

Are Traditional Dispensationalists Non-literal in the New Testament? *A Preliminary Response to Ed Glenny's Proposal for Dispensational Hermeneutics*

Recently, Ed Glenny, a usually clear and articulate progressive dispensationalist, gave a paper at the Dispensational Study Group of the *Evangelical Theological Society* (November 1998) entitled *Dispensational Hermeneutics: A Proposal*. In the paper, he seeks to “understand the hermeneutic that is being promoted in current traditional dispensational works and to test it in the New Testament to determine if it really is a consistently literal hermeneutic.”¹ He outlines three areas for discussion:

- An overview of recent discussions about literal interpretation in dispensationalism;
- Tensions for traditional dispensationalists in the New Testament using their hermeneutic;
- A proposal of a hermeneutical method (which entails progressive dispensationalism) that is better and more normal, grammatical-historical interpretation of the Bible than traditional dispensationalism.²

Glenny clearly lays out his view when he notes that “my concern is that the hermeneutic which some traditional dispensationalists call ‘consistently literal’ is not consistent in all contexts, and furthermore, what is being called ‘literal’ interpretation in the Old Testament is not practiced in the New Testament context.”³ In summary, Glenny asserts that traditional dispensationalists may do well in certain instances in the Old Testament, but struggle to handle the New Testament. **The issue is extremely important since it relates to how the Old and New Testaments are harmonized which in turn impacts one’s understanding of the fulfillment of prophecy.** Consequently, Glenny develops his main theme under the “tensions” section where he discusses *fulfillment*, the *biblical covenants*, and the *kingdom of God*.

My goal in this paper is to let the audience know how the hermeneutical argument is presently being made from the progressive side of the ledger. Along the way I also want to address briefly some historical and exegetical concerns I have with Glenny’s approach specifically and with progressive dispensationalism generally. This is not to say that traditionalists cannot learn anything from Glenny on some points. However, I will focus in this short essay on the concerns which I have and not on any areas of agreement unless they come up incidentally in the discussion.

Recent Discussion and Description of Literal Interpretation

It is significant that Glenny starts this discussion with mention of Charles Ryrie’s 1965 book *Dispensationalism Today*. That is as it should be. Ryrie’s book is the most important book written on dispensationalism in this century. It attempts to go to the heart of the matter with its argument for

¹ W. Edward Glenny, “Dispensational Hermeneutics: A Proposal,” Dispensational Study Group, ETS, November 1998, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

consistent literal interpretation. As such it has been the measuring device by which to measure all later debates.

Glenny, following most progressive dispensationalists, treats Ryrie's *sine qua non* or list of essentials of dispensationalism, especially the idea of consistent literal interpretation, as a claim that was new in large measure. He states specifically that in Ryrie's book the claim of literal interpretation was "given a position of importance for this system of interpretation, *which it had never known before*" (italics added).⁴ He goes on to qualify Ryrie's concerns (somewhat correctly I believe) but then does what most progressive dispensationalists and covenant theologians have done. They catalog various examples of dispensationalists of the past doing non-literal, even allegorical interpretation.⁵

It is at this juncture that I want to say what I have been saying for the last several years – progressive dispensationalists, while at times accurately showing the discontinuities in the history of dispensationalism, have refused to examine any strong counter claims involving continuity in the same tradition. My own studies have led me to believe that at the historical level, the values of dispensationalism cannot be boiled down to a loosely connected list of beliefs such as premillennialism, the pretribulational rapture, the existence of the Universal Church, etc. There appears to be something more substantial – a core, a *sine qua non*.

Earlier I had given a paper showing the rather stark continuity between Ryrie's essentials and an early nineteenth century dispensationalist named Guers who was directly discipled by Darby.⁶ Below is a table (once again) showing the similarities on the first two points separated by more than a century. Guers' detailed description of these points mirrors Ryrie's own qualifications for what is being undertaken.

	Émile Guers (1856) <i>La Future D'Israël</i>	Charles Ryrie (1965) <i>Dispensationalism Today</i>
1	Literalism in prophecy	Consistent literal interpretation
2	The Principle of Diversity of Classes and Privileges in the Entire Body of the Redeemed	Distinction between Israel and the Church
3	Futurism	Doxological purpose to biblical history (as opposed to a soteriological purpose as in Covenant theology)

Such continuities in the history of dispensationalism have not yet been taken seriously by progressive dispensationalists. Furthermore, this particular example of a definite historical continuity between Guers and Ryrie is revealing. It shows that Ryrie's 1965 discussion about consistent literal

⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵ Recently, last month Carl Sanders gave an informative paper at the national ETS meeting entitled "The Myth of Normative Dispensationalism" in which he follows the same basic historical outline which is consistent with almost all progressive dispensationalists. It strikes me that the overdose on discontinuity in the historical tradition posited by progressive dispensationalism could be methodologically borrowed in order to lead to the conclusion that there is no such thing as orthodox Christianity.

⁶ See Mike Stallard, "Émile Guers: An Early Darbyite Response to Irvingism and a Precursor to Charles Ryrie," *The Conservative Theological Journal* 1 (April 1997):31-46.

interpretation does not add something significantly new to the discussion of the dispensational tradition. Consequently, traditionalists will not simply abandon a more essentialist approach to the tradition on the basis of dealing with only the discontinuities.

After the basic introductory comments by Glennly in light of Ryrie's teaching, he reviews the basic definitions of literal interpretation given by Thomas Ice, Robert Thomas, Roy Beacham, and Elliott Johnson.⁷ He contrasts these authors to his own interpretive view which he labels "critical realism." This term is apparently one that he prefers to "literal interpretation" when discussing the text, although he certainly claims to be literal himself.⁸ Following Grant Osborne closely, Glennly defines this approach with six criteria for hermeneutical choices:

1. Coherence – does the proposed interpretation fit the context better than other possible solutions?
2. Comprehensiveness – does the proposed interpretation answer all questions? Does it envelop all of the texts of Scripture?
3. Adequacy – is the proposed interpretation more adequate than other solutions in all ways?
4. Consistency – is the proposed interpretation consistent with the text (synchronic) and consistent with the tradition stream (diachronic)?
5. Durability – will the proposed interpretation last?
6. Cross-fertilization – as faith communities interact with each other is the proposed interpretation generally accepted?⁹

To his credit, Glennly downplays the last two considerably. Such lists have been common when discussing world views and theological systems, but are not, taken as a whole, usually the stuff of which analytical and/or exegetical decisions are made.¹⁰ This is especially true for numbers 2 and 4. Most traditionalists would probably argue that the Ten Commandments can stand on their own without taking into account the entire canon. Another way to say this is that the original audience could understand what God was saying to them at Mt. Sinai without any later NT teaching taken into account. In fact, it is this intention of the biblical author as stated in the text, that is the goal of my own interpretation.¹¹ On this point, I believe Glennly would agree. However, the criteria as stated above need much qualification if a traditionalist is going to take them seriously.

Tensions for Traditional Dispensationalists in the New Testament

The bulk of Glennly's article discusses tensions which he believes exist for the traditional dispensationalist when he attempts to interpret the New Testament. Glennly garners evidence for his conclusions under the three categories already mentioned: (1) fulfillment, (2) biblical covenants, (3)

⁷ Glennly, 6-13. Later Glennly will interact with Charles Dyer's understanding of literal interpretation almost exclusively.

⁸ Ibid., 18-19.

⁹ Ibid., 16. See n. 43.

¹⁰ See for example, David Wolfe, *Epistemology: Justification of Belief*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 50-55.

¹¹ For a more complete understanding of this complaint and how the debate over dispensationalism is affected by it, see Mike Stallard, "Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 1(Spring 1997): 5-36.

the kingdom of God. I will not be able to deal with all three in this paper and will, therefore, focus on the first area of fulfillment.¹² Glenny maintains that traditionalists following the most recent definitions of literal interpretation cannot handle NT fulfillment passages clearly. In responding to Charles Dyer,¹³ he gives a focused series of complaints which I cite below in the form of a list:

First, it appears that he [Dyer] has redefined fulfillment according to a system, which has no responsibility to the authority of the New Testament text. The fulfillment language and the context of the New Testament have no voice of their own according to this approach.

Second, he [Dyer] has established the degree of correspondence between the Old Testament meaning and the later fulfillment: it must be “exact.” Ideally this is a wonderful plan, but it seems to ignore several problem passages that scholars have struggled with for centuries. It also seems to overestimate our ability to determine exactly what the Old Testament text is saying at times, as in identifying the mysterious “Servant” in Isaiah 40-55. Of course, we can say that any passage that does not correspond exactly with the Old Testament is simply analogy and not prophecy, but such a hermeneutic erodes our claim that the Old Testament Scriptures really belong to the church, or ever directly address her.

Third, Dyer has ruled out by definition any typological fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New Testament. [boldface supplied for readability]¹⁴

Glenny deals with these three and other complaints throughout his paper, sometimes in brief snapshots, and at other times with elaborate exposition of various problem passages. Below I want to address each of these three in reverse order. I will reserve most of my comments for the first complaint which is perhaps the one that goes to the core of his overall thesis that the literal hermeneutic of traditional dispensationalists fails them in the New Testament.

As to his **third complaint**, is it fair to say that recent traditional dispensationalists define typology out of existence? Several things could be said here. *First*, I want to remind all participants in the debate that recent traditional dispensationalists have tried to prevent the abuse of typology that was prevalent in the older dispensationalists like F. W. Grant and Arno C. Gaebelein (and even back to Darby). At the turn of the century terms such as *type, correspondence, analogy, illustration, application, allegory, example, copy, resemblance, pattern, and foreshadowing* all seem to be used synonymously in these kinds of authors.¹⁵ Typological interpretations abounded in the textual exposition of these men often to the point of overshadowing the grammatical-historical aspects of the passage being interpreted.

On the other hand, modern traditionalists like Roy Zuck have carefully crafted rules for limiting the interpreter’s imagination. Usually this is done by limiting typology to clear New Testament statements about a link between an Old Testament passage (the type) and the New Testament passage (the anti-type).¹⁶ In fact, the caution over typology which traditionalists feel is similar to their concern

¹² I hope to give a more complete response in the near future.

¹³ The article he is responding to is Charles Dyer, “Biblical Meaning of ‘Fulfillment’” in *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 51-72. I found Dyer’s article well crafted and to the point.

¹⁴ Glenny, 19.

¹⁵ See Michael D. Stallard, “The Theological Method of Arno C. Gaebelein” (Dallas, TX: Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992), 239.

¹⁶ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 169-84.

in general about the linking of passages within progressive dispensationalism. They are convinced that progressives often have a subjective element (perhaps a prior theological commitment or belief) that allows linking to be turned into identity between passages.¹⁷ Traditionalists also view the progressive methodology on this score to have a built in prejudice toward continuity in the text rather than discontinuity. Linking is usually done between things that are similar, not dissimilar.¹⁸

Another point to be considered in this discussion is that typology is usually viewed with respect to historical passages not sections that give direct prophecies. Although distinctions of this sort are, at times, difficult to make, they can be made nonetheless. Arno Gaebelien, for example, would consistently typify historical narrative (which made no predictions) but take most prophetic passages in a straight-forward way.¹⁹ Consequently, the whole area of typology misses, in this writer's judgment, the major points of difference between progressives and traditionalists concerning prophetic fulfillment.

Perhaps the most important reality to be considered in the area of typology is that any prediction (or foreshadowing) that is involved stems not from the OT text itself, but from the relationship of the type and anti-type as revealed in the New Testament passage under consideration. In other words, the whole issue of typological fulfillment is largely an exegetical one in the New Testament. The NT gives us new information concerning the truth taught in the OT, but that new truth is not a direct fulfillment in the same sense that a direct prediction would require. Therefore, it is clear that traditionalists are not running roughshod over the NT with the OT when it comes to typology if they are using Zuck's recommendations. Progressives should be pleased.²⁰ Simply put, any predictive element in an OT type is of a different order than a direct statement of prophecy. Therefore, the issue of "exact" correspondence as Dyer explained does not really apply to typology at all.²¹

My final comment is to note that traditionalists are divided on the issue of typology. There are some who themselves might be concerned about the limitations put on discerning types in the OT text that are found in the writings of men like Dyer and Zuck.²² Glenny has the right to respond to any

¹⁷ See Elliott Johnson's written response to Darrell Bock, "Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism" in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 101-105.

¹⁸ Of course, the issue of such linking takes one into the field of midrashic studies which is beyond the scope of this paper. Whether or not New Testament writers are doing midrash much like the extra-biblical writers which inform the NT era is an important issue to be resolved. It may be that a belief in a heavy use of midrash on the part of NT writers will be at cross purposes with the Reformation doctrine of the perspicuity of the Bible. At the practical local church level, could it be that church leaders may need to start teaching their people how to recognize midrash when they see it?

¹⁹ See this author's dissertation mentioned in an earlier note.

²⁰ I believe Glenny shows agreement with this in principle in "Typology and Biblical Theology: A Proposal and Case Study," Paper presented to the ETS Biblical Theology Study Group, November 1998, 9, note 34.

²¹ One positive contribution of Glenny's work has been to make dispensationalists take a new look at the field of typology which, in the present hermeneutical milieu, seems to be a wise undertaking. This whole area is so important to Glenny that he comments: "Typology is, in my estimation, a major hermeneutical foundation for a Biblical Theology, which understands the two Testaments to be one united Bible" (27). Two important writings by Glenny on typology precede his paper on dispensational hermeneutics: "Typology: A Summary of the Present Evangelical Discussion," *Journal of the Theological Society* 40 (December 1997): 627-38 and "Typology and Biblical Theology: A Proposal and Case Study," Paper presented to the ETS Biblical Theology Study Group, November 1998. I do not know if the latter has been formally published.

dispensationalist who has hazarded an opinion. Throughout his paper he does seem to be aware of nuances of differences within both camps: progressive and traditional dispensationalism. This is healthy and instructive. I would only ask that as progressives interact with perhaps a wide range of traditionalists, it is only fair that they allow traditionalists to interact with a growing development within progressive dispensationalism. For example, while Darrell Bock has tried to distance himself from George Ladd,²³ it is not as clear that C. Marvin Pate has tried to do so.²⁴ Yet both call themselves progressive dispensationalists.²⁵

As to Glenn's **second complaint**, he is concerned with Dyer's demand that fulfillment has to be "exact." At face value, Dyer's position appears to be common sense. How would one know that an OT passage has been "fulfilled" if there was not an exact correspondence? If a NT author labeled as direct fulfillment something different than the OT text suggested as direct fulfillment, then there is an inconsistency between the OT and NT texts. This is not the way to harmonize the two. As Dyer notes:

The only safe approach to determining the fulfillment of prophecy is first to understand the prophecy in its original context. Then one must examine the New Testament to see if the prophecy corresponds to the later events that actually transpired. Biblical fulfillment occurs when the meaning of a specific Old Testament prophecy finds its exact correspondence in a New Testament person, activity, or event.²⁶

Glenn believes that this line of reasoning is too simplistic. There are too many problem passages that do not fit this easy formula to allow it to stand. In general, he would view many NT passages as teaching fulfillment when, in fact, the OT facts do not match "exactly" the NT scene. His paper catalogs many alleged examples. In all such occurrences, he suggests one cannot simply resort to an appeal to analogy to unravel the NT fulfillment teaching. Such a move would constitute for Glenn the abandonment of the literal interpretation of the NT which is at the heart of his first complaint which we will discuss below.

However, with respect to this second complaint, Glenn adds a couple of bothersome comments that must be addressed. He says that an appeal to analogy instead of prophecy in some passages (e.g., Joel 2 in Acts 2 being analogous fulfillment as opposed to direct prophetic fulfillment) erodes two claims:

1. that the Old Testament Scriptures really belong to the church;
2. that the Old Testament Scriptures ever directly address the church.

Essentially, traditional dispensationalists are accused of limiting the use of the Bible for the church to the New Testament. However, what does he really mean? Does he mean that the OT has to be directly applicable to the church for the OT to really belong to the church? Does he mean that the OT directly

²² John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 62-78. Walvoord's position is from an former era perhaps, but there are no doubt many traditionalists who would be comfortable with the level of typology he attempts (which is much less than Arno C. Gaebelein had attempted).

²³ Darrell Bock, "Why I am a dispensationalist with a Small 'd,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (September 1998): 383-96.

²⁴ C. Marvin Pate, *The End of the Age Has Come: The Theology of Paul*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

²⁵ See C. Marvin Pate, gen. ed., *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

²⁶ Dyer, 70.

“speaks” of the church? Does he mean that the OT directly “speaks” to the church’s situation? Does he allow for a distinction between meaning and significance with respect to OT teaching relative to the church?

I am not sure that such statements are helpful in the debate between various kinds of dispensationalists. If Glenny means more than significance or application in some way (i.e., basic meaning is for the church), this can never be harmonized with a theology of the church found in Ephesians 1-3 and in Acts 2. The church is something new in Acts 2 and something distinct from national Israel in Ephesians 1-3. Progressives have tried to modify their view of the church in a direction that relativizes the distinction without demolishing it.²⁷ But it is clear that the Old Testament was not written to address the church directly since it did not exist at the time of the writing. That does not mean that the church cannot learn from the OT about God’s plan through the ages, truth about God & Christ, and wisdom in general. Glenny’s question betrays a fundamental flaw of downplaying the significance of any analogies between OT teaching and NT teaching. The sometimes beautiful and sometimes tragic experiences given in the OT become the analogies which help to inform the lives of NT church age believers. The birth story of Jesus as told in Matthew’s account is one glaring example of how the richness of OT imagery serves to enliven the NT experience (e.g., Rachel weeping, Jesus’ trip to Egypt and return, etc.). There is no fulfillment of direct prophecy in these examples. However, the analogy to the NT experience shows that the OT did, and does, in some sense belong to the church. So there is no reason that the category of *analogy* necessarily silences the value of the OT for the church.

The **first complaint** Glenny has for Dyer may be the fountain for all others. He chastises traditional dispensationalists like Dyer for not letting the NT speak on its own. Earlier he had complained of similar dispensationalists allowing the OT historical occasion to “freeze” the meaning of the OT passage even if the NT with a plain reading seems to want to go beyond it.²⁸ We must be careful here. The most important factor in interpreting the OT is the OT text. That is not true for covenant theology where the most important factor seems to be the NT interpretation of the OT text. When we come to the NT, we must also affirm that the most important component in understanding the NT is the NT text itself. We must avoid reading the OT into NT passages as well. However, when we come to the NT text, the OT text plus all of its antecedent theology **does** form part of the background for understanding the NT revelation. This is the significance of the progress of revelation for interpretation. For direct prophecies the issue is clear. The prediction in the OT governs as antecedent theology what constitutes a fulfillment. If any so-called fulfillment language in the NT leads to a different fulfillment than the one cited in the OT passage, then the so-called fulfillment is not direct fulfillment at all. In such cases, the interpreter should use appropriately distinct labels to define the fulfillment.

At this point, one example passage, that of **Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:16-21**, will be examined to demonstrate how Glenny has misread the traditional approach in the NT. Furthermore, in this passage, it will be demonstrated that the traditionalist cannot be accused of being non-literal.²⁹ This passage in

²⁷ See Carl Hoch, “The New Man of Ephesians 2” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992): 98-126 and Robert Saucy, “The Church as the Mystery of God” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992):127-55.

²⁸ Glenny, “Dispensational Hermeneutics,” 7.

²⁹ Glenny has several examples that merit a response. Here I am trying to be representative.

Acts has been taken by various Bible students as the *initial* fulfillment, *partial* fulfillment, *complete* fulfillment, or *no* fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel. Glenny on this passage acknowledges that traditionalists have responded to Peter's quotation from Joel in this passage in more than one way. What I would like to show below is that two particular approaches by traditionalists can be shown to be literal (faithful to grammatical-historical concerns) using only the New Testament itself. This is not to say that fulfilled prophecy should be determined this way. What I am doing is assuming Glenny's New Testament perspective for sake of argument. In the end, it will be fair to say that Glenny has overstated his case.

One of the key interpretive issues in the passage is the introductory formula "*this is that* which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16) as Peter begins to use the passage from Joel to explain the tongue-speaking to the gathered crowd. Many traditionalists have taken it to be what some have called an "analogous fulfillment." Arno C. Gaebelein, representative of this position, noted that

. . .careless and superficial expositors have often stated that Peter said that all this happened in fulfillment of what was spoken by Joel. He did not use the word fulfilled at all. Had he spoken of a fulfillment then of Joel's prophecy, he would have uttered something which was not true, for the great prophecy was *not* fulfilled on that day. Nor has this prophecy been fulfilled since Pentecost, nor will it be fulfilled during this present Gospel age. This great prophecy which Peter quotes in part will be accomplished at the end of the Jewish age, that end which has yet come and which cannot come as long as the church is on the earth. Joel's prophecy will be fulfilled in connection with the coming of the Lord. Before that day comes there will be visible signs of which the prophet speaks. All this is still in the future. Before it can all be fulfilled, the events spoken by Joel as preceding this prophecy must be accomplished, and, besides this, the church must be removed from the earth in the way as revealed in the Word (1 Thessal. iv:15-18). . . . He [Peter] tells the assembled multitude that something similar to that which they now were witnessing God had promised in connection with the days of Messiah. With His coming as King, the Spirit was to be poured out upon all flesh. That which they saw and heard was indeed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but not in the full sense as given in the prophecy of Joel. What took place was an evidence that Jesus, whom they had crucified, is the true Messiah and that what had taken place is a pledge that in due time all of the prophecy contained in the book of Joel would be fulfilled.³⁰

Glenny reacts to this position which basically says that Peter is saying "this is *like* that" when he says "this is that." He comments on the Joel quotation this way:

In Acts it is applied to the church with the introductory formula, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (2:16). This statement, as part of the New Testament text, is just as inspired as the Old Testament context. The normal, contextual, literal, grammatical-historical meaning of "this is that" is that what is cited from Joel is being fulfilled. Also, the inspired text says that Peter interprets Joel's after these things" as "in the last days," which, according to the New Testament authors, are this present age, the time when "God has spoken in his Son," Jesus (1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 1:1-2; 9:26; cf. 1 Cor. 10:11). . . . Furthermore, the response of the Jews to Peter's Pentecost sermon does not make sense if they did not understand the phenomena of the day of Pentecost to be a result of Jesus pouring forth the Spirit in fulfillment of Joel 2, thereby proving that the last days had arrived (Acts 2:17), and that Jesus was Messiah and Lord. Traditional dispensationalists, who see no fulfillment of Joel 2 in Acts 2, cannot claim that the hermeneutic they employ in this passage is "literal."³¹

³⁰ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1912; reprint ed., Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961), 53-54. For perhaps the most detailed and best explanation of the view of analogous fulfillment see Roy Beacham, "The Analogical Use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:15-21; A Literal Approach," Paper presented to the Bible Faculty Leadership Summit, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, August 7, 1998. Glenny reacts to Beacham in his paper.

³¹ Glenny, 21-22.

I am somewhat disturbed by Glenný's insistence on concluding that the analogous fulfillment view is non-literal. It is one thing to say that there is disagreement about the exegesis of the particulars of a passage. It is quite another to accuse someone of abandoning literal interpretation.³² Could it be that he is adopting a rigid, "wooden literalism" in the phrase "this is that?" Literal interpretation does not mean a wooden interpretation. It means the grammatical-historical interpretation of a passage which takes into account figures of speech, literary structure, genre, et al. It has a language context and a historical context which frames the occasion and language.³³

It is true that in the analogous fulfillment view the primary reliance has been on the Old Testament context of Joel's prophecy to answer the question of whether or not there has been fulfillment. When one analyzes the details of the OT text, the fact of the matter is that the particulars predicted in the Joel passage did not happen at Pentecost. However, if one were to limit himself to the NT passage for sake of argument, could a view wider than Glenný's understanding of "this is that" be possible contextually? The answer is *yes* for several reasons.

First, by reading the NT text alone, one can come to the exegetical conclusion (quite easily) that not all the words which Peter introduces with "this is that" are fulfilled in Acts 2. It may be unfortunate for Glenný's harshness about the traditional view that the cosmic sign portions of the prophecy (cited in the NT in Acts 2:19-20) are not fulfilled in Acts 2. This is an exegetical observation from Acts 2 and does not need Joel 2 to confirm it. The traditionalist wonders why Glenný can use a kind of wooden literalism to insist on fulfillment for only part of the prophecy. In fact Glenný seems to ignore the cosmic signs and only mentions what comes before and what comes after. Some traditionalists look at the NT text and simply notice that the lack of fulfillment of what was quoted in the NT may be a sign that there is no direct fulfillment going on in the passage. This is a reasonable possibility that could point to a broader understanding of what the formula "this is that" might entail. This broader understanding is not merely read into the NT from the OT but can be seen as an option forced by a complete contextual reading of the NT passage.

Second, a corollary to the absence of the fulfillment of the cosmic signs is the same conclusion based upon a linking to other cosmic sign passages in the New Testament. Glenný theologically links the phrase "in the last days" (Acts 2:17) with 1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 1:1-2; 9:26; etc., to show that the present age is the last days. In his mind, the quotation from Joel in Acts 2 serves to prove to the audience on Pentecost that the last days had arrived. Is this the only possible way to link and still be in the range of "literal?" Not many traditionalists would deny that the term "last days" can sometimes refer to the period from the First to the Second Advent. However, it is not true that the term is a technical term that always refers to that time period. The "last days" were still future as Paul wrote 2 Tim. 3:1 ("This know also, that in the last days perilous times will come."). Why link to one group of passages over any other group of passages? Could it be that the reason that progressive dispensationalists link the way they do is a prior theological commitment to a certain way of reading Acts 2? I believe the traditionalist has the upper hand here. The cosmic signs as mentioned in Acts 2 can be correlated to such passages as Matt. 24:29-31 (and others) which Glenný would assuredly say reflects the end time scenario. Thus, the traditionalist is not being non-literal in his reading of "this is that" when a simple correlation within the context of NT biblical theology (apart from OT

³² Traditionalists should not be likewise scolded for accusing covenant theologians down through the years as being non-literal. Up until recent times, covenant theologians admitted they were not literal in prophetic portions of the Bible. See Stallard, 11-12.

³³ Elliott Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 9.

considerations) points to a different timing for the fulfillment of the Acts 2 quote of Joel than the Acts 2 occasion.

Third, it is fascinating that Glennly suggests that Peter's sermon on Pentecost here does not make sense if the audience did not understand the phenomena (tongues) as ushering in the last days. In essence the coming of the Spirit is the coming of the eschaton. Is this the only plausible reading of the passage? If there is analogous fulfillment, then some application is made to the present audience. Traditionalists do not deny the experience of blessing by the Church at its own birthday as recorded in this chapter. What we deny is that the experience of blessing fulfills the Joel 2 passage. Furthermore, Peter's sermon would easily make sense to an audience who has been told that the one they killed was Messiah who was pouring forth the Spirit at that time and the One who would fulfill all that had been predicted. Glennly's statement is not compelling and, furthermore, it does not leave the analogous fulfillment in the throes of non-literalism.

Finally, I want to say that my point has not been to defend the analogous fulfillment view, but to point out that it does not necessarily violate the principle of literal interpretation. Its adherents are genuinely wrestling with the details of the text. But, it is important to acknowledge that not all traditionalists hold the analogous fulfillment view of the Joel 2 passage in Acts 2. Zane Hodges, on linguistic grounds, affirms the statement "this is that" as implying direct fulfillment of the pouring out of the Spirit. He comments that

Such an interpretation is unlikely on linguistic grounds. The Qumran documents have alerted New Testament scholarship to the so-called Qumran peshar mode of interpretation. In peshar exegesis, expressions resembling the one Peter employed were used regularly to refer to contemporary fulfillment. It would be surprising if Peter used this expression in some other way, of which we do not have other analogous examples.³⁴

Hodges seems to be joined by Elliott Johnson in this understanding.³⁵ The thrust of Hodges' position is that the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is an open question in the beginning of the book of Acts and the answer unfolds throughout.³⁶ The prophetic passage from Joel in Acts 2 then must be understood in its Jewish framework. Glennly acknowledges Hodges' overall view but dismisses it as not comprehensive.³⁷ This may be the case. I have yet to study Hodges's view in detail and want to reserve judgment. However, my initial reading of this view does not yield a verdict of non-literal for those traditionalists who do not take an analogous fulfillment view in this passage.

Three Hermeneutical Suggestions

After dealing with various passages and areas of theology, Glennly makes a proposal in the form of three suggestions on how to read the Bible which he calls:

- A Christological Hermeneutic

³⁴ Zane Hodges, "A Dispensational Understanding of Acts 2" in *Issues in Dispensationalism* edited by Wesley Willis and John Master (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 168.

³⁵ Elliott Johnson, "Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism" in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism* edited by Herb Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 151ff.

³⁶ Hodges, 166.

³⁷ Glennly, 21, note 57.

- A Canonical Hermeneutic
- A Complementary Hermeneutic

Each of these deserves its own analysis which I can not give in this forum. Sufficient here is the warning that in all three areas the traditionalist would be concerned about the loss of integrity of a literal understanding of the Old Testament.

Conclusion

There is so much else that Glennie discusses in the 56 pages of his paper that needs to be addressed by traditionalists. I hope that many will join me in addressing further the question of whether we are literal in the New Testament passage by passage. However, after my initial analysis of Glennie's hard work, I am a little confused. Why have progressives in the past been so insistent at removing the issue of literal interpretation from the debate between covenant theology and dispensationalism but now are so willing (if Glennie is representative) of raising it in the debate between progressives and traditionalists?