

DISPENSATIONALISM

Since the positions and conclusions in Endtimes.org are in line with the Dispensational System of Theology, or point of view, the terms need to be explained. There is no need to fear these terms. They describe some simple concepts related to our understanding of the Old Testament Covenants and how God will develop His kingdom program. Even if you have negative feelings about the term *Dispensationalism*, please go through the following brief explanation of what it is. It could be that it has never been clearly explained. Dispensationalism has influenced the doctrinal beliefs of many churches, including the Baptist church, the Bible churches, the Pentecostal churches, and many other non-denominational Evangelical churches. You may even be Dispensational in your thinking although not be calling yourself a Dispensationalist. Christian is always a better term, but terms like *Dispensationalist* helps to define where we are coming from when it comes to our views on Endtimes and the present and future Kingdom of God.

Definition

- **A Dispensation** - The system by which anything is administered. In Christian terms, looking back, it refers to a period in history whereby God dealt with man in a specific way. (Conscience, Law, Grace)
- **Dispensationalism** - A system of theology that sees God working with man in different ways during different dispensations. While 'Dispensations' are not ages, but stewardships, or administrations, we tend to see them now as ages since we look back on specific time periods when they were in force.
- Dispensationalism is distinguished by three key principles.
 - 1 - A clear distinction between God's program for Israel and God's program for the Church.**
 - 2 - A consistent and regular use of a literal principle of interpretation**
 - 3 - The understanding of the purpose of God as His own glory rather than the salvation of mankind.**

Ok, what does this mean in layman's terms. Read on.

What about the Dispensations?

The key to Dispensationalism is not in the definition or recognition of a specific number of dispensations. This is a misunderstanding of the opponents of Dispensationalism. Almost all theologians will recognize that God worked differently through the Law than He did through Grace. That is not to say that salvation was attained in a different manner, but that the responsibilities given to man by God were different during the period of the giving of the Law up to the cross, just as they were different for Adam and Eve. The Jews were to show their true faith

by doing what God had commanded, even though they couldn't keep the moral Law. That's what the sacrifices were for. When the apostle Paul said that as to the Law he was blameless, he didn't mean that he never sinned, but that he obeyed God by following the guidelines of the Law when he did sin, and animal sacrifices were offered for his sins by the priests in the temple. Salvation came not by keeping the law, but by seeing it's true purpose in exposing sin, and turning to God for salvation. The Jews weren't saved based on how well they kept the law, (as many of them thought) as that would be salvation by works. They were saved through faith in God, and the work of Christ on the cross was counted for them, even though it hadn't happened yet.

Dispensationalists will define three key dispensations, (1) The Mosaic Law, (2) The present age of Grace, and (3) the future Millennial Kingdom. Most will agree about the first two, and Covenant theology will disagree about the third, seeing this as the 'eternal state'. (Since they don't see a literal Millennial Kingdom - the future literal fulfillment of the Davidic Kingdom.)

A greater breakdown of specific dispensations is possible, giving most traditional Dispensationalists seven recognizable dispensations.

1. Innocence - Adam
2. Conscience - After man sinned, up to the flood
3. Government - After the flood, man allowed to eat meat, death penalty instituted
4. Promise - Abraham up to Moses and the giving of the Law
5. Law - Moses to the cross
6. Grace - The cross to the Millennial Kingdom
7. Millennial Kingdom - A 1000 year reign of Christ on earth centered in Jerusalem

While not everyone needs to agree on this breakdown, the point from the Dispensationalists view is that God is working with man in a progressive way. At each stage man has failed to be obedient to the responsibilities set forth by God. The method of salvation, justification by faith alone, never changes through the dispensations. The responsibilities God gives to man does change however. The Jews were to be obedient to the Law if they wished God's blessing of Land. If they were disobedient, they would be scattered. However, God promises to always bring them back to the land promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant. After the cross, believers no longer need the Law, which pointed to Christ as the one that would take away sin through his perfect sacrifice. (*Heb 10*) We are under a new Law, the Law of Grace. We have more revelation about God, and are no longer required to keep ceremonial laws given to the Jews. The moral law is always in effect as a guide, but we are no longer condemned by it, since we have a savior that has overcome for us.

Remember that making a distinction between these time periods is not what makes someone Dispensational. Recognizing the progressive nature, and seeing the church as part of Plan A and not Plan B is what makes someone Dispensational. Dispensationalists see a clear distinction between God's program for Israel and God's program for the church. God is not finished with Israel. The church didn't take Israel's place. They have been set aside temporarily, but in the Endtimes will be brought back to the promised land, cleansed, and given a new heart. (Gen 12, Deut 30, 2 Sam 7, Jer 31)

Just to clarify what I mean by Plan A and Plan B, I can see how some would say that the church is God's Plan B. However, God knew that the Jews would reject their Messiah. Daniel 9 tells us that the Messiah would be cut off, or killed, and Isaiah 53 speaks of the suffering servant. To call the church Plan B sounds too much like it was his second best plan, as if his efforts were thwarted. God has one redemptive plan for all mankind that was foretold in Genesis 3. The Messiah would come and defeat Satan and death. Now, this doesn't mean that his plan for Israel, and the promises/covenants made with the forefathers are null and void. They are not.

So what is the key to Dispensationalism?

The literal method of interpretation is the key. Using the literal method of interpreting the biblical covenants and prophecy leads to a specific set of core beliefs about God's kingdom program, and what the future will hold for ethnic Israel and for the Church. We therefore recognize a distinction between Israel and the Church, and a promised future earthly reign of Christ on the throne of David. (The Davidic Kingdom.) This leads a person to some very specific conclusions about the Endtimes.

- Israel must be re-gathered to their land as promised by God.
- Daniel's seventieth week prophecy specifically refers to the purging of the nation Israel, and not the Church. These were the clear words spoken to Daniel. The church doesn't need purging from sin. It is already clean.
- Some of the warnings in Matthew 24 are directed at the Jews, and not the Church (since God will be finishing His plan with national Israel)
- A [Pretribulation rapture](#) - Israel is seen in Daniel as the key player during the tribulation, not the Church. God removes the elect when he brings judgment on the world. i.e. Noah, John 14, 1 Thess 4:16.
- Premillennialism - A literal 1000 year Millennial Kingdom, where Christ returns before the Millennium starts. Revelation 20 doesn't give us a reason to interpret the 1000 years as symbolic. Also, Dispensationalists see the promised literal reign of Christ in the OT. Note the chronological order of events between Revelation 19-21.

Charles Ryrie in his book 'Dispensationalism' points out that some Christians have actually called Dispensationalism heretical. Actually it is people that use words like 'heretical' for non essential doctrinal beliefs that are the ones that cause division in the Church. Whether a person believes in a literal future Millennial Kingdom is not essential Christian doctrine. It doesn't rank up there with the Deity of Christ, the Trinity, the Atonement, etc. A house divided against itself will not stand. When we get to heaven, or the Millennial Kingdom, whichever will come first, we will understand the truth of all the word of God, but until then there are essential doctrines of the faith that are worth going to battle over. Others are not, since we don't want to be found going to battle with each other, and therefore, with Jesus Christ Himself.

The History of Dispensationalism

While the opponents of Dispensationalism will point out that as a system of theology it is relatively new, it is notable that there is evidence from the early church writers that there was clearly an understanding that God dealt with His people differently in progressive dispensations, and that Israel wasn't seen as replaced by the Church. A small reference to some of these writings is found in "The Moody Handbook of Theology" by Paul Ennis. He mentions the following as being in the history of the development of Dispensationalism.

- Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165)
- Iranaeus (A.D. 130-200)
- Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-220)
- Augustine (A.D. 354-430)

Of the above Ryrie says "It is not suggested nor should it be inferred that these early Church Fathers were dispensationalists in the modern sense of the word. But it is true that some of them enunciated principles which later developed into Dispensationalism, and it may be rightly said that they held primitive or early dispensational concepts." With this understanding, the following have written in support of some or all dispensational principles.

Some Dispensational writers

- Pierre Poiret (1646-1719)
- John Edwards (1637-1716)
- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
- John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)
- C.I. Scofield (1843-1921)
- Lewis Sperry Chafer
- Charles Ryrie
- Dwight Pentecost
- John Walvoord

The real Christians are found in the book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. The early church fathers listed:

- Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165)
- Iranaeus (A.D. 130-200)
- Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-220)
- Augustine (A.D. 354-430)
- Cyprian
- Papias
- Origen
- Jerome
- Tertullian
- Ignatius
- Polycarp

Did not believe the Bible, they rejected and corrected the Word of God. They spiritualized, allegorized the Bible and replaced the Word of God with a stale, warmed over Greek philosophy.