

## DISPENSATIONALISM (7)

6. Dr. Renald Showers defines dispensationalism “as a system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible’s philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God” (*An Introduction to Dispensational Theology*, p. 1). He also adds: “a particular way of God administering His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history” (*There Really is a Difference*, p. 30).

7. A leader for the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry defines it this way: “Dispensationalism is an approach to Biblical interpretation which states that God uses different means of administering His will to people during different periods of history...” (*Dispensationalism*, p. 1).

When we are interviewing people for membership we discuss dispensationalism. The way we define it is this way:

**A dispensation is a distinct period of time in God’s sovereign progressive program with mankind in which He chooses to reveal and do specific things and govern and operate in unique and different ways, depending on what He desires to accomplish in that specific period of time in His program.**

**God deals with men in different ways at different times depending on what His program and will is at that time.**

For example, when God was working with Israel as a nation and specifically taking her from Egypt to the Promised Land, He parted the Red Sea. His goal was to take that nation to the Promised Land. Now today, He will not part any sea because His purpose in this present time zone is not to take Israel to the Promised Land.

Although it seems that many do not want to bring time into dispensationalism, time is at the heart of it. A dispensation is a time zone in the plan of God. In that time zone God moves and ministers differently, depending on His specific plan in that particular time zone.

One easy illustration of this is the O.T. time zone and the N.T. time zone. In the O.T., animals were sacrificed in order to be right with God. In the N.T., animals are no longer sacrificed. What that teaches us is God has a plan that He executes in different time zones.

Now some bring into the idea of every dispensation the failure of man. So they say man is tested and fails so God moves man into another time zone.

I have always struggled with that. As far as man being put to the test and failing, that is a given. Man is a failure no matter what the dispensation. Ever since Genesis with one simple mandate, “don’t eat of one tree,” man is a failure. I don’t necessarily see that as a critical part of dispensationalism, other than this became the basis for God sending His own Son literally into this world. Known to God are all of His works from beginning to end (Acts 15:18). Clearly the failure of man is not a factor in determining a specific dispensation.

## DISPENSATIONALISM (8)

Two key questions: 1) What starts a dispensation; 2) What ends a dispensation and begins another dispensation?

I spent years in Calvary Church in Grand Rapids and George Gardiner used to say that when God starts a dispensation, He starts it by doing something dramatic and He ends a dispensation by also doing something dramatic.

**QUESTION #5** – How many dispensations are there in the Bible?

Dr. Charles Ryrie said that he believed there were three essentials necessary to determining this:

- 1) Realize distinction between Israel and the Church;
- 2) A consistent rule of literal interpretation of Scripture;
- 3) A realization that the purpose of God is to glorify Himself, not save all mankind.

Ryrie concluded as long as these three essentials were in view, the names and numbers of dispensations were relatively minor (*Dispensationalism*, p. 45).

Dr. Showers says three essentials for a dispensation are: 1) God has a specific way of ruling; 2) Man has a specific responsibility to obey God in accordance to how God rules; 3) God reveals new truth and deals with men in a new way (*There Really is a Difference*, p. 30).

Now as we have already seen, some believe there are different numbers of dispensations:

Jonathan Edwards said there were two—Moses and Christ;

Dallas Seminary in doctrinal statement mentions three (Law, Grace, Kingdom);

Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria said there were four (Adam, Noah, Moses, Christ);

Tertullian said there were five (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ);

Justin Martyr said there were six;

J. N. Darby and C. I. Scofield said there were seven.

Others have said there are eight or nine:

**Dispensation #1** - Dispensation of Innocence - (Adam to expulsion from Eden). Gen.1-3

God classified Adam and Eve as good (Gen. 1:27, 31). Man and woman were naked and innocent, with no shame (Gen. 2:25). God actually walked and talked with them (Gen. 3:8).

**Dispensation #2** - Dispensation of Conscience - (Expulsion from Eden to Flood). Gen. 4-8

We may establish that in some respects this dispensation of time runs until Moses and the law. Because during this time all people die as a penalty for sin, but they do not as yet have the law so conscience is determining right and wrong. Romans 2:15; 5:14.

**Dispensation #3** - Dispensation of Government - (Noah to Abraham). Gen. 9-12

During this time God gave man the right to govern over animals and man (Gen. 9:2, 6).

## **DISPENSATIONALISM (9)**

**Dispensation #4** - Dispensation of Promise and Patriarchal Rule - (Abraham to Moses).  
Gen. 12-Exodus

Hebrews 11:8-9 speaks of this period of time in which Abraham looked forward to the time when God would fulfill His promise to Abraham and his family.

**Dispensation #5** - Dispensation of the Law (Moses to death of Christ) Exodus until Christ.  
Gospel of John was very clear to point this out in John 1:17.

**Dispensation #6** - Dispensation of Grace (Death of Christ to Rapture of church).  
John thru Revelation 3

**Dispensation #7** - Dispensation of God's wrath in Tribulation (Rapture to Second Coming).  
Revelation 4-19

We believe there are statements in the Bible that clearly indicate the Tribulation will be a distinct period of time unlike any that has ever existed in the history of the world (Dan. 12:2; Joel 2:1-2; Matt. 24:21).

**Dispensation #8** - Dispensation of Millennium (Second Coming until end of 1000 years).  
Revelation 20

This will be a time when Satan is bound and Christ is reigning on this earth (Revelation 20:4). During this time God will fulfill all Kingdom promises that He gave to Israel.

**Dispensation #9** - Dispensation of New Heaven, New Earth, New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22).

The adjective "new" (Rev. 21:1-2) is kainos. There are two different Greek adjectives that are translated "new." Neos which means new in time; Kainos which means brand new in quality. A used car may be neos, meaning new in time to you, or kainos, meaning brand new in quality, never before in existence. Kainos means this is brand new (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 226). Obviously this is a brand new dispensation.

**QUESTION #6** – What do we believe are the key critical dispensational time moments of the Bible?

There are certain time zones that need to be recognized if one is to rightly divide Scripture. In each of these time zones things work differently depending on what God is doing or desires to do.

From this teacher's perspective we see nine specific dispensations:

**Dispensation Time Zone #1** - The time period of Adam and Eve in Eden. (Genesis 2-3)

**This is the first time zone often called the dispensation of Innocence.** During this time period things were very unique. During this period Adam and Eve were naked and innocent, with no shame about anything (Gen. 2:25).