

## Dispensationalism and End Times

One of the most important underlying theological concepts for dispensationalists is *progressive revelation*. While some nondispensationalists start with progressive revelation in the New Testament and refer this revelation back into the Old Testament, dispensationalists begin with progressive revelation in the Old Testament and read forward in a historical sense. Therefore, there is an emphasis on a gradually developed unity as seen in the entirety of Scripture. Biblical covenants are intricately tied to the dispensations. When these Biblical covenants are compared and contrasted, the result is a historical ordering of different dispensations. Also with regard to the different Biblical covenant promises, dispensationalists place emphasis on to whom these promises were written, the original recipients. This has led to certain fundamental dispensational beliefs, such as a distinction between Israel and the church.

### Historical-grammatical interpretation

Another important theological concept is the emphasis on what is referred to as the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. This is often popularly referred to as the "literal" interpretation of Scripture. Just as Israel literally experienced the curses spoken of in the Old Testament, dispensationalists believe that they will one day, literally, receive the blessings spoken of in the Old Testament. Just as it is with progressive revelation, the historical-grammatical method is not a concept or practice that is exclusive just to dispensationalists. However, a dispensational distinctive is created when the historical-grammatical method of interpretation is closely coupled with an emphasis on progressive revelation along with the historical development of the covenants in Scripture.

### Distinction between Israel and the church

All dispensationalists hold to a clear distinction between Israel and the church. Israel is an ethnic nation consisting of Jews, beginning with Abraham and continuing in existence to the present. The church consists of all saved individuals in this present dispensation - i.e., from the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 until the time of the Rapture. The distinction between Israel and the church is not mutually exclusive, as there is a recognized overlap between the two. The overlap consists of Jewish Christians (such as Peter and Paul) who are ethnically Jewish and also have faith in Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists also believe that toward the end of the Tribulation, Israel as a nation will turn and embrace Jesus as their Messiah right before his second coming.

### Dispensations

The label "dispensationalism" is derived from the idea that biblical history is best understood through division into a series of chronologically successive dispensations. The number of dispensations held are typically three, four, seven or eight. The three- and four-dispensation schemes are often referred to as minimalist, as they recognize the commonly held major breaks within Biblical history. The seven- and eight-dispensation schemes are often closely associated with the announcement or inauguration of certain Biblical covenants. Next is a table outlining the eight-dispensation scheme:

Schemes	Range of Bible Chapters							
	Genesis 1-3	Genesis 3-8	Genesis 9-11	Genesis 12 to Exodus 19	Exodus 20 to Acts 1	Acts 2 to Revelation 20	Revelation 20:4-6	Revelation 20-22
7 or 8 Dispensational Scheme	Innocence or Edenic	Conscience or Antediluvian	Civil Government	Patriarchal or Promise	Mosaic or Law	Grace or Church	Millennial Kingdom	Eternal State or Final

These different dispensations are not separate ways of salvation. During each of them man is reconciled to God in only one way, i.e. by God's grace through the work of Christ that was accomplished on the cross and vindicated in His resurrection. Before the cross, man was saved on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice to come, through believing the revelation thus far given him. Since the cross, man has been saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom revelation and redemption are consummated. On man's part the continuing requirement is obedience to revelation of God. This obedience is a stewardship of faith. Although the divine revelation unfolds progressively, the deposit of truth in earlier time-periods is not discarded, rather it is cumulative. Thus conscience (moral responsibility) is an abiding truth in human life (Ro. 2:15; 9:1; 2 Co. 1:12; 4:2), although it does not continue as a dispensation. Similarly, the saved of this present dispensation are "not under law" as a specific test of obedience to divine revelation (Gal. 5:18; cp. Gal 2:16; 3:11), yet the law remains an integral part of Dispensational teaching, which clarifies that, although Christ fulfilled the law for us, by it we have had the knowledge of sin (Rom 7:7), and it is an integral part of the Holy Scriptures, which, to the redeemed, are profitable for "training in righteousness" (2 Ti. 3:16-17; cp. Ro. 15:4). The purpose of each dispensation, then, is to place man under a specific rule of conduct, but such stewardship is not a condition of salvation. In every past dispensation unregenerate man has failed, and is failing in the present dispensation, and will fail in the future until Eternity arrives. But salvation has been and will continue to be available to him by God's grace through faith. (The New Scofield Study Bible, NIV 1984 Edition , pg. 3-4)

## Israel and the Church

The relationship between the ancient nations of Israel and Judah (sometimes collectively referred to as *Israel* or *the Jewish people*) and the church as the people of God is the key discriminator between Dispensationalism and other views. In the dispensational view, the time in which the church operates, known as the church age or the Christian dispensation, represents a "parenthesis". That is, it is an interruption in God's dealings with the Jewish people as a nation as described in the Old Testament, and it is the time when the Gospel was preached and salvation in the present age is offered to the Gentiles and Jews alike. During the present dispensation a small Jewish remnant along with a large Gentile number are to be saved and become part of the Church. Israel as a nation is partially blinded until the fullness of the Gentiles has come. Afterwards however, God's continued care for the Jewish people as a nation will be revealed after the end of the church age when Israel will be restored to their land and will accept Jesus as their messiah (compare Zech 12:8-10) and therefore "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom

11:25-29). That is, those of Israel who come to faith in Jesus Christ and physically live through the Great Tribulation will be saved from the Beast and the false prophet, all who come to attack Israel will be defeated by the coming of Jesus Christ Himself with His church, and thus Israel will be brought to national salvation. Jesus Christ will then sit on the throne of David and will begin the Theocratic Davidic Kingdom which is promised in numerous places in the Old Testament, in which believers and Christ reign together on the earth from Israel( Isa. 9:6-7, Isa. 11, 65:17-25, 66:22-24, Zech. 14:9, Acts 1:6-7, Matt. 25:31-34, Rev. 5:10, 20:4-6 ) .

Contrasted with this view are Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Covenant Theology, and New Covenant Theology. New Covenant Theology advocates supersessionism where the church replaces the Jews as God's chosen people. In Catholicism and Covenantalism, the church is not as a replacement for the nation of Israel but an expansion of it where Gentiles are, in the words of Romans 11, "grafted into" the existing covenant community.

All of these groups expect there will be an influx (or return, depending on which view one is considering) of Jews to the church before the second coming of Christ. However, dispensationalists object to Roman Catholicism and Covenant Theology because dispensationalists do not view the church as the promised covenanted kingdom in Old Testament prophecy. They believe such a kingdom is still promised to the Jews during the New Testament era (for instance, in Acts 3:19-21). Dispensationalists further believe that the promises regarding the throne of David will be fulfilled on the earth as Jesus reigns over the earth from Israel at his second coming.<sup>[7]</sup>

## **Eschatology**

Dispensationalists are premillennialists who affirm a future, literal 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ which merges with and continues on to the eternal state in the "new heavens and the new earth" (Rev. 21), and they hold that the millennial kingdom will be theocratic in nature and not mainly soteriological, as it is viewed by George Ladd and others who hold to a non-dispensational form of premillennialism. Dispensationalism is known for its views respecting the nation of Israel during this millennial kingdom reign, in which Israel as a nation plays a major role and regains a king, a land, and an everlasting kingdom.

The vast majority of dispensationalists hold to the pretribulation rapture, with small minorities holding to either a mid-tribulation or post-tribulation rapture.

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