

# The History of Dispensationalism

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# Who cares?

- Critics of dispensationalism point to its history, claiming it's new, modernistic, and therefore, not biblical.
- Traditionalism—the bane of biblical Christianity—is exposed by a close study of history.

- Premillennial Church Fathers
- Papias
- Irenaeus
- Justin Martyr
- Tertullian
- Hippolytus
- Lactantias

- Joachim of Fiore
- Pierre Poiret
- John Edwards
- Isaac Watts

- Samuel H. Coxe
- John N. Darby
- William Kelly

- C. I. Scofield
- L. S. Chafer
- Charles Ryrie

## Biblical Orthodoxy

*What went wrong? Why doesn't every church teach dispensations?*

**Truth!**



**Traditionalism**

- Catechetical School of Alexandria
- 4<sup>th</sup> Century Paradigm Shift
- Origen, Augustine, et al.
- Roman Catholicism, Reformation, Founding Fathers

**Apostasy**

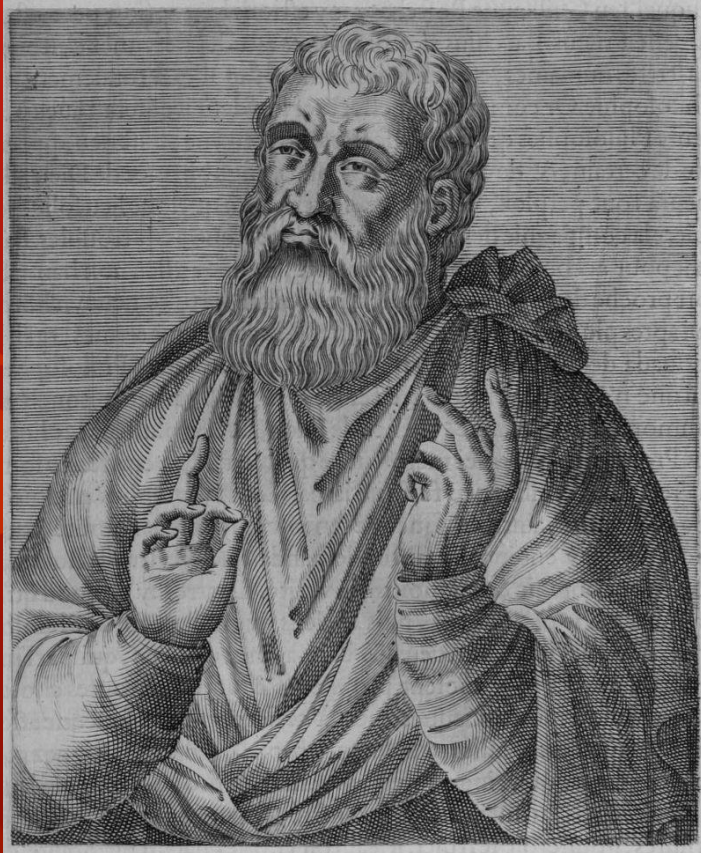
# Papias, 70-163 AD

- Known for providing earliest record of the provenance of the Gospels.
- Identified by Eusebius as a believer in a literal millennium ruled by Christ.





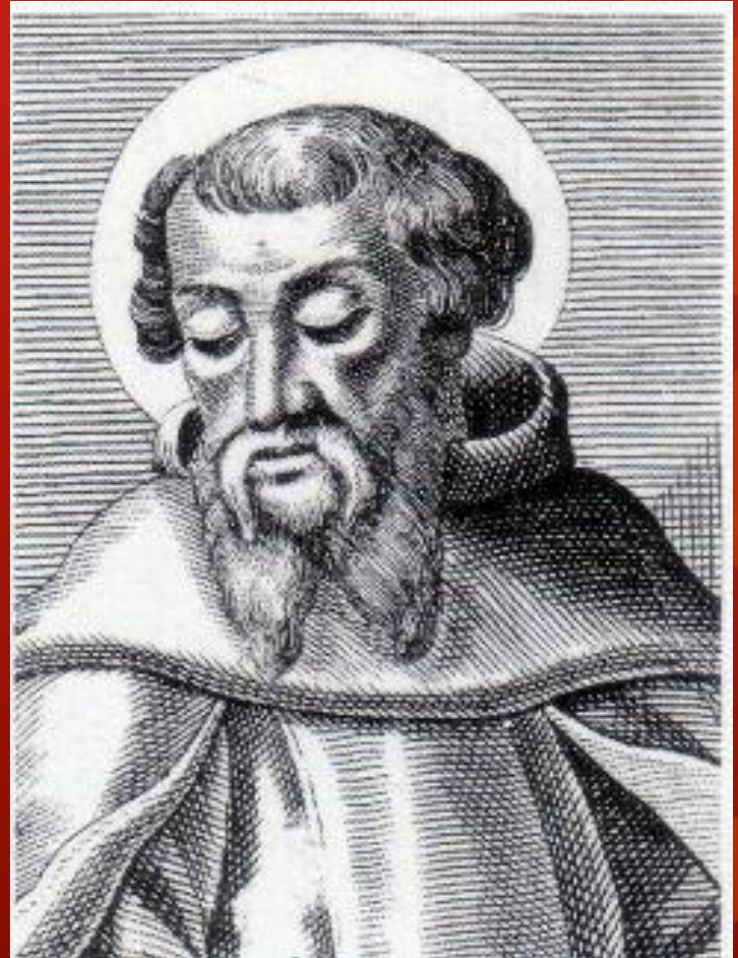
# Justin Martyr, 110-165 AD



- Defended premillennialism against rise of allegorical interpretation.
- *Dialogue With Trypho*—The author discusses the periods before Moses and how God justified Enoch, Noah, and Abraham apart from the Law.
- Contrasts the period of the Law with the “present dispensation”, the church.
- Deeply educated in Greek philosophy, Justin’s theology, like that of many in the ancient world, was compromised.

# Irenaeus, 130-200 AD

- An early church bishop in Gaul and an apologist for Christianity.
- Had listened to Polycarp, a disciple of John.
- Wrote *Against Heresies*—defending the orthodox faith from Gnosticism.
- Discussed four covenants—Adam, Noah, Moses, and Christ—and explained that in the course of these different times God “summed up all things”.
- Rejected allegorical treatment of prophecy and insisted on literal millennial rule of Christ.
- His theology was spoiled by some elements of Greek philosophy and devotion to Mariology (worship of Mary).



# Tertullian, 155-240 AD



- Early apologist who opposed Gnosticism.
- Developed doctrine of the Trinity.
- “Christians are made, not born.”
- Believed in premillennialism and the literal rule of Christ on earth.



# Joachim of Fiore, 1135-1202



- Mystic and theologian who converted to Christianity after visiting the Holy Land.
- Became a monk, lay preacher, and studied the Bible, especially Revelation.
- Taught a “tripartite scheme of history”—the Age of Law (or the Father), the Age of Grace (or the Son), and the future Age of the Spirit.
- Believed, however, that the final age would begin in 1260, and that salvation would be universal—a postmillennial idea.



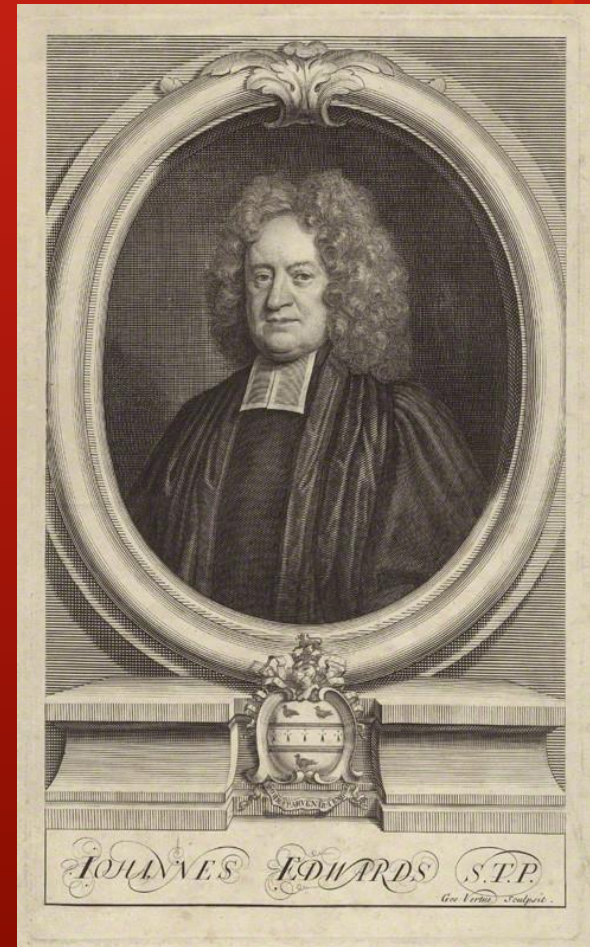
# Pierre Poiret, 1646-1719

- “L’Economie Divine”
- Premillennial
- Outlined Seven Dispensations
  - Infancy—to the Deluge
  - Childhood—to Moses
  - Adolescence—to the Prophets
  - Youth—to the coming of Christ
  - Manhood—after Christ to Middle Ages
  - Old Age—Early Modern period
  - Renovation—the Millennium

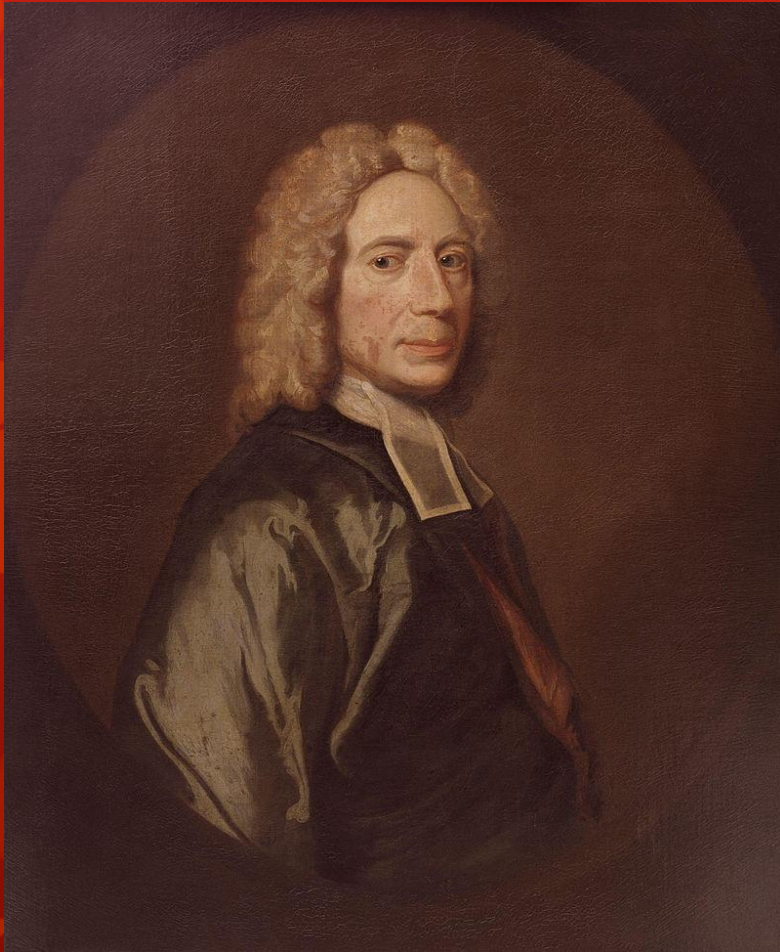


# John Edwards, 1637-1716

- Calvinist minister in the Church of England.
- *A Compleat History or Survey of All the Dispensations* (1699)
- Scheme
  - Innocence
  - Sin and Misery
  - Reconciliation
    - Patriarchal economy
    - Mosaic economy
    - Gentile economy (concurrent)
    - Christian economy
- Believed in a future spiritual millennium.



# Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

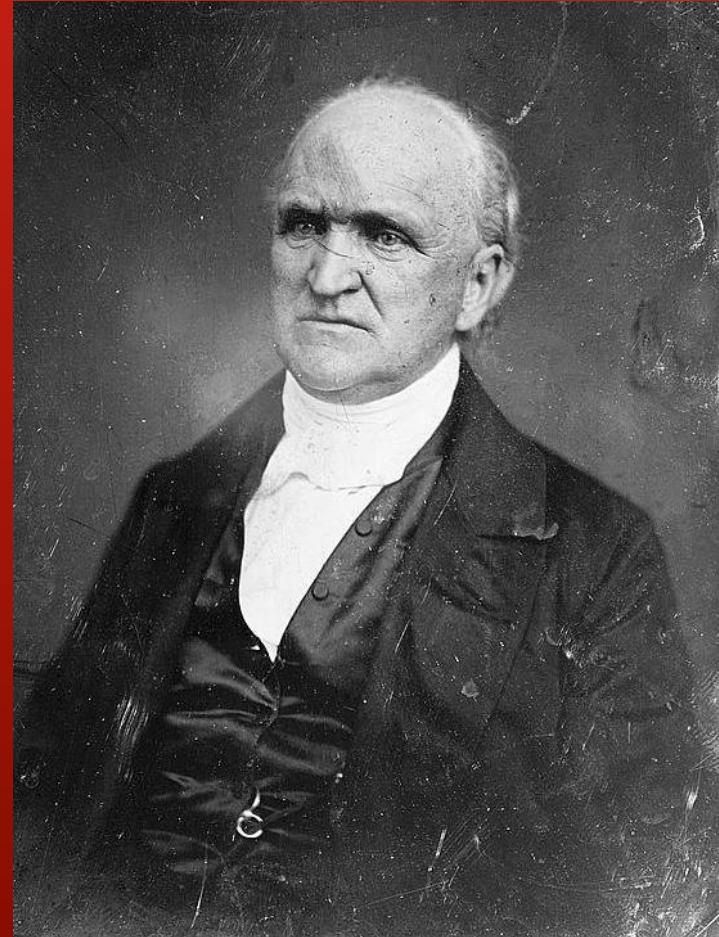


- Most famous for his hymns.
- Essay: “The Harmony of all the Religions which God ever Prescribed to Men and all his Dispensations towards them”.
- Scheme
  - Innocence
  - Adamic Covenant of Grace
  - Noahical Dispensation
  - Abrahamic Dispensation
  - Mosaic Dispensation
  - Christian Dispensation



# Samuel H. Coxe, 1793-1880

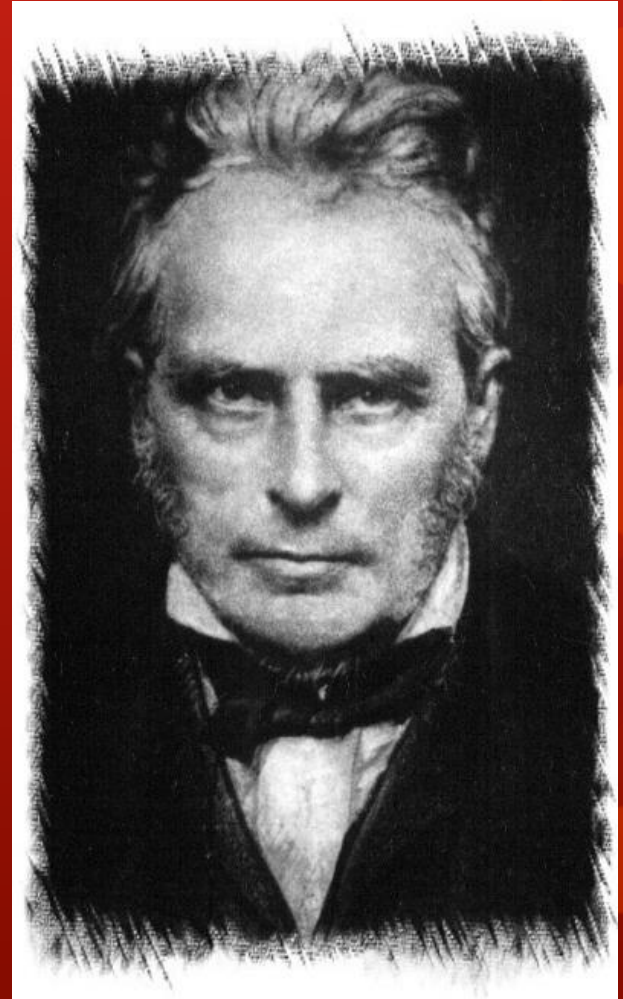
- American Presbyterian minister, orator, abolitionist, and theologian.
- Developed a sevenfold scheme of the dispensations.



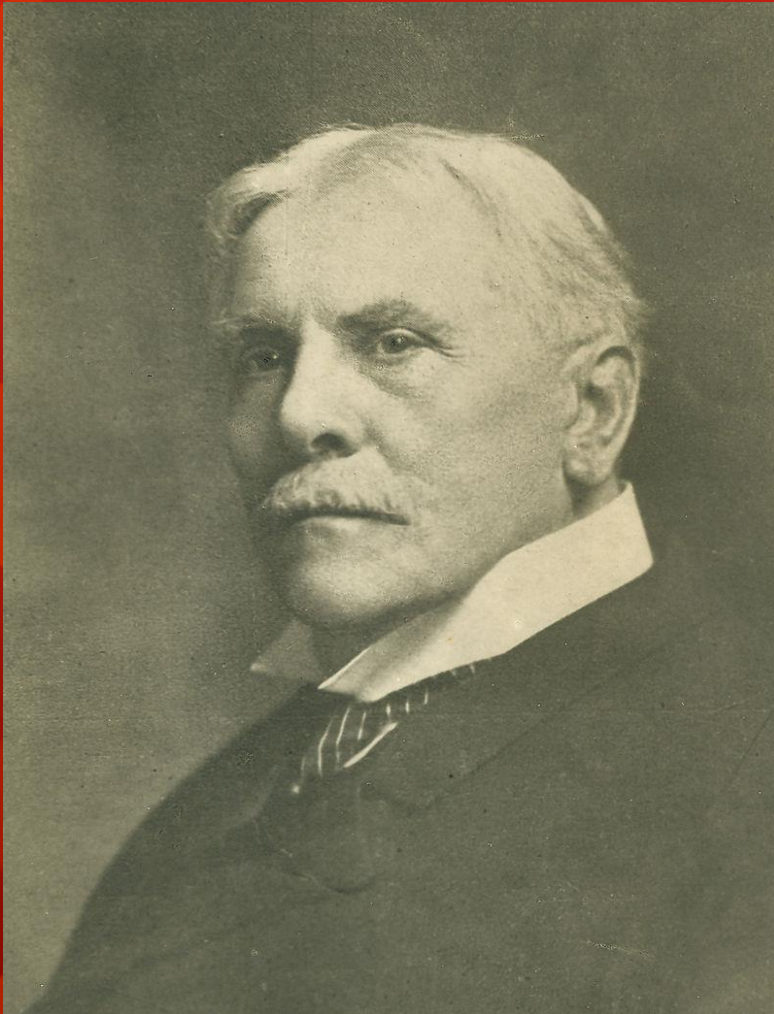


# John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

- Became a believer while studying law in college.
- Became an ordained Anglican curate; later a priest in the Church of Ireland.
- Resigned when the Archbishop insisted members swear allegiance to George IV as King of Ireland.
- Isaiah 32 changed his theology
- A founding member of the Plymouth Brethren.
- Translated the Bible, wrote hymns and books about eschatology and theology.



# C. I. Scofield, 1843-1921



- Served in the Confederate army but later deserted to the Union.
- Served as a lawyer and politician. Accused of bribe-taking and forgery.
- Heavy drinker who deserted his wife and children.
- Converted to Christianity and ordained as a minister in 1883.
- Came under the influence of James Brookes, a dispensationalist.
- Pastored a church in Dallas—future site of Dallas Theological Seminary.
- In 1909 published the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which popularized dispensationalism in America.

# Lewis Sperry Chafer, 1871-1952

- A Congregational minister in Massachusetts.
- Mentored by C. I. Scofield.
- Helped found the Philadelphia School of the Bible.
- In 1921 followed Scofield as pastor of First Congregational Church of Dallas.
- Co-founder of Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924.
- Wrote an influential *Systematic Theology*.



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