

Dispensationalism

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I. Definition of Dispensationalism and a Dispensation

- A. Dispensationalism is a system of theology that recognizes the unfolding revelation of God that results in different stewardships of responsibility on the part of mankind. It recognizes both continuity and discontinuity in the way God administers the affairs of the world. It is primarily known for how it distinguishes Israel from the Church and that it teaches a number of different *dispensations*. But it also accounts for how the discontinuities fit together into a unified program of world history.
- B. A *dispensation* is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose.¹ It is often thought of as an age or period of time. However, it is not the period of time per se, but it does operate within a period of time. An age has to do with *time* while a dispensation has to do with revealed *truth*. Dispensational responsibilities from one dispensation can continue over into the next period of time.
- C. A dispensation is instituted by new revelation from God that creates a governing relationship between God and man and thus gives man a certain set of responsibilities. This effectively becomes a test of man's obedience, usually ends in man's failure, and then God's judgment.
- D. Some Biblical uses of the word – oikonomia (noun for stewardship), oikonomeo (verb to be steward), oikonomos (noun for the person who is steward)
1. The Greek dictionary lists the meanings of the noun for stewardship as (1) responsibility of management; (2) state of being arranged; (3) program of instruction or training. The idea is that there are two parties, the boss and the steward. The steward is responsible for certain things and accountable for his carrying out of the arrangement; and the boss can change the arrangement when he wants to.
 2. Ephesians 1:10 – the kingdom dispensation – “that in the **dispensation** of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth-- in Him.”
 3. Ephesians 3:2 – the dispensation of grace – “if indeed you have heard of the **dispensation** of the grace of God which was given to me for you.”
 4. Ephesians 3:9, M Text, NU Text, NAS, NIV, ESV – the dispensation of grace again – “and to make all see what is the **administration** of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.”
 5. The idea of stewardship or management is present in several texts that use this word family. For instance, Luke 12:42, 16:2,3,4,8, Rom 16:23, 1 Cor. 4:1-2, 9:17, Gal. 4:2, Col. 1:25, 1 Timothy 1:4 (*godly edification* is actually *administration of God* in the M Text and NU Text, a difference of a single Greek letter). Psalm 112:5 uses the word of the man who conducts his affairs with discretion or justice. Titus 1:7 uses the term of a pastor. 1 Peter 4:10 uses it of

¹ I follow Ryrie's definition in *Dispensationalism*.

those who have received spiritual gifts (all believers) that we are to be good stewards of that grace gift of God.

E. Some Biblical uses of the idea – that there are distinguishable economies in God’s work

Romans 6:14 – “you are not under law but under grace.” See also 6:15, Gal. 4:21, 5:18.

1 Cor. 9:20 – “and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, **though not being myself under the Law**, that I might win those who are under the law” (boldface taken from the NU text).

Gal. 4:2 – “under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.” There is the idea here of a change in stewardship at the appropriate time.

Ephesians 1:21, 2:7, and 3:5 offer the idea of a distinction between different ages, like “this age and the one to come” or “this age and previous ages.” In 3:5 this is connected with revelatory activity of God.

There is clearly a significant distinction between the old covenant economy and the church economy or what we call the dispensation of grace. Nearly all accept such a distinction even if they are not dispensational in their theological approach.

F. The Traditional Seven Dispensations

Here is a list of the seven distinguishable economies that most dispensationalists understand from Scripture. Some of the features of earlier dispensations carry on into future ones, but God changed things up enough at these boundaries to make a new distinguishable economic arrangement in His dealings with mankind.

1. Innocence – before sin entered the world
2. Conscience – after sin entered the world until the great flood
3. Human Government – after the flood, when God instituted civil government
4. Promise – when God called Abram and formed the Jewish nation up to the exodus from Egypt
5. Law – After the exodus from Egypt (1445 B.C.) throughout the remainder of the Old Testament up to the death of Christ.
6. Grace – From the death of Christ forward, including the present day, up to the second coming of Christ. Also called the church age or dispensation of the Spirit.
7. Kingdom – From the second coming of Christ until the beginning of the eternal state 1000 years later.

II. Initial Considerations

A. Why does dispensationalism matter?

1. It promotes a literal type of interpretation that affects many areas of theology and many particular passages of Scripture. The dispensational understanding of the doctrines of the Spirit (different in this age?), Satan (bound or not?), Soteriology (Spirit baptism?), the Church (origin, members, nature, purpose, relationship to Israel and the Kingdom), and Eschatology all differ significantly from the teachings of covenant theology (amillennial and postmillennial) and even progressive dispensationalism.

2. It is one of those “big four” I mentioned in the Kingdom Lectures that helps us understand the whole Bible. For instance, it helps us understand how various distinctions in the Bible work (under law vs. not under law, Israel vs. Church, etc.). It helps us answer supposed contradictions (Matthew 10 versus Matthew 28 commissions, for instance). It explains how the ministry of the Holy Spirit differs in this age from the preceding (Spirit baptism, transient theocratic anointing).
3. It provides a philosophy of history that explains all of God’s work. The governing principle of God’s work is His glory; His goal is to demonstrate His glory by establishing His kingdom rule over the world, and the means to that goal is the outworking of the dispensational program.

B. Unfounded Objections

1. One objection to dispensationalism must be dispatched immediately: there is and has only ever been one way of salvation. Dispensationalists have consistently taught this, even if some have made careless statements in this regard. Note this well:
 - a. The ultimate cause of salvation in every age is the grace of God.
 - b. The basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ.
 - c. The requirement of salvation in every age is faith.
 - d. The object of faith in every age is God.
 - e. The content of faith changes in the dispensations. We are responsible for the accumulation of God’s progressive revelation over time, whereas saints in previous ages could not be so responsible because they did not have the revelation.
2. A related object to the above has to do with the efficacy of OT sacrifices. Dispensationalists have sometimes asserted some level of moral as well as theocratic efficacy to the animal sacrifices, and this is seen by others as a contradiction of Hebrews 10:4.
 - a. I believe and teach that the OT sacrifices had a level of efficacy that include *temporary* forgiveness of sin (Lev. 4:20, for example). The animal actually did stand in as a substitute for the sinner.
 - b. Hebrews 10:4 says that such sacrifices could not grant *final* removal of sin, *final* purging of the conscience, and *full* expiation (removal) of guilt before God. Is this a contradiction?
 - c. The answer is that there was no finality in the OT system, but there is finality under the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:26, 10:10). The OT sacrifices were like interest-only payments on the mortgage debt of sin—they were effective for the purpose that they were given. Christ paid off the principal, penalties, and interest in one great sacrificial work, thus removing the need for further payments since the “mortgage” has been completely paid off.
3. Another objection can be dispatched: God has always been a God of grace (Ezra 9:8). Dispensationalism simply highlights the even more manifest grace of God in the present age (John 1:17).
4. Dispensationalism is not linked with one particular type of theology such as Arminianism or easy believism or Calvinism. Some people believe that it is, and so object to it on the basis of “guilt by association.” For instance, “Zane Hodges was a dispensationalist and taught easy believism...therefore dispensationalism must be bad.” Such a tactic to dismiss dispensationalism is not right. Dispensationalism is held by those with a wide variety of theological views in other areas. See Appendix 1 for details.

III. History of Dispensationalism

A. Classical or Original Dispensationalism

This period includes John Nelson Darby, the Niagara Bible Conference, C. I. Scofield and his reference Bible, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Harry Ironside.

It is characterized by a rigid division between Israel and the Church, an emphasis on typology, and a variety of interpretations regarding the kingdom.

B. Revised/Modified Dispensationalism

This period includes the 1950s-1980s and particularly Charles Ryrie with his publication of *Dispensationalism Today*. It also encompasses the revision of Scofield's reference Bible and such men as Clarence Mason, Alva McClain, J. Dwight Pentecost, John Walvoord.

It is characterized by a softer distinction between Israel and the Church and a more self-conscious attempt to consistently use literal hermeneutics throughout the system. A wide variety of interpretations concerning the kingdom is still evident in this phase.

Some students of the history of dispensationalism use the label Traditional/Normative to refer to both the classical and revised phases because they see little substantive difference between them.

C. Progressive Dispensationalism

This form has taken shape from 1985 to present, with significant influence from the Dispensational Study Group that is part of the Evangelical Theological Society, including Craig Blaising, Darrell Bock, and Robert Saucy.

It is characterized by an even softer distinction between Israel and the church, a more unified view of the church and the kingdom as being connected by the Davidic covenant, and a hermeneutical system called "complementary" hermeneutics in which the NT can add meaning to an OT prophecy but cannot jettison the substance of the promise.

None of the periods have wiped out adherents to the previous forms, although the middle period is, in my estimation, the most common form. The changes between the classical and revised phases are much more incremental in nature than suggested by the progressive proponents.

I personally am content to call myself a revised or traditional dispensationalist. I reject progressive dispensational emphases.

IV. Characteristics of Dispensationalism

Charles Ryrie listed three essentials or *sine qua non* of dispensationalism. These have been attacked as too reductionist and not unique to dispensationalism. I have formulated a longer list of characteristics that are at the core of dispensationalism. This is not intended to be a minimal list, nor things that are completely unique to the dispensational system.²

A. Emphasis on the Bible and its authority.

1. Dispensationalists are people of the Book. We want to hear "Thus says the Lord."

² My list grew out of Blaising's opening chapter in *Progressive Dispensationalism* (1993); Michael Vlach's booklet *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (2008); as well as Ryrie's three sine qua non.

2. We want to read it, understand it, believe it, and obey it.
 3. We want to hear the whole counsel of God preached expositively, that is, in a way that explains and applies the text of Scripture.
 4. Our interest is not to be dispensational per se, but to be biblical. We are dispensational because we believe that is what the Bible teaches. Likewise, we do not profess allegiance to a premillennial view per se, but to the Bible, which we believe teaches premillennialism. We do not simply hold on to any view just because some teacher told it to us, but because we see it taught in the Bible.
 5. And we do not profess allegiance to the Bible in isolation as if it itself is an object of worship. Rather, because we are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, we wish to honor Him by means of honoring His Book--by believing it and obeying it.
- B. A simple, plain or normal kind of literal hermeneutic, applied to all of Scripture including OT prophecy.
1. Recognizes one meaning of a passage that is stable over time.
 2. Recognizes figures of speech.
 3. Recognizes that sometimes terms or phrases have a range of meanings, but only one of the meanings in that range is referenced in a given context. For example, the *seed of Abraham* is used in various senses in Scripture.
 4. Recognition that the Bible does use typology. I believe that types can easily be overused and so their use should be strictly limited to what the Bible indicates is a type.
 5. Does take into account grammar, history, theology.
 6. Should be consistently employed, not ignored on the "hard" or prophetic texts.
- C. Recognition of progressive revelation where later revelation does not cancel or change the meaning of earlier revelation.
- The NT does not have priority over the OT in terms of reinterpreting or changing its meaning. It may expand upon or reveal new information, but not change the old information unless such is specifically mentioned (Law versus Abrahamic covenant is an example here).
- D. Distinction between Israel and the Church.
1. Need to recognize that the church and Israel differ in origin, purpose, and destiny. One is ethnically originated, the other spiritually originated; one is national and centralized, the other individual, decentralized and local assembly based; one will be the head of the nations in the millennium, the other will be the bride and co-ruler with Christ during that age.
 2. Dispensationalism recognizes some blessings God has given the church that were not given to OT Israel (Spirit baptism, an explicit knowledge of the basis of eternal forgiveness, etc.). Not all blessings are given to all people equally. Similarly, responsibilities are not assigned equally in every dispensation.
 3. Not supersessionism or what is more popularly known as replacement theology.
 4. The church is a parenthesis from one perspective—that of God's specific plan for Israel. All this means is that God sets aside Israel for a moment and plans to turn his attention more

fully to them later. From the overall perspective, the church is another equally-weighted *chapter* in the outworking of God’s unified plan for the world.

E. Future salvation and national restoration for Israel.

The Abrahamic covenant still is to be fulfilled in all its dimensions, including spiritual, political, and material.

F. The central place of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants in God’s unfolding plan.

G. A succession of dispensations, usually seven in number, that are unfolded one by one through God’s progressive revelatory activity.

Rolland McCune class notes, p. 10: “Instead of a purely linear view of God’s dealings with man (often reflected in the “time line” of older dispensationalists), dispensationalism sees historical, theological, and spiritual *progress* being made as God moves toward the climax of human history—the dispensation of the fullness of times. Thus each dispensation is on a higher plateau than previously in terms of the information God has disclosed of Himself and His will, and the blessings and responsibilities that flow therefrom.”

This arrangement accounts for not only the unity of the Bible and God’s plan, but also for their great diversity throughout time.

H. The imminent return of Christ for the church and the premillennial second coming of Christ.

These tenets are obviously not unique to dispensationalism, but if you take these away, it is doubtful whether you are left with a true dispensational position because of how these parts of integrally related to the others.

I. God’s program for the world involves the eventual establishment of the mediatorial kingdom during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

1. The nature and progress of this program is given in detail in my lectures entitled *The Kingdom of God*.
2. This kingdom will then merge into the eternal state.
3. The idea is that God will be our God and we will be his people. God’s people will dwell with Him. See Exodus 6:7, Lev. 26:12, Jer. 31:1, 31:33, 32:38, Rev. 21:3.
4. There is more to history than simply individual salvation. God’s plan includes redemption of sinners and the whole created order, including societal, political, economic, and moral factors. This all is for His glory and for our good.

The following sections discuss related or competing systems of theology. They can be catalogued on the basis of their level of continuity and discontinuity compared to traditional dispensationalism. They go too far in either one direction or the other. The traditional understanding is, in my view, the most Biblically balanced of the views.

III. Comparison to Hyper-Dispensationalism, aka Ultra-Dispensationalism

- A. Characteristic: over-emphasizes discontinuities such that it sees two churches in the NT—a Jewish church and a Gentile church. The beginning of the Gentile church is variously placed in either Acts 9, 13, or 28, but always with the ministry of Paul. This usually means that they see no Great Commission, water baptism, or perhaps even Lord’s Table. You can tell if someone is like this if

they emphasize Pauline revelation as over against all other NT revelation. They effectively pit Paul against Peter.

B. Representative Authors

1. Les Feldick, lesfeldick.org
2. E. W. Bullinger
3. Charles F. Baker, *Dispensational Theology*.
4. Cornelius R. Stam, Berean Bible Society.

C. Evaluation

1. The main issue is that we believe one dispensation covers Pentecost to the Rapture. They believe that there are two dispensations in that period of time. There simply is no clear demarcation point to create a second church-age dispensation. This is evidenced by the hyper-dispensationalists disagreement among themselves over just when the Gentile church began.
2. There is only one body and bride of Christ, the church.
3. Paul persecuted the church, so it had to exist before he did.
4. Eph 3:5 tells us that the mystery of the Jew + Gentile body was revealed to the NT apostles and prophets. This includes all of them (Peter, John, etc.), not just Paul.

IV. Comparison to Covenant Theology

A. Characteristics: under-emphasizes discontinuities such that it sees the plan of redemption as one continuous thread throughout history, and the Church is viewed as the new or true Israel.

1. Replacement Theology or what is known as *supersessionism*. There is only one people of God. Any distinction between Israel and the church is either eliminated or greatly blurred. Either Israel was so disobedient they forfeited their promises, or God had always planned to replace the national entity with a spiritual one that would inherit the promises.
2. Generally amillennial³ or postmillennial⁴ in eschatology.
3. Some are premillennial (covenant or historical premillennial).
4. Emphasis on God's redemptive plan for mankind throughout history.

B. Representative Authors

1. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, P&R 1980 ().
2. Anthony Hoekema, "Amillennialism" in *The Meaning of the Millennium*.
3. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Banner of Truth.
4. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Hendrickson (postmillennialist).
5. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, 1994 (covenant/historic premillennialist).

³ Amillennialism teaches that there is no literal millennial kingdom at the end of human history.

⁴ Postmillennialism teaches that Christ will return to the earth *at the close of* the millennial period.

6. George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Eerdmans (covenant premillennialist). The new evangelical movement generally followed Ladd's covenant premillennial approach, along with Fuller Seminary, Wheaton, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.
7. William S. LaSor, *Israel: A Biblical View*, Eerdmans, 1976.
8. Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Nelson (amillennialist).
9. Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, P&R, 1964, (postmillennial).
10. John Gerstner, O. T. Allis, George Murray, Willem Van Gemeren, Vern Poythress (amillennialist).
11. Clarence Bass, J. Barton Payne, Daniel P. Fuller, Millard Erickson (covenant premillennialist).

C. Evaluation

1. Everywhere in the NT that the word Israel is used, it refers to national, ethnic Israel. The church does not replace it.
2. God's plan is more sweeping than simply human redemption. It includes redemption of the created order and society itself. It includes matters before the fall (when there was no redemption) and after the end of world history in the eternal state (when there is no more redemption).
3. The hermeneutic CT uses for prophecy is not consistently literal. Promises made "to the house of Israel and the house of Judah" end up having no relation to those recipients.
4. Premillennialism seems obvious from the Revelation 19-20 text.
5. The New Covenant was made with Israel, not the church. There has to be some distance between the church's participation in NC blessings as compared to Israel's fulfillment of them. Covenant theology does not give any distance, but flattens everything to a single people of God under the New Covenant today.

V. Comparison to Progressive Dispensationalism

- A. Characteristics: heavier emphasis on continuity than traditional dispensationalism; desire for theological dialogue and cooperation with non-dispensationalists.
 1. Sees dispensationalism as a developing theological tradition and itself as continuing the development of that tradition.
 2. Emphasizes a holistic redemption program of God, not multiple totally distinct programs of redemption.
 3. Emphasizes that there is progress from one dispensation to the next.
 4. Says that modern updates in the evangelical understanding of hermeneutics demands an update to dispensationalism. Hermeneutics has become more complicated than just simple/literal.
 5. Maintains some distinction between Israel and the church, and believes premillennialism.
 6. Davidic covenant and Christ presently ruling from David's throne are key themes, as the messianic kingdom has been inaugurated.
 7. The New Covenant is seen as partially fulfilled, which is close to the covenant theology view of New Covenant fulfillment in the present age.

B. Representative Authors

1. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*. Zondervan, 1992.
2. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, BridgePoint 1993.
3. Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*. Zondervan, 1993.

C. Evaluation

1. The complementary hermeneutic is essentially a form of *sensus plenior*, that is, *fuller sense* hermeneutics. This means that PD finds more meaning in the OT text than the OT reader could have found. That additional meaning comes from NT revelation, in effect “read back” into the OT. Against this view, I believe that a text always means what it always meant. The meaning is in the text, not outside of it, and that includes that the NT does not change the meaning of an OT text. It may augment our understanding of it or add additional, previously unrevealed information. But it cannot change the meaning.
2. Places a heavy emphasis on evangelical scholarship and especially evangelical hermeneutical method. My objection is that we should not be trying to move closer to evangelical scholarship, but to the Bible as God’s revealed word. We are fundamentalist types who have come to accept and obey the Word of God as inerrant and authoritative. Evangelical scholarship has left evangelicalism in a mess and without a clear message. Nearly everything is up for grabs in evangelicalism (creation, eschatology, etc.). Not so with those who are straightforward Bible believers.
3. PD downplays the difference between Israel and the church so much as to make one wonder whether there is much of a difference at all.
4. PD is the first dispensational type of thought to make the Davidic covenant active in any sense today. But that covenant is strictly for Israel and does not have any clause that fits the church.
5. Misses the fact that traditional dispensationalism placed an emphasis on progress from one dispensation to the next. By missing this emphasis, PD proponents “created” a problem that did not exist in order to solve that problem.
6. Redemption oriented, like covenant theology. In general, PD is a mediating position between traditional dispensationalism and covenant premillennialism. It seems to lean to the latter moreso than the former.

Conclusion

When I first learned dispensationalism, I really began to understand the whole Bible. I hope this session whets your appetite in the same direction.

MAP

Appendix 1: What Dispensationalism is Not

Some Dispensationalists may have held these beliefs in the past, or may hold them today, but that does not impugn the basic integrity of the system. In other words, we cannot impute guilt to the system based on some of its adherents also holding to these positions which are not inherent parts of the system. So--Dispensationalism does not entail...

1. Different ways of salvation. Perhaps the most serious and simultaneously tiresome of all arguments leveled against Dispensationalism is that it teaches two ways of salvation: salvation by works in the Old Testament and salvation by faith in the New Testament. This argument has long ago been debunked, but I have had it brought up to me in very recent arguments against Dispensationalism. I will probably say more about this point later, but suffice it to say that Dispensationalism teaches ONE way of salvation in all times of history--sourced in God's grace, through conscious faith, on the basis of the substitutionary atonement accomplished in the cross-work of Jesus Christ.

2. A particular view of Spirit Indwelling. Some Dispensationalists have taught that the Spirit's indwelling in a believer could be lost or removed in times of divine chastisement, or that not all regenerated people were necessarily indwelt in the OT. However, there are other Dispensationalists who teach that the Spirit indwells all believers permanently in every age. Some Dispensationalists make a distinction between the OT and NT ministries of indwelling as to their extent or the particular benefits involved, but neither basic view is entailed by the system. The Dispensational approach does note distinctions in God's working in various ages, so it may be "spring-loaded" to find differences in more places than are actually there.

3. Exactly 7 Dispensations. Many Dispensationalists hold to 7 Dispensations. This author does as well. However, whether there are 8, 6, 5, 4, etc. is not inherent in the system itself. Of course, if you get down to 2 (OT and NT) then you likely are not a Dispensationalist.

4. Wooden literalism. Another worn-out argument against Dispensationalists is that they can only interpret the Bible according to a very stiff kind of literalism. I don't have any personal experience with Dispensationalists who are this way. Many seem to be able to find a lot of meaning in parables and other figures of speech (many times, they find more meaning than is actually there!). The fact is that many Dispensationalists work diligently to properly understand the various figures of speech and poetic parts of the Bible. Dispensationalists do not ignore the various forms and genres of the Scripture. Wooden literalism is not entailed by the system.

5. Easy believism. Dispensationalism does not entail a watered down view of the transformative power of God's grace. Nor does it require one to accept that faith is not necessarily followed by works, or that justification is not inevitably followed by sanctification. Just because some Dispensationalists view the doctrine of salvation this way does not mean that others do.

6. A particular view of Calvinism. You do not have to be a three-point Calvinist (or less) to hold to Dispensationalism. There are plenty of four- and five-point Calvinists who are also Dispensational (believe it or not!).

7. A particular view of the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon on the mount is relegated by some D's (my new shorthand for Dispensationalists) to only the kingdom dispensation in the future. This beloved

passage of Scripture does arouse some emotions, to be sure, and its interpretation is not trivial, coming as it does at the end of the Law dispensation, when the Lord genuinely offered the Kingdom to Israel, and at the beginning of the age of Grace. However, many traditional D's find a great deal of application of the passage to the modern era.

8. A hypothetical atonement. Since I mentioned the offer of the Kingdom, I might as well also say that Dispensationalism does not require you to believe that such an offer makes the cross of Christ only an afterthought, or that it hypothetically could have been avoided. Nope--it was necessary for Christ to suffer, and then be glorified, in accordance with the OT prophets. No D I know of suggests that the Cross could have been avoided.

9. A mutilated Bible. Dispensationalism recognizes a great deal of continuity between the Dispensations, so one is not required to "snip sections out of the Bible and throw them away!"

10. That salvation is unimportant. Since Covenant theology emphasizes that the program of history is centered around the salvation of man, it is easy to overlook that D's recognize a VERY IMPORTANT place for the salvation of man within God's eternal program. D's just want to remind us that the glory of God is the ultimate goal of all things--that all revolves around God, not ultimately around man.

11. That there are no covenants in the Bible. This is perhaps stating the case somewhat extremely, but Dispensationalists do believe the covenants--like the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. The idea of covenant is important in the Scriptures. Again, D's believe that there are other issues that rise to a higher level of importance.

12. Zionism. This is a hot-button issue. D's do not uniformly give tacit approval to everything Israel does. Neither do D's uniformly say that Israel should have complete possession of the land today, particularly in the face of their rejection of God and Christ. Not all D's believe that we need to continue to give money to Israel to maintain blessings under the Abrahamic covenant. In other words, a "Zionistic" type of Dispensationalism exists, but it is not entailed in the system.

13. Sensus plenior, equivocal use of language, or prophetic double reference. There are a good number of D's who are committed to a literal hermeneutic that is associated with a univocal use of language, namely that a word means only one thing in a given context. There are many others who believe that double-meaning or some kind of fuller sense is found by the NT authors in their understanding of OT Scripture.

14. A particular view of Adam's headship in Romans 5. Many Dispensationalists believe that Adam's headship was of the realistic or seminal sort. In this view, when Adam sinned, humanity in him also sinned, and this sin then properly belongs to each individual in the race. However, there are others, like myself, who understand that Adam's headship was a representative or federal headship that resulted in the immediate imputation of Adam's sin to all of his posterity. Note what McCune writes in the second volume of his Systematic Theology: "It is sometimes suggested that this view assumes covenant theology and is, therefore, incompatible with Dispensationalism. There is, though, no necessary connection between this view and either system" (Rolland McCune, A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, volume 2, p. 79, fn. 24.).

15. A particular study Bible or Bible version. I'm thinking here of the Scofield Reference Bible, in either the 1909 or 1917 KJV editions, the 1967 KJV edition with word changes, or the 1989 NKJV edition. I think

some folks believe that dispensationalists are Scofield-carrying types. To be sure, some are. But that doesn't mean they embrace everything that Scofield taught. And, there are better study Bibles with better study notes and cross-references. An NIV Study Bible or ESV Study Bible (as strange as that may seem!) can be just as useful to the dispensationalist. So, don't let the study Bible or Bible version someone is carrying trick you.

Summary of the Dispensations and Covenants

rev. January 12, 2006

Dispensations						Covenants		
Dispensation	Begin	End	Responsibility	Failures	Judgment	Corresponding Covenant Conditional (C) or Not (UC)	To Whom	Continues Today?
1. Innocence	Creation Gen. 1:26-27	Fall Gen. 3:6	Multiply, have dominion, eat vegetation, etc. Not eat of tree of knowledge of good and evil	Ate of the tree Gen. 3:6	Curse on Serpent, Woman, Man, ground; spiritual and physical death Gen. 3:14-19	Edenic (C) Gen. 1:26-30, 2:16-17	Whole Race	No
2. Conscience	Fall Gen. 3:7	Flood Gen. 8:19	Live according as God commanded (ruling of the Spirit, Gen. 6:3)	Wickedness Gen. 6:5	Flood Gen. 7:17-24	Adamic (UC) Gen. 3:14-19	Whole Race	Yes
3. Human Government	Flood Gen. 8:20	Call of Abraham Gen. 11:9	Multiply, have dominion, eat meat, capital punishment, etc.	Drunkenness, rebellion Gen. 9:21-22	Tower of Babel Gen. 11:7-9	Noahic (UC) No more flood; rainbow Gen. 8:20-9:17	Whole Race	Yes
4. Promise	Call of Abraham Gen. 11:10, 12:1-4	Giving of Mosaic Law Ex. 19:2	Believe in the promises of God	Murmuring Ex. 14:11-12 Sins of all sorts Gen. 37:26-27	Bondage in Egypt Ex. 3:7	Abrahamic (UC) Gen. 12:1-3, 13:14-17, 15:1-18 a) seed/nation b) land - Gen. 12:7 c) world blessing	Jew	Yes
5. Law	Giving and Accepting of Mosaic Law Ex. 19:3, 8	Death of Christ Acts 2	Obey the law	Judges, Kings, disobey the law, etc.	Babylonian and Assyrian Captivities	Mosaic (C) Ex. 19:1-8, 20:1-31:18, Deut. 28	Jew	No
6. Grace <u>You are here</u>	Death of Christ, Start of Church Acts 2	Rapture, Tribulation 1 Thess 4:13, 5:9, Rev. 19	Believe in Jesus Christ for salvation (Acts 16:31) and obey Christ's commandments (John 13:34, 14:15, 14:21, 15:10-12; Acts 1:2).	Unbelief, apostasy, etc. Rom. 10:16, 1 John 2:19 1 Tim 4:1-3	Tribulation Rev. 6-19 Judgments of Israel and Nations Ez. 20:35-38, Matt. 25:31-46	New Covenant (UC) for Church - Luke 22:20 New Covenant based on work of Christ	Jew Gentile	Present Age
7. Kingdom	Second Coming Lasts 1000 years Rev. 20:1-6 Matt. 24:30ff	Great White Throne Judgment Rev. 20:15	Obey the King – Jesus Christ, ruling from Jerusalem	Rebellion Rev. 20:7-9, Zech. 14:16-14 Sinners still present Is. 65:20	Destruction of rebels, old Earth and Heaven Rev. 20:9, 2 Pet. 3:7, 10-12 Second Death in Lake of Fire Rev. 20:10-14	Davidic (UC) Seed - 2 Sam. 7:5-19 Palestinian (UC) Land – Deut. 30:1-10, Ez. 34:25-29, Amos 9:14-15 New Covenant (UC) for Israel (Salvation for nation) Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-12	Jew Jew Jew	Yet Future
Eternal State	New Heaven and Earth Rev. 21:1ff	NEVER!	Serve God - Rev. 22:3 Reign with God Dan. 7:18, 27	None. No more sin, etc. – Rev. 21:4				

The above table explains the Dispensational approach to the Bible. As shown, there are Biblical covenants associated with the various dispensations. Covenant theology has different covenants called the “theological covenants.” There are three of them with very slim Biblical support: Covenant of Redemption (Titus 1:2, Heb. 13:20 – everlasting covenant), Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace.