

## DISPENSATIONALISM

**One of the most important words a believer will ever know when it comes to understanding the Bible is “dispensationalism.” It is the key that unlocks the true interpretation to all Scripture.**

**Every true believer in Jesus Christ is a dispensationalist!** We are not claiming that every believer admits he is a dispensationalist or that every believer knows he is a dispensationalist, or that every believer has been instructed in the doctrine of dispensationalism. What we are dogmatically and unequivocally saying is that “**every believer is a dispensationalist!**”

Five simple evidences prove the point beyond any shadow of a doubt:

- 1) If you believe there is a difference between the O.T. and the N.T., you are a dispensationalist (Joshua 1:2).
- 2) If you believe you are saved by trusting in the shed blood of Jesus Christ and not the shed blood of an animal, if you don't bring a lamb to offer to church, you are a dispensationalist (Hebrews 10:10-12, 18).
- 3) If you believe you worship God at Church and not at the Temple in Jerusalem, you are a dispensationalist (Ezek. 43:7).
- 4) If you believe that you are entitled to heaven, not land in Palestine, which God has promised to Israel, you are a dispensationalist (2 Cor. 12:2).
- 5) If you believe you worship God on the first day of the week, Sunday, not the seventh day of the week, Saturday, you are a dispensationalist (1 Cor. 16:2).

Whether you know it, like it, understand it or acknowledge it, the fact remains, every believer is a dispensationalist. Since this is a reality for every believer, it is imperative that every believer ought to know and understand what dispensationalism actually is. In fact, as this study will prove, **if you are going to properly understand the Bible, you must come to terms with dispensationalism.** This study is designed to do just that.

**QUESTION #1** – What is the actual meaning of the word “dispensation”?

Actually defining dispensationalism is difficult because there are so many different definitions given by different people. But certainly a good place to start is with the word itself, even though we cannot build a definition on the word itself. To analyze this, there are two main areas of consideration:

**Area of Consideration #1** - The actual meaning of the word “dispensation.”

The actual word “dispensation” is Latin in its origin and refers to economical management or superintendence. However, this Latin word is derived from a Greek word (οικονομία) which refers to a house manager or household administrator or one who regulates or arranges things for a specific dispensation. During the classical era of Greek, the word specifically referred to an office of management or an entrusted stewardship, but later, during the Koine era of Greek, it came to be a general term that referred to an administration or dispensation (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 313).

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Actually the Greek word “dispensation” (οικο-νομια) is a word derived from two Greek words: “oikos” (οικος) which means a house or dwelling and “nomos” (νομος) which means a law (*Ibid.*, pp. 313, 305). A good way to understand this would be “**laws that govern a specific house-hold.**”

We may illustrate the point of dispensationalism by using this very definition. In a house there are various rooms and each room has a particular function for a particular time. Each room has its own rules and guidelines, which contribute to the whole of the house. For example, the kitchen is that part of the house where the food is prepared. Normally the time periods where you find a lot of activity here are at breakfast time, lunch time and supper time. Typically, any person who is in the kitchen at these times is there to help prepare and serve the food.

On the other hand, another room is the laundry room. If one is in that room, that person is in a room that is designed to do the laundry. If a person were in the laundry area and thought that it was his responsibility to prepare or cook food or if the person were in the kitchen area and thought the primary responsibility was to do the laundry, there would be a real chaos and disaster to the way the house works. There would be a breakdown of the normal rules of how the dispensation of each room was to work. As a result, the people in the house would be very malnourished and very confused.

So it is with dispensationalism. We may picture the whole program of God as a big house, with various rooms (*we will discuss the potential number of rooms later in this study*). Each room gets a specific use at different times, depending upon what God wants accomplished according to His program. By sovereign decree of God, we have been placed into one of those rooms and unless we understand how things work in the room we are in, we will be very malnourished and confused and the end result will be a theological disaster.

Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. Just as in a house, not all rooms are for the same purpose, so not all time periods in the program of God are for the same purpose.

**Area of Consideration #2** - The actual uses in the Bible of the word “dispensation.”

The verb form (οικονομew) and the feminine noun form (οικονομια) and the masculine noun form (οικονομος) are used several times in the New Testament:

- 1) In Luke 12:42, the word is translated “steward” (οικονομος)
- 2) In Luke 16:1, 3, 8, the word is translated “manager” (οικονομος)
- 3) In Luke 16:2, 3, 4, the word is translated “stewardship” (οικονομια)
- 4) In Romans 16:23, the word is translated “treasurer” (οικονομος)
- 5) In I Corinthians 4:1, the word is translated “stewards” (οικονομος)
- 6) In I Corinthians 9:17, the word is translated “stewardship” (οικονομια)
- 7) In Ephesians 1:10, the word is translated “administration” (οικονομια)
- 8) In Ephesians 3:2, the word is translated “stewardship” (οικονομια)
- 9) In Ephesians 3:9, the word is translated “administration” (οικονομια)
- 10) In Colossians 1:25, the word is translated “stewardship” (οικονομια)

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- 11) In I Timothy 1:4, the word is translated “administration” (οικονομια)
- 12) In Titus 1:7, the word is translated “steward” (οικονομος)
- 13) In I Peter 4:10, the word is translated “stewards” (οικονομς)

**In analyzing these words, we may certainly conclude that the idea of a dispensation has to do with stewardship and appointed times and administrations.**

**One of the arguments against dispensationalism is that the word itself does not have to do with time.** In fact, those who adhere to this suggest a dispensation is a stewardship or administration that is not time related. However, careful study does suggest it is time related.

Jesus specifically broke things down into a time frame in the program of God when He spoke of various ages. For example, in Matthew 13:40, He speaks of tares that will be burned “at the end of the age.” In Matthew 28:20, He speaks about being with His disciples “even to the end of the age.” Paul speaks of “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7) and so does the writer of Hebrews specifically speak “of the age to come” (Heb. 6:5). This clearly indicates that there are different time periods in the plan of God and different ages.

**Without a doubt the most important of all of the passages on the subject of dispensationalism are those found in Ephesians.**

In Ephesians 1:10, the Apostle Paul connects the subject of dispensationalism to time. He specifically brings up the subject of “fullness of the times” and “the summing up of all things in Christ” both in the heavens and on the earth. This, then, gives us our license to connect Dispensationalism to time related things.

This is a very important point to see because some theologians claim that the actual word “dispensation” (οικονομια) does not actually refer to “a period of time.” But we would suggest that no Biblical word may properly be understood apart from its context. It is the context that makes sense of the word and **when one looks into this critical context of Ephesians, the word “dispensation” is clearly connected to time.**

In Ephesians 3:2, 9, the Apostle Paul connects the subject of dispensationalism to God’s grace. He also presents the idea that until this time, this had been a mystery (3:9). He also mentions that there were various “ages” in which this had been hidden (3:9). In this very context, Paul says that this dispensational mystery was about a time when Gentiles could be a fellow partaker with the Jews of a relationship with God through the Gospel (3:6). So Paul’s concept of a dispensation did have various time ages in view.

**From this one important book of Ephesians, we may clearly see that dispensations have to do with time, with ages, with Jews, with Gentiles and with a period known as God’s grace. Dispensationalism has to do with God’s purposes at various times in the heavens and on the earth.**