

11–11–2020 End Times Bible Study # 12 — Dispensational Theology

As usual, begin with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth (John 14:26). This will be a short summary. You might need to read it several times to grasp what it says if you have not previously studied it or heard of it. I believe it misrepresents the teachings of the Bible in several ways.

Dispensationalism is a method of interpreting history that divides God's work and purposes toward mankind into different periods of time. The main proponents use seven dispensations. I will limit the discussion to the seven basic dispensations, using the most common names. I will list time name, time period covered, God's commands and warnings for each stage.

#1: Dispensation of Innocence (Genesis 1:28-30 and 2:15-17). It covers the time from creation till Adam and Eve sin in the Garden of Eden by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. In this dispensation God's commands were to (1) populate the earth with children, (2) subdue the earth, (3) have dominion over the animals, (4) care for the garden, and (5) abstain from eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God warned of the punishment of physical and spiritual death for disobedience.

#2: Dispensation of Conscience. It lasted about 1,656 years from the time of Adam and Eve's eviction from the garden until the flood (Genesis 3:8–8:22). This dispensation demonstrates what mankind will do if left to his own will and conscience, which have been tainted by the inherited sin nature. The five major aspects of this dispensation are 1) a curse on the serpent, 2) a change in womanhood and childbearing, 3) a curse on nature, 4) the imposing of difficult work on mankind to produce food, and 5) the promise of Christ as the seed who will bruise the serpent's head (Satan).

#3: Dispensation of Human Government which began in Genesis 8. God had destroyed life on earth with a flood, saving just one family to restart the human race. God made the following promises and commands to Noah and his family: A: God will not curse the earth again. B: Noah and family are to replenish the earth with people. C: They shall have dominion over the animal creation. D: They are allowed to eat meat. E: The law of capital punishment is established. F: There never will be another worldwide flood. G: The sign of God's promise will be the rainbow.

Noah's descendants did not scatter and fill the earth as God had commanded, thus failing in their responsibility in this dispensation. About 325 years after the flood, the earth's inhabitants began building a tower, a great monument to their solidarity and pride (Genesis 11:7-9). God brought the construction to a halt, creating different languages and enforcing His command to fill the earth. The result was the rise of different nations and cultures. From that point on, human governments have been a reality.

#4: Dispensation of Promise. It started with the call of Abraham, continued through the lives of the patriarchs, and ended with the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, a period of about 430 years. During this dispensation God developed a great nation that He had chosen as His people (Genesis 12:1–Exodus 19:25).

The basic promise during the Dispensation of Promise was the Abrahamic Covenant. Here are some of the key points of that unconditional covenant: A: From Abraham would come a great nation that God would bless with natural and spiritual prosperity. B: God would make Abraham's name great. C: God would bless those that blessed Abraham's descendants and curse those that cursed them. D: In Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed. This is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His work of salvation. E: The sign of the covenant is circumcision. F: This covenant, which was repeated to Isaac and Jacob, is confined to the Hebrew people and the 12 tribes of Israel.

#5 Dispensation of Law. It lasted almost 1,500 years, from the Exodus until it was suspended after Jesus Christ's death. This dispensation will continue during the Millennium, with some modifications. During the

Dispensation of Law, God dealt specifically with the Jewish nation through the Mosaic Covenant, or the Law, found in Exodus 19–23. The dispensation involved temple worship directed by priests, with further direction spoken through God’s mouthpieces, the prophets. Eventually, due to the people’s disobedience to the covenant, the tribes of Israel lost the Promised Land and were subjected to bondage.

#6: Dispensation of Grace. This is the one in which we are now living. It began with the New Covenant in Christ’s blood (Luke 22:20). This “Age of Grace” or “Church Age” occurs between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel 9:24. It starts with the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and ends with the Rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4). This dispensation is worldwide and includes both Jews and the Gentiles. Man’s responsibility during the Dispensation of Grace is to believe in Jesus, the Son of God (John 3:18). In this dispensation the Holy Spirit indwells believers as the Comforter (John 14:16-26). This dispensation has lasted for almost 2,000 years, and no one knows when it will end. We do know that it will end with the Rapture of all born-again believers from the earth to go to heaven with Christ. Following the Rapture will be the judgments of God lasting for seven years.

#7: Millennial Kingdom of Christ. It will last for 1,000 years as Christ Himself rules on earth. This Kingdom will fulfill the prophecy to the Jewish nation that Christ will return and be their King. The only people allowed to enter the Kingdom are the born-again believers from the Age of Grace, righteous survivors of the seven years of tribulation, and the resurrected Old Testament saints. No unsaved person is allowed access into this kingdom. Satan is bound during the 1,000 years. This period ends with the final judgment (Revelation 20:11-14). Then the earth will be destroyed by fire, and the New Heaven and New Earth of Revelation 21 and 22 will begin.

What are the problems with this design of God dealing with his people? Jesus warned there would always be false prophets. A few people expressed ideas with some similarity to the Dispensational theme, but they were all based on apocryphal books which were ignored or rejected in making the Biblical canon. It is a new way of looking at the prophecies of God. How new? Most people agree that J. N. Darby (1800—1882) was the father of modern Dispensational Theology and Futurism. He was an Anglo-Irish Bible teacher, one of the influential figures among the original Plymouth Brethren and the founder of the Exclusive Brethren. Pre-tribulation rapture theology was popularized extensively in the 1830s by J. N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, and further popularized in the United States in the early 20th century by the wide circulation of the Scofield Reference Bible.

Kansas attorney, C.I. Scofield (1843-1921), was converted to Christ at age 36. During the 1880’s in St. Louis, James Brookes disciples Scofield teaching him dispensationalism. An ordained Congregationalist, Scofield, pastored both Congregational and Presbyterian churches. He is well-known as a popularizer of dispensationalism through his widely-known and controversial Scofield Reference Bible (1909). His work has done more to spread dispensationalism throughout the English-speaking world than anything else.

Charles C. Ryrie (1925—2016), was a teacher at Dallas Theological Seminary and taught Systematics and for over 20 years was the dean of doctoral studies. I do not recommend using either the Scofield Reference Bible or the Ryrie Study Bible. I do not accept the existence of a Rapture. I would encourage you to study covenant theology. We have referred to the Bible as The Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant). This will give you a more solid foundation for studying The End Times.

Another problem: In the Bible the word "dispensation" never refers to a period of time. Invariably its meaning is "a stewardship," "the act of dispensing," "an administration." Read the four New Testament texts in which the word "dispensation" is found: 1 Corinthians 9:17 (ESV—stewardship); Ephesians 1:10 (ESV—plan); 3:2; and Colossians 1:25.

The plan of the ages is a gospel plan. God's dealings with man have been ever the same. Faithful Abel and Enoch, Abraham and Moses, were all "saved by grace." By "faith," they trusted God’s promise. So, today God’s

remnant church is a church which is saved by faith through grace and then lives a life of thanksgiving toward God and keeps the commandments of God to demonstrate their thanks.

Pray to keep clear that God has only had one plan of salvation from eternity. Tomorrow I will spend time discussing Millennialism, another divisive issue about the end times.