



## Introduction

- Dispensationalism does not believe the biblical covenants are the primary structure of the Bible so it is very different from what we believe, but it is a popular way of interpreting the Bible.
- You have been influenced by dispensationalism more than you realize.
- A dispensationalist believes dispensational theology.

## Dispensationalism Defined

### Dispensation

- The word dispensation comes from the Greek word *oikonomia*, which can be translated as administration or stewardship.
- A dispensation is concerned with how things are done during a particular period in history, in particular, how God administered his plan of redemption in various stages of history.
- A dispensation marks a period of time in which God administered his redemptive plan in a way different from other periods of time.
- Dispensationalism is looking to understand Scripture by seeing the divisions or differences throughout the biblical story, while Covenant Theology is looking for unity in the biblical story.
- Dispensationalists of today are quick to refute the teaching that salvation was not always based on the person and work of Christ.

### How Are Dispensations Identified?

#### Jesus

Luke 16:1–9

- It is not stated in the text but it is implied that the rich man fires his manager and hires another manager, thus, there is a change in administration.
- The rich man, who represents God, still owns everything but he changes who stewards what he owns.
- Specifically in this text, according to the dispensationalist, Jesus implies a dispensational change, from this world to the eternal age.

#### Paul

Ephesians 3:1–3

- Paul says the Ephesians have heard of his stewardship (*oikonomia*) of God's grace. Paul says this stewardship was a mystery but now this mystery is revealed.
- This is a new era or dispensation, and, since this is a new dispensation, there must have been a dispensation prior to this one.
- Dispensations originate from implications found in the New Testament.
- Because we have a change in how things are done in the New Testament we need to look for changes in how things are done in the whole Bible.



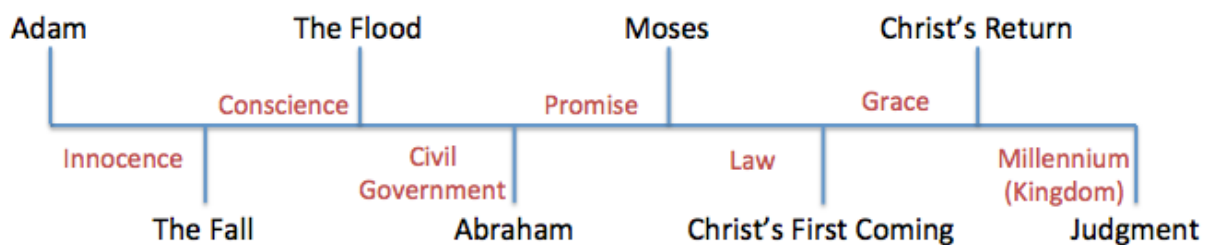
## The Dispensations

### Classical Dispensationalism

Traditionally classic dispensationalism has identified seven dispensations:

1. The Dispensation of Innocency or Freedom (before the Fall)
2. The Dispensation of Conscience or Self-Determination (after the Fall until the Flood)
3. The Dispensation of Civil Government (after the Flood until Abraham)
4. The Dispensation of Promise or Patriarchal Rule (Abraham until Moses)
5. The Dispensation of Mosaic Law (Moses until Jesus' first coming)
6. The Dispensation of Grace (Jesus' first coming until Jesus' second coming)
7. The Dispensation of the Millennium (Jesus' second coming until the final judgment)

## Classic Dispensations

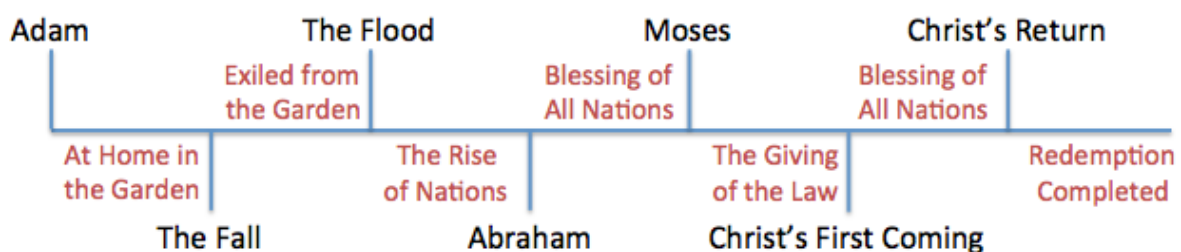


### Progressive Dispensations

Progressive dispensationalism also has seven dispensations:

1. Creation: At Home in the Garden (before the Fall)
2. Fall: Exiled from the Garden (after the Fall until the Flood)
3. After the Flood: The Rise of Nations (after the Flood until Abraham)
4. Call of Abraham: Blessing of All Nations (Abraham until Moses)
5. The Exodus: The Giving of the Law (Moses until Jesus' first coming)
6. The Spirit: Blessing of All Nations (Jesus' first coming until Jesus' second coming)
7. The New Heavens and Earth: Redemption Completed (Millennium, final judgment, new heavens and earth)

## Progressive Dispensations





## The Importance of Dispensations

Dispensationalists see the need to recognize the various dispensations as critical to a correct understanding of the Bible.

## Dispensationalism History

### John Nelson Darby

- There were hints of dispensational theology in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries but it really had its start in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with John Nelson Darby.
- Darby didn't fully develop dispensationalism but his ideas about the rapture, tribulation, millennium, and the different histories of Israel and the Church were foundational for today's dispensationalism.
- The system of theology he and others developed was unique.
- Darby heavily influenced James Brookes, a Presbyterian from Saint Louis. He was a leader in the Niagara Bible Conference, a conference that met every summer that focused on prophecy and the end times.

### C. I. Scofield

- The most prominent early American dispensationalist was C. I. Scofield.
- Scofield published two items that greatly spread dispensationalism.
- *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* contained 10 chapters on the dispensational perspectives of eschatology and ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church).
- *The Scofield Reference Bible* was published in 1909. Its notes were thoroughly dispensational in perspective. A new version was published in the 1960's.

### Dispensational Schools

Scofield and others began schools with a dispensational focus.

- Philadelphia Bible Institute
- Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA)
- Dallas Theological Seminary

### Dispensationalism Today

- Dispensationalism is widespread throughout the United States and the world.
- It is prevalent in charismatic, Pentecostal, nondenominational, fundamentalist, Calvary Chapel, and Bible churches.
- Prominent dispensationalists today are John McArthur, Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, Tim LaHaye, and Hal Lindsey.
- Major dispensational schools are Dallas Theological Seminary, Bible Institute of Los Angeles, Moody Bible Institute, The Master's College, and Liberty University.
- We can distinguish between pop dispensationalism and theological dispensationalism.



## Dispensational Differences

### Hermeneutics

- Covenant Theology
  - Scripture interprets Scripture – the Bible is its main interpreter
    - Interpret the implicit in light of the explicit
    - Interpret the unclear in light of the clear
    - Interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament
- Dispensationalism
  - Literalism – an approach to Scripture that finds the meaning of the text in the plain or normal sense of the text in its context
- According to the dispensationalist, if you place any other hermeneutic above the literal hermeneutic you are abandoning literalism.
- We heartily support reading the Scripture literally, but we must let the Scripture interpret itself. That is why “Scripture interprets Scripture” is our top rule for interpreting the Bible.

### Dispensations versus Covenants

#### The Role of Covenants

- Dispensationalism sees the covenants as important but not what structures the Scriptures.
- “Implied” dispensations are more important than “explicit” covenants.
- We have explicit covenants in Scripture: the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Levitical, Davidic, and New Covenants.
- Dispensationalism does not recognize the three foundational covenants, the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace.

#### Covenant Fulfillment

- Dispensationalists point out that the covenants given in the Old Testament, in particular, the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants were made with Israel and only Israel. Jeremiah 31:31
- The dispensationalist acknowledges that the Church (which is not Israel according to them) gets some benefits but it is not actually included in the covenant.
- Israel will receive the full benefits of the new covenant in the millennium.
- Because we hold to the supremacy of Scripture interprets Scripture we believe all covenants are fulfilled in Christ.
- The dispensationalist says because the Old Testament literally says these covenants were with Abraham, David, and Israel—the Church in Christ in no way fulfills these covenants.
- 2 Corinthians 1:20 literally says all of the promises of God are fulfilled in Christ. We are interpreting the Old Testament based on the New Testament.
- We agree that we should understand how a person who lived before Christ would have understood an Old Testament text. However, Jesus and the apostles give us the ultimate meaning.



## Israel and the Church

### Dispensational View

- Dispensationalism has a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. Ryrie says this is the essence of dispensationalism.
- According to dispensationalism, the Old Testament did not foresee the Church. The Old Testament speaks of a kingdom, in particular, the kingdom promised to David.
- Classic dispensationalism sort of sees the Church as a Plan B. Israel and the kingdom was Plan A, but because the Jews rejected Jesus, the implication is God was forced to do something else. God put Plan A on hold and created the Church, which is Plan B.
- Progressive dispensationalism doesn't necessarily see the rejection of Jesus by the Jews as forcing God to change his plans but progressive dispensationalists acknowledge that the rejection of Jesus by Israel plays into God creating the Church.
- Some classic dispensationalists see the distinction between Israel and the Church as lasting through eternity. The Jews are people of the earth, and Christians are people of heaven.
- Most dispensationalists today agree that the final state will include Israel and the Church together.

### Covenantal View

- According to the New Testament, there is one people of God with one plan and purpose.
- The church does not replace Israel, but the Church is the ultimate or true Israel.
- Prophecies given in the Old Testament to Israel are applied to the Church. Compare Jeremiah 31 with Hebrews 8 and Amos 9 with Acts 15.
- Old Testament language about Israel is applied to the Church. 1 Peter 2:9–10, Romans 2:28, Ephesians 2:11–22, John 15:1, Matthew 2:15

### Jews Today

- Nowhere in Scripture do Jesus, Peter, John, Paul, or James explicitly describe a glorious future on this earth for the nation of Israel.
- Paul's hope for his brother Israelites was that they would be saved, that is, in Christ, the true Israel. Romans 9:1–5, Romans 10:1
- Many people point to Romans 11:26 which says, "All Israel will be saved," to prove that Israel has a glorious future as a nation.
- They are placed in Christ. They experience the fulfillment of all the promises given to their forefathers. There is no need for further fulfillment.
- Our attitude towards ethnic Jews should be the same as Paul's attitude. Our heart and desire should be that they be saved.

## Conclusion

- Even though we disagree at a very fundamental level with dispensationalism, dispensationalists are our brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - Dispensationalists hold to the inerrancy, infallibility, and sufficiency of Scripture.



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- They are active in missions and evangelism.
  - From all eternity the Three-In-One planned, purposed, and covenanted to redeem a people, and he established covenants with man that find their fulfillment in the second man, the last Adam, Jesus Christ.
  - We will forever, with the innumerable multitude of God's people, give praise to him for our salvation in Christ. Revelation 7:9–12