; Acts 9:16; 14:22), and therefore the connection with the term "times" and the phrase "from the presence of the Lord" may refer to the deliverance of the Jewish remnant from Gentile domination and resultant persecution (ultimately effected at the end of the Tribulation period) by the advent of Messiah (Luke 21:28). In this respect it is analogous to the Greek term *anesis* ("relief") in 2 Thessalonians 1:7. The Greek term *apokatastasis* ("restoration") in Acts 3:21 is derived from the verb *apokathistemi* ("to restore [to an earlier condition]"), and appears in Acts 1:6 for "*restoring* the kingdom to Israel," and in Matthew 17:11 and Mark 9:12 (cf. Malachi 4:5)

of Elijah's coming to "restore all things." Parallel expressions of this period of "restoration" in the New Testament (though broader in scope) may be found in Jesus' use of "the regeneration" (*palinnesia*) in Matthew 19:28 and Paul's description of the future age of redemption in Romans 8:18-23. This term for "restoration" is especially related to national Jewish *repentance* toward the redemptive work of Messiah, since the two terms come from the same root and seem to be patterned after the prophetic condition for the restoration of the messianic kingdom: "(re)turn to Me [with a restored heart], and I will return to you [with restored blessings]" (Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7; cf. Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17).

In light of this apostolic presentation to the Jewish audience that rejected Jesus (Acts 3:14-17), one must ask why, if all of the messianic blessings for Israel were fulfilled in the cross work of Christ, is Israel's repentance (verse 19) tied so vitally (and causally) with the Second Advent? The Second Advent is here explained with respect to its *purpose* (indicated by the conjunctive *hopos* + *an* and the aorist subjunctive) as a return for Israel: "repent ... *in order that* He may send the Christ *appointed for you*" (verse 20). This construction governs both purpose clauses "that your sins may be wiped away" and "that He may send the Christ ..."; thus both phrases are joined together in Greek in one verse (verse 20), although in English translation in two verses (verses 19-20). Nowhere in scripture is it ever said to Gentiles that their repentance would result in God sending the Messiah. On the contrary, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 states that Gentile conversion has simply put them in a position to "wait" for the Messiah's return. Also of significance here is the specificity in of address in Acts 3:20 as "for *you*." That this addresses Jews alone, and especially Jews as "national Israel" is affirmed by verses 12-15 where the audience is designated as "Men of Israel," who "delivered up," "disowned," and "put to death" Jesus, and verse 17 where Israel's "rulers" are specifically mentioned. This relationship between national repentance toward the Messiah and the messianic advent for the Nation (cf. John 4:22), especially with the added requirement of Jewish witness and Gentile inclusion (Acts 1:8; 15:11-18), demands a parenthetical period until fulfillment is realized.

### ***The Pauline Interpretation of Postponement***

In the Pauline apologetic for national Israel, the rejection of the promised Messiah by Israel is presented as having brought a suspension in the fulfillment of the messianic promises to Israel (Romans 11:12, 15, 23, 25-28, 31). Paul argues that it is only because God has not failed (and cannot fail) in His promise to *national Israel* (cf. 1 Kings 8:56; Zephaniah 3:11-20), that *Gentiles*, who presently share in Israel's Messiah during the Church Age, can have assurance of God's promised blessings (Romans 9:6; 10:1; 11:11, 29-32). The Pauline defense for this truth comes in Romans 11 after the announcement of the removal of Israel's national hardening upon the completion of Gentile inclusion in the Church (verses 25-27) and rests upon the unchanging character and unconditional covenant of God in verses 28-29: "From the standpoint of the gospel they [national Israel] are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable." This means that despite Israel's national rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, their position in relation to the Abrahamic Covenant as a "chosen Nation," has not been revoked. While this does not (and never did) secure their salvation apart from repentance (Matthew 3:8-9; Romans 2:17-29), it does preserve the promise for the Nation of future salvation once repentance is secured (Zechariah 12:10-13:2; Matthew 24:30; Romans 11:25-27). This is in harmony with the divine declaration

of unchanging position and unconditional promise made at the time of Israel's rejection and exile during the First Temple (Jeremiah 31:35-37) and was the support for Paul's "desire and prayer to God" for Israel's national salvation (Romans 10:1). Thus, God's merciful plan will return them to a place of obedience in the future, just as the formerly disobedient Gentiles have now been shown mercy (Romans 11:30-32).

Yet, even the present mercy that has come to Gentiles is not complete, but awaits a final fulfillment. In Romans 15:8-12 Paul cites from four Old Testament (LXX) passages that predicted Gentile salvation (Psalms 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1; Isaiah 11:10) in order to show that God is fulfilling His promise to bless the Gentiles through Israel's Messiah in His confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Genesis 12:3; John 4:22). None of the passages cited in the Greek text use the definite article with "Gentiles," since it is as individuals, not as a national entity, that Gentile obedience to Messiah has been affected during the present age of the Church. By contrast, the Old Testament prophets depict an obedience of the Gentile nations, a future accomplishment attending the Second Advent when Israel is restored as head of the nations and itself becomes the instrument of universal blessing, in complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 28:13; 30:1-10; Zechariah 8:22-23). The salvation of *individual* Gentiles (Acts 15:14) in the Church presages the future promise of *national* Gentile salvation in Israel (Isaiah 2:2-3; 66:18-19; Zechariah 8:22-23; 14:9, 16). In the same way individual Jewish salvation (a Remnant of national Israel) in the Church presages national Israel's salvation in the future (Romans 11:1-15). Moreover, individual Gentile salvation today guarantees that national Israel must be restored tomorrow in order to carry out her role with respect to national Gentile salvation (Isaiah 19:23-25). Paul describes this present and future relationship between Israel and the Gentiles through an *a fortiori* (lesser to greater) argument in Romans 11:12-15. Here it is stated that if Israel's transgression has resulted in spiritual blessing for the Gentiles, how much more will be the fulfillment of their national purpose in the Abrahamic Covenant – to bless "all the families (Gentiles) of the earth" (Genesis 12:3). If their rejection has resulted Gentile acceptance, what will their acceptance (at the Second Advent) result in but "life from the dead" (a redeemed, regenerated, and restored national Israel)? This is the Pauline understanding of the purpose for a prophetic postponement in the divine program for Israel.

### ***Examples of Prophetic Postponement***

Old Testament messianic and eschatological texts are replete with examples of statements in which a partial fulfillment can be discerned in history, but complete, or ultimate fulfillment, awaits a future time, usually the eschaton. Passages traditionally classified as apotelesmatic are those which include a near historical fulfillment, and a far "Day of the Lord" fulfillment in the same context. We may refer to this type of postponement as eschatological "Day of the Lord" texts.

### Eschatological Day of the Lord Texts

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Obadiah 1-14 (far fulfillment)<br>Joel 2:1, 11 (near fulfillment)<br>Isaiah 13:6 (near fulfillment)<br>Zephaniah 1:7 (near fulfillment) | Obadiah 15-21 (near fulfillment)<br>Joel 2:31 (far fulfillment)<br>Isaiah 13:9 (far fulfillment)<br>Zephaniah 1:14 (far fulfillment) |
|---|--|

Old Testament messianic Texts also reveal (in the light of the New Testament revelation) a distinction between an historical (first advent) and eschatological (second advent) fulfillment. We may refer to this type of postponement as eschatological messianic texts.

### Eschatological Messianic Texts

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Isaiah 9:1-2 (historical)<br>Isaiah 9:6 (historical, cf. Matthew 4:16; Luke 1:79)<br>Isaiah 52:13-55:13 (historical)<br>Isaiah 59:16 (historical)<br>Isaiah 61:1-2a (historical; cf. Luke 4:16-19; 7:22)<br>Zechariah 9:9 (historical)<br>Isaiah 11:1-2 (historical)<br>Micah 5:2-3a (historical)<br>Psalm 22:1-21 (historical)<br>Psalm 34:14 (historical)<br>Malachi 3:1 (historical)<br>Malachi 4:5 (historical)<br>Genesis 49:10 (historical)<br>Deuteronomy 18:16a (historical)<br>2 Samuel 7:15 (historical)<br>Zephaniah 2:13-3:7 (historical)<br>Psalm 2:7 (historical, cf. Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5)<br>Isaiah 53:10a, 11 (historical)<br>Daniel 9:26 (historical) | Isaiah 9:3-5 (eschatological),<br>Isaiah 9:7 (eschatological)<br>Isaiah 56:1-8 (eschatological)<br>Isaiah 59:17-21 (eschatological)<br>Isaiah 61:2b-11 (eschatological);<br>Zechariah 9:10 (eschatological)<br>Isaiah 11:11 (eschatological)<br>Micah 5:3b-15 (eschatological)<br>Psalm 22:22-32 (eschatological)<br>Psalm 34:16 (eschatological)<br>Malachi 3:2-3 (eschatological),<br>Malachi 4:6 (eschatological)<br>Genesis 49:11-12 (eschatological)<br>Deuteronomy 18:16b (eschatological)<br>2 Samuel 7:13, 16 (eschatological)<br>Zephaniah 3:8-20 (eschatological)<br>Psalm 2:8 (eschatological)<br>Isaiah 53:10b, 12 (eschatological)<br>Daniel 9:27 (eschatological) |
|---|---|

In addition, many of the desecration/restoration motif texts in the Prophets also bear this distinction, with a partial (near) fulfillment in the return to the Land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, and an ultimate/eschatological (far) fulfillment in national Israel's final regathering (Isaiah 11:11-12) and return to Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3) and the rebuilding of the eschatological Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28; 40-48) in the Millennial Kingdom.

### ***Prophetic Postponement and Dispensational Interpretation***

Prophetic Postponement is a tenant of classical dispensational interpretation. It is not a creation of this system prompted by its view of separate programs for Israel and the Church, but the observation that such distinctions were made in New Testament employing Old Testament

messianic and restoration passages. Such observation then prompted the recognition of separate programs for Israel and the Church and their development systematically. The following points may be made concerning prophetic postponement:

- (1) The present physical domination of Gentile powers, and the present spiritual program of the Church, requires that the literal historical fulfillment of national Israel's physical ascendancy and spiritual revival be postponed until a future age.
- (2) The evidence for this Prophetic Postponement apotelesmatic interpretation) is not restricted to any one text, but is a characteristic of messianic and "Day of the Lord" prophetic texts. It may be further supported by the restoration motifs of the prophets, which have not seen complete fulfillment in any subsequent age.
- (3) Prophetic Postponement can be demonstrated in New Testament eschatological texts and through the structuring of the Olivet Discourse and the Judgment section (chapters 6-19) of the Revelation by the eschatological interpretation of Daniel 9:27.
- (4) The New Testament further demonstrates the acceptance of Prophetic Postponement through its continuation of the Old Testament restoration promises to national Israel (e.g. Acts 3:19-21; Romans 11:25-31). The Second Advent of Christ is seen to be uniquely associated with the fulfillment of these promises (e.g., Matthew 24:30-31; Acts 1:6-7; 3:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Therefore, it may be concluded that a distinctive tenant of the dispensational hermeneutic is apotelesmatic interpretation or prophetic postponement. This phenomena can be demonstrated in Old Testament texts in which unfulfilled aspects of the messianic program for national Israel are discernable and may be defined by type as either eschatological "Day of the Lord," or "eschatological messianic."

## **Bibliography**

Randall Price, "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts," *Issues in Dispensationalism*. Eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994): 132-165, Ronald W. Pierce, "Spiritual Failure, Postponement, and Daniel 9," *Trinity Journal* 10 NS (1982): 211-222, John A. McLean, "The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Key for Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1990), Pasquale De Santo, "A Study of Jewish Eschatology with Special Reference to the Final Conflict" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1957).