

DISPENSATIONAL AND COVENANT THEOLOGIES

THE HISTORY OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION (HERMENEUTICS)

The importance of utilizing sound principles of Bible interpretation cannot be over-emphasized. Most doctrinal errors are a result of faulty hermeneutics.

Both Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology use the principles of literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutics to interpret God's Word. The main difference between the two systems, has to do with consistency. Covenant Theology employs literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutics when interpreting many passages of Scripture which are historical or narrative. But they abandon literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutics when interpreting other passages of Scripture such as the prophetic Scriptures that point to future fulfillment. They take prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ as being literal. But they will allegorize prophecies regarding the second coming of Christ. In contrast, Dispensational Theology attempts to be consistent in using literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutics to interpret the whole council of God's Word.

Since the main difference between the two systems of theology has to do with literal versus allegorical interpretation, it would be good to understand the history of these approaches to interpreting God's Word.

During the Patristic Period of church history (ca. 150-600), two schools of interpretation emerged. The school in Antioch of Syria advocated a literal approach to interpreting the Word of God. In contrast, the school in Alexandria Egypt favored more of an allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures.

Literal Interpretation at the School of Antioch

We read about the city of Antioch in Acts 11:25-26 which states: "And he [Barnabas] left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Paul began all three of his missionary journeys from Antioch. Luke describes the significance of Antioch in Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28; 15:35-41; and 18:22-23. From his description, it would be reasonable to say that Antioch was the hub of missionary outreach to Asia Minor.

Dr. Andy Woods explains the importance of this city:

Antioch is very significant. If you want to understand the way that the apostles think, you must study their students at Antioch. We can trace the Apostle Paul's ministry back to Antioch. In fact, in terms of what it taught, Antioch became a bellwether for the early church and the apostolic teaching. When the apostles left the scene, a school was developed there—the school of Antioch. We might call it a seminary. The people there stood for the literal interpretation of the Bible.¹

¹ Woods, Andy. *Ever Reforming: Dispensational Theology and the Completion of the Protestant Reformation* (p. 18). Dispensational Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

Justin Martyr (ca. 100-160 A.D.) typifies the School of Antioch. Regarding a literal millennial kingdom, he wrote:

But I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem as was announced by the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the others.²

Justin Martyr held to the literal interpretation of prophecy. In fact, he felt to be an *orthodox* Christian, you needed to believe this.

The Antioch school was opposed to the allegorical method of interpretation. It taught that meaning is discovered by using the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation.

Allegorical Interpretation at the School of Alexandria

In the sixth century B.C., the literature of the Greek poets came into question because their gods appeared too sinful and human. Greek philosophers such as Plato, decided to interpret the questionable Greek poems allegorically to explain the debauchery of the Greek gods. Plato felt that the poems were too disgraceful to be read to children in their literal form.

The first century A.D. saw the allegorical method of interpretation make inroads into Judaism. Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria, borrowed the allegorical system of interpretation from the Greek philosophers and applied it to portions of Scripture that depicted the immorality of biblical characters. Philo applied allegory to accounts in Scripture such as Lot's incest with his daughters and the polygamy among the patriarchs.

Influenced by Philo, some of the Church Fathers in Northern Africa also borrowed the allegorical method of interpretation. Two of these men were Clement and Origen. They helped establish the first Christian institution of higher learning in the mid-2nd century in Alexandria, Egypt. It was known as the School of Alexandria and became a leading center of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation. The Alexandrian School with Origen at its helm was key in the development of allegorical interpretation.

The Decline of Literal Interpretation During the Patristic Period

A major debate emerged between the church in Alexandria, and the church in Antioch.

Scholars in Alexandria such as Clement, Origen and Augustine advocated the allegorical method of interpretation. Origen thought it was foolish not to understand that Scripture "is to be taken figuratively" (*De Principiis* 2.11.2).

In contrast, scholars in Antioch such as Irenaeus and John Chrysostom advocated for a literal understanding of God's Word. Polycarp and Papias taught Irenaeus (ca. 120-202). Irenaeus was a stern defender of the literal interpretation of Scripture as opposed to allegorical interpretation. He did not ignore symbols and types in Scripture, but always sought the plain sense of the biblical text.

² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 80.

Unfortunately, the Antioch school ran into trouble when one of its students, Nestorius, was pronounced a heretic. The school never recovered and by default the Alexandrian school rose in prominence.

Systems of Interpretation During the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages (ca. 600-1500), the allegorical method of interpretation continued as a dominant system of hermeneutics. However, scholars such as Jerome advocated for the literal-grammatical method of interpretation in opposition to what he regarded as the excesses of allegorical interpretation. The Victorines of the 12th Century stressed the importance of history and geography, which is the natural background for literal hermeneutics. They emphasized syntax, grammar, and exegesis. Nicholas of Lyra (ca. 1279-1340) opposed the spiritual-mystical interpretation of Scripture and advocated a literal-historical approach to interpretation. Nicholas used the Hebrew text in his effort to establish a clear reading of the literal sense of Scripture. John Wycliffe (ca. 1330-1384) taught that Scripture must be studied only with a literal emphasis.

Though the literal-grammatical method of interpretation was not the dominant view during the Middle Ages, it did set the stage for the historic events that were about to take place.

Literal Interpretation After the Middle Ages

The Reformation (ca. 1500-1650) witnessed a theological revolution. With that, interpretation of the biblical text also witnessed a transformation. Bernard Ramm wrote, “Although historians admit that the West was ripe for the Reformation due to several forces at work in European culture, nevertheless there was a *hermeneutical Reformation* which preceded the ecclesiastical Reformation.”³

The first-generation Reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, made great advancements in the area of Bible interpretation. However, they were not always consistent in applying their methods of interpretation. Though they did part ways with the Roman Catholic Church, unfortunately they carried some Roman Catholic baggage with them as they went their own way. The Reformers abandoned the allegorical method of interpretation in all areas except eschatology.

After the Reformation, there was a hermeneutic divide among Protestant scholars. The first group dominated the interpretative landscape for the next 250 years. It was exemplified by the interpretative methodology of Johannes Cocceius which allowed for the allegorical approach and laid the foundation for Covenant Theology. The second group was exemplified by the interpretative methodology of Pierre Poiret which insisted upon a consistent literal approach and laid the foundation for Dispensational Theology.

³ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd rev. ed. (1970; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 51-52.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DISPENSATIONAL AND COVENANT THEOLOGIES

The Beginning of Covenant Theology

Covenant Theology did not begin as a system until the 16th and 17th centuries. It did not exist in the early Church. Louis Berkhof (a prominent Covenant Theologian) wrote, “In the early Church Fathers the covenant idea is not found at all.”⁴

It was the second-generation reformers who gave birth to Covenant Theology. Dr. Charles Ryrie explains:

Covenant theology does not appear in the writings of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, or Melancthon, even though they discussed at length the related doctrines of sin, depravity, redemption, and so on. They had every opportunity to incorporate the covenant idea, but they did not. There were no references to covenant theology in any of the great confessions of faith until the Westminster Confession in 1647, and even then, covenant theology was not as fully developed as it was later by Reformed theologians.⁵

Dr. Renald Showers adds:

Moreover, according to Louis Berkhof, a prominent Covenant Theologian, Kaspar Olevianus who lived from A.D. 1536–1587, was the first person to demonstrate a theological system based upon the theological covenants. While this new theological system began within the Reformed Churches of Switzerland and Germany, it was the publications of Johannes Cocceius, that made Covenant Theology known and accepted.⁶

The Beginning of Dispensational Theology

Dispensational Theology did not exist as a developed system of thought in the early Church. However, a few early Church leaders did recognize some of the biblical principles which are basic to Dispensational Theology. Justin Martyr (ca. 110-165) held a concept of differing programs of God. Irenaeus (ca. 130-200) spoke of four governing periods of time in human history (pre-flood, post-flood, the law period, and the period of the gospel. Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202) distinguished the Age of Law, the Age of Grace, and the future Age of the Spirit and righteousness.

Pierre Poiret (ca. 1646-1719), the French philosopher, was the first person on record to develop an organized dispensational system.

Others also contributed to the development of dispensationalism. For example, John Edwards (ca. 1639-1716) wrote “The Compleat History or Survey of All the Dispensations.” Sir Isaac Watts (ca. 1674-1748) the famous hymn writer and theologian wrote “The Harmony of all the Religions which God ever Prescribed to Men and all his Dispensations towards them.” John Nelson Darby (ca. 1800-1882) was instrumental in systematizing and promoting of

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (second revised and enlarged edition; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), p. 211.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 185.

⁶ Showers, R. E. (1990). *There Really Is A Difference! A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*. Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

dispensationalism. C. I. Scofield (ca. 1843-1921) popularized dispensationalism through the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible.

Summary

The allegorical approach to biblical interpretation was originally borrowed from pagan Greek philosophers. Not all the early church fathers bought into the allegorical approach of interpretation. Both dispensational and Covenant Theology developed after the Reformation. Neither system can be found in the early church fathers. The correctness of a system of theology should not be judged on how recent it is in church history. Systems of theology should be judged based on how they comport with God's Word.

BIBLICAL COVENANTS VERSUS THEOLOGICAL COVENANTS

Biblical Covenants

The word "covenant" is a biblical word which comes from the Hebrew noun *berîyth*. A covenant is an agreement that binds two parties together. God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, David, and the nation of Israel.

For example:

Genesis 6:17-18 "And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant (*berîyth*) with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you."

Genesis 9:8-11 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant (*berîyth*) with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant (*berîyth*) with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

Genesis 17:1-2 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant (*berîyth*) between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

A biblical covenant is a binding legal agreement, contract, or promise. In Scripture the term is applied to various transactions between 1) men and 2) between God and man. The first occurrence of the word *berîyth* is found in Genesis 6:18 when God established His covenant with Noah.

Biblical covenants in Scripture are well-defined with the terms of the covenant being clearly spelled out.

Theological Covenants

While Covenant Theologians do recognize these biblical covenants, they also use the word "covenant" in a theological sense. When speaking of "theological covenants," they are not referring to actual biblical covenants which are found in Scripture.

Dr. Thomas Ice explains: “Covenant Theology is not a system of theology developed directly from the biblical covenants, as one might first suspect. Instead it is a system of theology based upon speculation about abstract covenants in an attempt to organize Scripture into a system of theology.”⁷

Covenant Theology depicts all of history as being covered by two or three theological covenants. The Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and (sometimes) the Covenant of Redemption are used to explain all relationships between God and man from the beginning of creation to the end of time.

Unlike the biblical covenants found in God’s Word, these theological covenants lack biblical support. For example, Oswald T. Allis (Covenant Theologian) speaks of the covenant of grace as being “cryptic” in Genesis 3:15. Yet the biblical covenants with Abraham, Israel, David, and others are clearly spelled out in Scripture. They certainly are not “cryptic.”

Dr. Ryrie notes: “Allis calls the revelation of this important covenant in Genesis 3:15 cryptic. This is all very strange and hard to swallow, especially when the biblical covenants with Abraham, Israel, David, and others are so clearly and specifically revealed. Abraham had no doubt that a covenant was being made when God Himself passed between the pieces of the sacrifice (Gen. 15:17-21). And yet we are asked to believe in the existence of a covenant of grace that was scarcely revealed, although it is the fountainhead out of which even the Abrahamic covenant came!”⁸

Louis Berkhof (Covenant Theologian) wrote: “It must be admitted that the term ‘covenant’ is not found in the first three chapters of Genesis, but this is not tantamount to saying that they do not contain the necessary data for the construction of a doctrine of the covenant.”⁹ “It may still be objected that we do not read of the two parties as coming to an agreement, nor of Adam as accepting the terms laid down [for a covenant], but this is not an insuperable objection.”¹⁰ “Some deny that there is any Scripture evidence for such a promise. Now it is perfectly true that no such promise [as the covenant of works] is explicitly recorded.”¹¹ “There may still be some doubt as to the propriety of the name ‘Covenant of Works,’ but there can be no valid objection to the covenant [of works] idea.”¹² “They who deny the covenant of works generally base their denial in part on the fact that there is no record of such a promise in the Bible. And it is perfectly true that Scripture contains no explicit promise of eternal life to Adam.”¹³ “We have no definite information in Scripture respecting the sacrament(s) or seal(s) of this covenant [of works].”¹⁴

⁷ Thomas Ice, *COVENANTS AND DISPENSATIONS Part I*. https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/Ice-Covenants_Dispensations_01.pdf

⁸ Ryrie, Charles. *Dispensationalism Revised and Expanded*. N. p. Print.

⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). 213.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. 215.

¹³ Ibid. 216.

¹⁴ Ibid. 217.

Charles Hodge (Covenant Theologian) wrote: “[The covenant of works] does not rest upon any express declaration of the Scriptures.”¹⁵ “Although the word covenant [as in covenant of works] is not used in Genesis, and does not elsewhere, in any clear passage, occur in reference to the transaction there recorded, ... it is plain that the Bible does represent the arrangements made with Adam as a truly federal transaction.”¹⁶

Mal Couch warned: “It is particularly disturbing, though, that the leading proponents of Covenant Theology admit that there is no scriptural evidence for the two most important covenants in their system—the covenant of works and the covenant of redemption (and/or grace). Covenant theologians admit that these covenants were likely revealed in time, specifically, that they were made in eternity past and outside of the framework of Scripture. Yet they claim that there is substantial evidence that they indeed are legitimate biblical covenants.”¹⁷

When examining the text of Scripture, our goal is to be as objective as possible. We want to allow the biblical text to inform our opinions rather than impose our own ideas upon God’s Word. In defining “objectivity,” The Moody Handbook of Theology says that:

Theology must be based on inductive research and conclusions, not deductive reasoning. The theologian must approach the Scripture with ... an open mind, allowing the Scripture to speak for itself—without forming prejudicial opinions about what the Scripture should say.¹⁸

Yet Covenant Theologians readily admit that their “theological covenants” have very little scriptural support. This makes one wonder how these “theological covenants” were developed. Dr. Ryrie explains: “The existence of the [theological] covenants is not found by an inductive examination of passages; it is a conclusion deduced from certain scriptural evidence. Now, if it is permissible for the covenant theologian to base his entire system on a deduction rather than on a clear statement of Scripture, why can he not permit the dispensationalist to deduce the existence of various dispensations, especially when certain of the dispensations are specifically named in Scripture? The dispensationalist has more inductive evidence for the existence of the specific dispensations than does the covenant theologian for his covenants of works and grace; and the dispensationalist has as much, if not more, right to deduce his dispensational scheme as does the covenant theologian his covenant scheme.”¹⁹

Dr. Ryrie concludes: “The theological covenants on which covenant theology is based are not specifically revealed in Scripture. Other covenants (such as the Abrahamic and Davidic) are specifically revealed, and in great detail, but the all-embracing covenants of covenant theology are not in the Bible. The whole covenant system is based on a deduction and not on the results of an inductive study of Scripture.”²⁰

¹⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). 2:117.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mal Couch, Gen. Ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1996). 158.

¹⁸ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology Revised and Expanded*, (Chicago, Moody Publishers, 2008). N. p. Print.

¹⁹ Charles Ryrie. *Dispensationalism Revised and Expanded*. N. p. Print.

²⁰ Ibid.

These “theological covenants” are a product of man’s deductive reasoning rather than inductive exegesis of the biblical text.

Dr. Ice accurately summarizes the difference between biblical covenants and the theological covenants developed by Covenant Theology: “The subject of covenants in the Bible is well established, but not the system we know as Covenant Theology.”²¹

WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY

Definition

Understanding how God works out His purposes throughout the timeline of history helps believers to develop a worldview for living in harmony with His will. Having a divine perspective on the past, present, and future helps us to know what God expects of us in this present day and age. Scholars have called this area of study a philosophy of history. Although the Bible is not a philosophy of history per se, Scripture does help us to understand how God is working throughout the annals of time.

Theologians have developed two distinct approaches to understanding the philosophy of history as it is depicted in God’s Word. Those two systems are known as Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.

Covenant Theology can be stated briefly as a system which understands the philosophy of history based on theological covenants. Covenant Theologians depict all of history as being covered by two or three theological covenants. The covenant of works, the covenant of grace, and (sometimes) the covenant of redemption are used to explain all relationships between God and man from the beginning of creation to the end of time.

Since the foundation of Covenant Theology is based on two or three covenants that cannot be found in Scripture, we need to examine these theological covenants.

Covenant of Works

What is the covenant of works?

The Westminster Confession says that “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.” (WCF, 7, 2).

The Puritan theologian Thomas Watson wrote:

“When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge upon pain of death. ... This covenant was made with Adam and all mankind; for Adam was a public person, and the representative of the world.”²²

It should be noted that in this covenant God promised eternal life to Adam and his descendants as opposed to natural life. The Puritan theologian John Ball wrote concerning the covenant of

²¹ Ice. *COVENANTS AND DISPENSATIONS*.

²² Thomas Watson. *A Body of Divinity*, <https://ccel.org/ccel/watson/divinity.vii.i.html> (accessed 9/20/2021).

works that “God covenanteth with man to give him eternal life upon condition of perfect obedience.”²³

Louis Berkhof explains the elements of this covenant of works:

(1) Adam was constituted the representative head of the human race, so that he could act for all his descendants. (2) He was temporarily put on probation, in order to determine whether he would willingly subject his will to the will of God. (3) He was given the promise of eternal life in the way of obedience, and thus by the gracious disposition of God acquired certain conditional rights. This covenant enabled Adam to obtain eternal life for himself and for his descendants in the way of obedience.²⁴

Adam was appointed as the representative head of the human race. His obedience would allow him and his descendants to gain eternal life. However, his disobedience meant that he and his descendants suffer the penalty of physical, spiritual, and eternal death.

Covenant Theologians use Genesis 2:16-17 to support the covenant of works:

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

However, there is not one mention of the word “covenant” in this passage. The passage simply states that if Adam and Eve would eat of the forbidden fruit they would die. It does not say that Adam made an agreement with God. It does not say that God promised them eternal life if they obeyed.

As was stated previously, Berkhof admitted that “Scripture contains no explicit promise of eternal life to Adam. But the threatened penalty clearly implies such a promise.”²⁵ In other words, you cannot arrive at the covenant of works through inductive exegesis of God’s Word. You can only find the covenant of works by deductive reasoning.

Covenant of Grace

What is the covenant of grace?

Berkhof wrote: “The covenant of grace may be defined as *that gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience.*”²⁶

Since Adam broke the covenant of works, we are told that God established the covenant of grace. When Adam sinned, God made a new covenant providing salvation through the covenant of grace.

²³ John Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*;
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A30345.0001.001/1:6.2?rgn=div2;view=fulltext> (accessed 9/20/2021)

²⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

According to Berkhof, God made this promise to the *elect sinner*. Other Covenant Theologians say that God made this covenant with *the sinner, the elect, or believers and their offspring* which becomes a justification for infant baptism.

Covenant Theologians use Genesis 3:15 to support the covenant of grace:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

Oswald T. Allis admitted that the covenant of grace is “cryptic” in this text. He wrote, “the covenant of works was immediately followed by the covenant of grace. This covenant is first set forth cryptically in the words of the protevangel, (Genesis 3:15) ...”²⁷

Loraine Boettner wrote: “We believe that the requirement for salvation now, as originally, is perfect obedience.”²⁸

Obviously, sinners cannot obey perfectly. Therefore, Covenant Theology teaches that Christ obeyed on behalf of the elect sinner.

According to the covenant of grace, Christ “is the substitutionary covenantal representative fulfilling the covenant of works on their behalf, in both the positive requirements of righteousness and its negative penal consequences (commonly described as his active and passive obedience).”²⁹

John Murray explains what is meant by active and passive obedience: “The real use and purpose of the formula is to emphasize the two distinct aspects our Lord’s vicarious obedience.... Christ’s obedience was vicarious in the bearing of the full judgment of God upon sin, *and it was vicarious in the full discharge of the demands of righteousness* [italics mine].”³⁰

Likewise Hodge elaborates on the sufferings of Christ during His lifetime: “He lived his whole life, from his birth to his death, as our representative, obeying and suffering in our stead and for our sakes; and during this whole course all his suffering was obedience and all his obedience was suffering.”³¹

Covenant Theologians deduce from their theological covenants that Christ’s obedience during His lifetime was just as vicarious and substitutionary as His death on the cross.

However, there are serious problems with this doctrine. According to this view the death of Christ was not the only basis by which God provided redemption and eternal life for mankind. If Christ’s life sufferings are viewed as substitutionary and vicarious, then what does that say about His work on the cross? The Savior’s passive obedience in the shedding of His blood at Calvary

²⁷ Carl Henry, *Basic Christian Doctrines* (Dallas, TX, DIGITAL PUBLICATIONS, 2002)

²⁸ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination [Fifth Edition]* (Hauraki Publishing, 2017). Print.

²⁹ Theology Reformed and Reforming. *Covenant Theology*. <https://reformed-theology.blogspot.com/2010/12/covenant-theology.html> (accessed 9/20/2021).

³⁰ John Murray, *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), pp. 27, 28.

³¹ A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 250.

must be viewed as less than complete. The blood shed at Calvary would then constitute only part of the payment for sin.

However, it was not Christ's blood spilled in the garden of Gethsemane that paid for our sins. It was the blood He shed on the cross that purchased our redemption. Peter made that fact absolutely clear when he wrote that Christ "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24)."

The doctrine of active and passive obedience also lacks any scriptural support. There is nothing in God's Word that indicates Jesus' life sufferings were substitutionary or vicarious. In contrast, Scripture abounds with evidence that, through His substitutionary death on the cross, Jesus took the sinner's place and died on the sinner's behalf (Isa. 53:6-7; Rom. 3:24-25; 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:14-21).

The covenant of grace does not line up with the teaching of God's Word.

Covenant of Redemption

What is the covenant of redemption?

Some Reformed theologians have introduced a third covenant, the covenant of redemption. It was made in eternity past and became the basis for the covenant of grace. Louis Berkhof describes the covenant of redemption as "the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given him."³²

Covenant Theologians find their support for the covenant of redemption in Psalm 110, Philippians 2:5-11, and Revelation 5:9-10. Yet, once again, we see no mention of the word "covenant" in any of these texts. There is not even the idea of an agreement or contract between the Father and the Son. If the covenant of grace is cryptic in Genesis 3:15, then the covenant of redemption is extremely ambiguous in these passages of Scripture. The fact that Covenant Theologians cannot agree if this covenant even exists makes it doubtful at best.

WHAT IS DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

Definition

Briefly stated, we could say that Dispensationalism represents all of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God's rule. In this system there are usually, but not always, seven dispensations.

Dr. Renald Showers explains: "Dispensational Theology can be defined very simply as a system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible's philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God's rule."³³

³² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*

³³ Renald Showers. *There Really Is a Difference!*

According to Dr. Charles Ryrie, a dispensation is a “distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose.”³⁴

When we use the word “economy” we normally think of financial matters. However, the word “economy” in older dictionaries was defined as “the management of household affairs.” This is how Dr. Ryrie is using this word in his definition of a dispensation. In fact, the English word “economy” is derived from the New Testament Greek word οἰκονομία [oikonomia] which means “the management of a household or of household affairs; specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of others’ property.”³⁵

In Ephesians 3:2 Paul wrote:

- “you have heard of the dispensation [οἰκονομία; oikonomia] of the grace of God (NKJV)”
- “you have heard of the stewardship [οἰκονομία; oikonomia] of God’s grace (NASB)”
- “you have heard about the administration [οἰκονομία; oikonomia] of God’s grace (NIV)”

Simply put, a dispensation is a distinct way in which God deals with mankind in order to work out His own purposes in human history.

The fact is that there are distinctions in Scripture. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon individuals (Jdgs. 16:20; 1 Sam. 16:14; Ps. 51:11). After the beginning of the church, the Holy Spirit indwelt believers (Jn. 14:16-17).

All interpreters recognize the fact of distinctions to some degree. For example, Covenant Theologians don’t bring animal sacrifices to church on Saturday. They obviously recognize a difference between the dispensation of Israel under the Law of Moses and the dispensation of believers living in the age of grace.

Dispensationalism is built upon the foundation of consistent, literal interpretation. Literal interpretation means taking God’s Word at face value. Therefore, literal interpretation also results in recognizing distinctions in the Bible. No interpreter of Scripture denies the fact that there are distinctions in Scripture. However, the extent to which one recognizes distinctions is the evidence of his consistent use of the principle of literal interpretation. Taking the Word of God at face value means the recognition of distinctions in Scripture. Distinctions in Scripture naturally leads to dispensations.

The Essentials of Dispensationalism

Dr. Charles Ryrie reduced Dispensational Theology to 3 basic essentials:

The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist’s consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic

³⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 28.

³⁵ Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* 1889 : 440. Print.

purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.³⁶

Grant Hawley expanded upon Dr. Ryrie's list of essentials:

1. Literal, historical, grammatical interpretation should be applied to all portions of Scripture.
2. The church and Israel are distinct peoples in God's program for the ages.
3. The Lord Jesus Christ will return bodily to earth and reign on David's throne in Jerusalem for one-thousand years.
4. The underlying purpose of God's dealings with the world is His glory, not merely the salvation of man, thus the Scripture goes far beyond evangelism.
5. The Christian is free from the law in its entirety for both justification (Gal 2:16) and sanctification (Gal 5:18). Each of these points is fundamental to normative dispensationalism, but the first point is primary among them because all of the other points flow from consistent literal interpretation.³⁷

Both Ryrie and Hawley see the consistent application of literal, historical-grammatical interpretation as being the foundation of Dispensational Theology—the key word being “consistent.” Covenant Theology also employs literal, historical-grammatical interpretation however, this method of interpretation is not consistently applied.

The Biblical Covenants

Covenants Defined

As was mentioned previously, a biblical covenant (berîyth) is a binding legal agreement, contract, or promise. The first biblical covenant is found in Genesis 6:18 when God established His covenant with Noah. Biblical covenants are well-defined contracts in which the terms of the covenant are clearly spelled out. These covenants did not occur in a vacuum. God made these covenants with the patriarchs and Israel in a way that they could be culturally understood.

Conditional vs Unconditional Covenants

There are two types of biblical covenants—conditional and unconditional.

With conditional covenants the recipient must meet certain conditions or obligations. Only then is the benefactor of the covenant obligated to fulfill that which was promised. It is a covenant with an “if-then” clause attached to the contract. The conditional covenant comes with blessings for meeting the conditions but curses if the conditions are not met.

With unconditional covenants there are no conditions or obligations that need to be met by the recipient. The promise depends only upon the benefactor for its fulfillment. For this reason, unconditional covenants are also known as unilateral covenants. That which was promised is

³⁶ LaHaye, Tim, and Ed Hindson. *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy: Over 150 Topics from the World's Foremost Prophecy Experts*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2018). Print.

³⁷ Grant Hawley, *Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked*. (Dispensational Publishing House, 2017). Print.

given to the recipient of the covenant on the authority and integrity of the one making the covenant apart from the merit or response of the receiver. It is a covenant with no “if-then” clauses attached to the contract whatsoever.

The Number of the Biblical Covenants

God made six covenants in the Old Testament: the Noahic Covenant; the Abrahamic Covenant; the Land Covenant; the Mosaic Covenant; the Davidic Covenant; and the New Covenant. Of those six covenants, only the Mosaic Covenant was conditional. All the rest are unconditional. There are no “if-then” clauses in those unconditional covenants.

The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants

Parts of Israel’s unconditional covenants have already been literally fulfilled. Other parts have never been fulfilled. Since some parts have been literally fulfilled, normative dispensationalists say that they have every reason to expect that the unfulfilled parts of those unconditional covenants will also be literally fulfilled. In contrast, Covenant Theologians say that those parts not yet fulfilled will not be accomplished in the future.

How does Covenant Theology resolve this apparent contradiction? Covenant Theologians say that the Mosaic Covenant, which is conditional, supersedes the Abrahamic Covenant, which is unconditional. It is as if God inserted an “if-then” clause in the Abrahamic Covenant after the fact. If that were true, it would be like changing the rules after you start playing the game.

However, Scripture clearly indicates that the Mosaic Covenant does not supersede the Abrahamic Covenant. Paul wrote, “And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, **cannot annul** the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect (Gal. 3:17).” The law was the embodiment of the conditional Mosaic Covenant. It came four hundred and thirty years after God made the Abrahamic Covenant which was unconditional. No, God did not change the rules after the fact.

The Noahic Covenant (Gen 6:18; 9:9-17 — unconditional)

As we noted earlier, the first occurrence of the word covenant is found in Genesis 6:18 when God established His covenant with Noah. The Noahic Covenant is in the context of God expressing His wrath because of the sinfulness of mankind resulting in a universal flood (Gen. 6:1-7). God made an unconditional covenant with Noah promising to preserve the human race and living creatures from extinction and to prevent future, global death by vowing never to repeat that catastrophic event again. This unconditional covenant is signified by the rainbow. The irrevocable quality of the Noahic Covenant illustrates the immutable nature of the unconditional covenants to follow.

The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:3-8 — unconditional)

God’s covenant with Abraham is first set forth and initiated in Genesis 12:1-3. It is later reiterated in Genesis 13:14-17 and ratified by the sacrificial animals in Genesis 15. Then it is signified by the sign of circumcision in Genesis 17. It is once again reiterated in Genesis 22:15-18. It is later confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-5, 24) and Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15; 35:9-12; cf. 46:1-4) and is subsequently spoken of as God’s “covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (2 Kings 13:23).

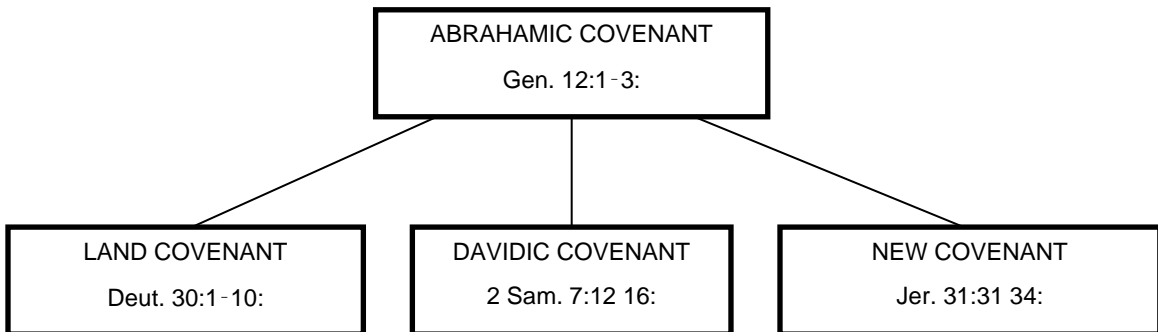
We find the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12 and 17.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 17:3-8 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

There are three aspects to this covenant:

1. Abraham was promised land (actual land). This is amplified in the Land Covenant.
2. Abraham was promised seed (posterity). This is amplified in the Davidic Covenant.
3. Abraham was promised a blessing. This is amplified in the New Covenant.



Steven McAvoy explains the significance of this covenant:

From an interpretative standpoint, the Abrahamic covenant is the single most important event in the Old Testament. It governs God’s entire program for Israel and the nations and is thus determinative of God’s program in history. The Abrahamic covenant is foundational to all of Scripture. It is the key to both the Old and New Testaments and is foundational to the whole program of redemption. All subsequent revelation is the outworking of this covenant. This covenant, and the subsequent covenant framework, is the key to understanding Scripture.³⁸

This covenant is the basis of dispensational premillennialism. We do not begin our support of dispensational premillennialism in Revelation 20 where 1000 years is mentioned six times. Rather we begin with the unconditional covenants which are not yet completely fulfilled. When

³⁸ Steven L. McAvoy, “Abrahamic Covenant” in Mal Couch, ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), p. 27.

these covenants are taken literally — understood in their normal, grammatical-historical sense — the result is premillennialism.

Does unconditional really mean unconditional? Are there no exception clauses written in the fine print of an unconditional, unilateral Old Testament covenant? Steven McAvoy puts those questions to rest:

A unilateral covenant was binding only on one party, the one making the pledge. The Abrahamic covenant is a unilateral covenant, a divine covenant in which God alone pledges Himself to a course of action through Abraham and his seed, which cannot be reversed (else God would prove untrue) and cannot be annulled by the failure of either Abraham or his seed, for the existence and continuance of the covenant depends not upon the fidelity of Abraham or his seed, but on God alone.”³⁹

... to the people of Abraham’s day, making such a covenant was extremely important and “irreversibly binding.”⁴⁰

Genesis 15 elaborates on God’s unconditional covenant with Abraham. Abraham is concerned because he has no heirs. In verse 5 God tells Abram, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be.”

To ratify that promise God used a Chaldean sacrificial ritual. When a contract was made between two people, according to Chaldean tradition, the two parties would pass between animals that had been prepared for sacrifice. But in this account, it was God Himself who passed between the sacrificial animals thus signifying that this covenant was unconditional. There were no strings attached. There were no “if-then” clauses in the contract. There was no fine print that would make the contract null and void.

The Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 19:5-6; Lev. 26:1-46; Deut. 7:12–8:20 — conditional)

Of the six covenants that we are exploring, the Mosaic Covenant was the only conditional covenant. This covenant either brought God’s direct blessing for obedience or God’s direct cursing for disobedience upon the nation of Israel.

Part of the Mosaic Covenant included the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. However, the Mosaic Law actually consisted of 613 commandments which governed Israel’s moral life, civil life and ceremonial life.

Mal Couch describes the nature of this covenant:

The purpose of the Mosaic covenant is important to note. The Law was given to Israel and not to the church or mankind in general. God entered into this covenant with the Jews whom He had “brought out ... of the land of Egypt” (Exod. 20:2). It was Israel’s constitution, given to guide the people through life (31:12-17).⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics : A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2000), p. 141

Paul Benware agrees:

The law given at Mount Sinai was designed to be temporary. It would exist as a rule of life for Israel until the Messiah came (Gal. 3:23-4:5). The law was never designed to save anyone but was given to protect Israel from the terrible sins of the Gentiles and to teach them about their God.⁴²

Israel failed miserably. However, their failure or success in keeping this covenant had nothing to do with God's promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. But it had everything to do with Israel's prosperity and ability to stay in their land. The Mosaic Covenant had nothing to do with Israel's title to the land. Rather it had everything to do with their tenancy in the land. The covenant had nothing to do with Israel's national salvation. But it had everything to do with their national success.

Even though the Mosaic Covenant was conditional and depended upon Israel's obedience, God had His own "reserve clause" in the contract:

Leviticus 26:43-46 The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; they will accept their guilt, because they despised My judgments and because their soul abhorred My statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD. These are the statutes and judgments and laws which the LORD made between Himself and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.

The Land Covenant (Deut. 28-30 — unconditional)

The Land Covenant is an unconditional covenant made between God and Israel right before Moses died. It is sometimes referred to as the "Palestinian Covenant," however that term is never found in the Bible. Moses would never have called the land "Palestine."

This covenant is called the Land Covenant because many of the promises relate to Israel's possession of the land. It amplifies the land aspect which was described in the Abrahamic Covenant. The Land Covenant is important since it reaffirmed Israel's title deed to the land. The promise of the Land Covenant is not nullified because of the conditional Mosaic Covenant. The Land Covenant is termed an eternal covenant (Ezek. 16:60) because it is a part of the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant and an amplification of it.

A study of Deuteronomy 28-30 shows that God foretold Israel's apostasy and dispersion under Assyria, Babylon, and Rome prior to her occupation of the land. Before the Land Covenant will be fulfilled Israel must first come to a place of repentance and knowledge of Messiah (Zech. 12:10-14) and be regathered to the land from the nations where the people have settled over the millennia.

The fulfillment of the Land Covenant is still in the future. It relates to Israel's appropriation of the land promised to her in both the Abrahamic Covenant and the Land Covenant.

⁴² Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy : A Comprehensive Approach* (Moody Publishers 2006), Kindle Edition

Terms of this covenant can be summarized as follows:

1. The nation will be removed from the land for its unfaithfulness (Deut. 30:1-3).
2. There will be a future repentance of Israel (Deut. 28:63-68).
3. Their Messiah will return (Deut. 30:3-6).
4. Israel will be restored to the land (Deut. 30:5).
5. Israel will be converted as a nation (Deut. 30:4-8; cf. Rom. 11:26-27).
6. Israel's enemies will be judged (Deut. 30:7).
7. The nation will then receive her full blessing (Deut. 30:9).

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Chron. 17:11-14 — unconditional)

The Davidic Covenant is an unconditional covenant made between God and David. It expands upon the “seed” section of the Abrahamic Covenant in which God promised to bless Abraham with numerous descendants.

In this covenant, God promised David and Israel that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David and the tribe of Judah and that He would establish a kingdom that would endure forever. The Davidic Covenant is unconditional since God did not place any conditions of obedience for it to be fulfilled. The realization of this covenant rests solely on God's faithfulness and does not depend at all on David or Israel's obedience.

In this covenant, God made several key promises to David. God reaffirmed the promise of the land which He pledged to Abraham. Then He promised that David's son would succeed him as king of Israel and that this son, Solomon, would build a temple.

God expanded upon that promise saying: “I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever,” and “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

God began with a promise that David's son Solomon would be blessed and build the temple. Then He amplified that promise guaranteeing an everlasting kingdom and saying that another Son of David would rule forever and build a lasting House. This is significant because it shows that the Messiah comes from the lineage of David. And it shows that He will establish a kingdom from which He will reign.

Jeremiah elaborates on the unbreakable nature of this unconditional covenant with David:

Thus says the LORD: “If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers (Jer. 33:20-21).”

The New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-37; Ezek. 36:24-28; Heb. 8:8-13 — unconditional)

The New Covenant is another unconditional covenant which relates to the nation of Israel.

Jeremiah 31:31 states, “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” The writer of Hebrews quotes

Jeremiah saying, "... I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Heb. 8:8)."

This covenant amplifies the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant. In this covenant, God promises to forgive sin and promises that there will be a universal knowledge of the Lord (verse 34). We are also told that the nation of Israel will have a special relationship with their God (verse 33).

Jeremiah also tells us what must take place for God to invalidate these promises to Israel:

Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): "If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever." Thus says the LORD: "If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they have done, says the LORD. (Jer. 31:35-37)

The promises of this covenant have not yet been completely fulfilled with the nation of Israel to date. The fact that this is an unconditional covenant should inform us about the fulfillment of this covenant. The sun, moon and stars still continue to shine. But these promises to Israel have not yet been fulfilled in their entirety. This fact should indicate that the complete fulfillment of the New Covenant is yet future.

Number of Dispensations

What defines a person as a dispensationalist is not the number of dispensations that he sees in God's Word. Dr. Robert Lightner taught a class on dispensationalism at Tyndale Seminary. During that class he stated that a person could be a bona fide dispensationalist even if he only held to 3 dispensations—law, grace, and a literal millennial kingdom. The point that he was trying to make is that the number of dispensations does not define a dispensationalist. Rather, a dispensationalist is one who consistently employs the principles of literal, historical-grammatical interpretation to all portions of God's Word. If they do, then they will keep Israel and the church distinct. They will also understand that the ultimate purpose of God in history is not limited to just the salvation of man. God will ultimately glorify Himself as He works out his purposes in the various dispensations—no matter how many there actually are. With that being stated, how many dispensations are there?

Normative dispensationalists usually hold to 7 dispensations. How do they arrive at that number? As was mentioned, dispensationalism recognizes distinctions in Scripture. These distinctions result in different dispensations. A dispensation is a distinct way in which God deals with mankind as He works out His own purposes in human history. What dispensations do we see in the Word of God?

If you don't bring animal sacrifices to church on Saturday, then you recognize at least 2 dispensations.

- 1) Age of the law; and 2) Age of the church.

If you believe in a literal 1000-year reign of Christ, then you recognize 3 dispensations.

- 1) Age of the law; 2) Age of the church and 3) Age of the millennial kingdom.

Did God relate to the Children of Israel differently after He gave them the Mosaic Law? Did He expect them to obey the Law? Were the Children of Israel given new obligations should they violate the Mosaic Law? Absolutely! Therefore there must be at least 4 dispensations.

- 1) Age before the law; 2) Age of the law; 3) Age of the church and 4) Age of the millennial kingdom.

Did God relate to Adam and Eve differently after they sinned in the garden? Yes! After the fall they and their descendants were in need of a Savior which God promised in Genesis 3:15. Therefore there must be at least 5 dispensations.

- 1) Pre-fall (innocence); 2) Post-fall (conscience); 3) Age of the law; 4) Age of the church and 5) Age of the millennial kingdom.

These 5 dispensations seem pretty obvious. The next 2 dispensations are not quite as obvious. We might ask, “did God’s administration on earth change after the flood?” In Genesis 9, God instituted the Noahic covenant. In that covenant God said:

Genesis 9:5-6 “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.”

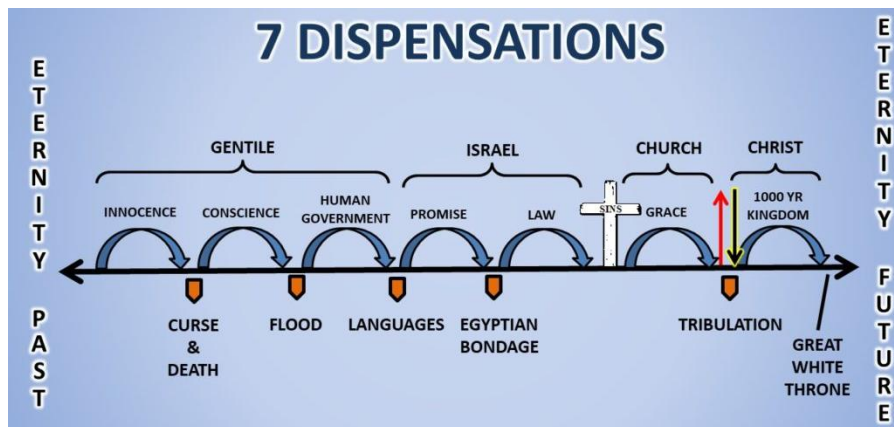
The Noahic covenant marked the beginning of a new dispensation in which capital punishment for murder was instituted by God. This brings us to 6 dispensations.

- 1) Pre-fall (innocence); 2) Post-fall (conscience); 3) Post-flood (human government); 4) Age of the law; 5) Age of the church and 6) Age of the millennial kingdom.

In Genesis 12 God called Abraham and began to deal specifically with him and his descendants. In the Abrahamic Covenant God promised Abraham and his descendants land, seed (posterity) and blessing. At this point in human history God began to deal with a specific people group based on His promises to Abraham.

- 1) Pre-fall (innocence); 2) Post-fall (conscience); 3) Post-flood (human government); 4) Abraham and his descendants (promise); 5) Age of the law; 6) Age of the church and 7) Age of the millennial kingdom.

This is how the normative dispensationalist arrives at 7 dispensations.



The Seven Dispensations

Most normative dispensationalists understand the Bible to be organized by these 7 dispensations. Each dispensation begins with God giving man a specific responsibility. Each one ends in failure as man disobeys the responsibility that was given to Him. As a result, man is judged because of his failure.

1. Innocence (Genesis 1:1-3:6)
 - A. Responsibility: Obey God (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15-17)
 - B. Failure: Disobedience (Gen. 3:1-6)
 - C. Judgment: Curse and death (Gen. 3:7-19)

2. Conscience (Genesis 3:7-8:14)
 - A. Responsibility: Do good; blood sacrifices (Gen. 3:5, 7, 22; 4:4)
 - B. Failure: Wickedness (Gen. 6:5-6, 11-12)
 - C. Judgment: The Flood (Gen. 6:7, 13; 7:11-14)

3. Human Government (Genesis 8:15-11:9)
 - A. Responsibility: Scatter and Multiply (Gen. 8:15-9:7)
 - B. Failure: Man Did Not Scatter (Gen. 11:1-4)
 - C. Judgment: Confusion of the Languages (Gen. 11:5-9)

4. Promise (Genesis 11:10-Exodus 18:27)
 - A. Responsibility: Dwell in Canaan (Gen. 12:1-7)
 - B. Failure: Dwelt in Egypt (Gen. 12:10; 46:6)
 - C. Judgment: Egyptian Bondage (Ex. 1:8-14)

5. Law (Exodus 19:1-Acts 1:26)
 - A. Responsibility: Keep the Whole Law (Ex. 19:3-8)
 - B. Failure: Broke the Law (2 Kings 17:7-20; Mt. 27:1-25)
 - C. Judgment: Worldwide Dispersion (Deut. 28:63-66; Lk. 21:20-24)

6. Grace (Acts 2:1-Revelation 20:3)
 - A. Responsibility: Faith in Jesus; Keep Doctrine Pure (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 8:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9)
 - B. Failure: Doctrinal Impurity (Jn. 5:39-40; 2 Tim. 3:1-7)
 - C. Judgment: Apostasy; False Doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3)

7. The Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20:4-20:15)
 - A. Responsibility: Obey and Worship Jesus (Is. 11:3-5; Zech. 14:9, 16)
 - B. Failure: Final Rebellion (Rev. 20:7-9)
 - C. Judgment: Satan Loosed; Final Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15)

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DISPENSATIONAL AND COVENANT THEOLOGIES

	<i>Dispensational Theology</i>	<i>Covenant Theology</i>
God's Purpose in History	The ultimate purpose of history must be large enough to include all of God's programs—the saved & the lost, good angels & fallen angels, the nations, nature, etc.	The ultimate purpose of history is limited to the redemption of the elect.
Principles for Interpretation	The literal, historical-grammatical method is used consistently for the entire Word of God, including prophecy.	The literal method is used inconsistently while an allegorical-symbolical method is used for most of future prophecy.
Biblical Covenants vs Theological Covenants	The foundation of this system is built upon the biblical covenants which are understood by means of the inductive exegesis of God's Word.	The foundation of this system is built upon two or three theological covenants which are postulated by means of the deductive reasoning of theologians.
Israel and the Church	Israel and the Church are distinct. Only those saints of the present dispensation are in the Church, which began on the Day of Pentecost and continues until the Rapture. God has a special plan for Israel's future.	Israel and the Church are essentially the same. All saints throughout history are in the Church, beginning with Adam (or Abraham). God has no special plan for Israel's future.
Water Baptism	Baptism is for adult believers. Most practice baptism by immersion as a profession of faith and a symbol of identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.	Baptism is for adult believers. Some also baptize infants whose parents are believers. The method of baptism could be by immersion, sprinkling or pouring.
The Law	The NT believer is not under Law but under Grace. The rule of life for the believer is the grace teaching of the New Testament.	The NT believer is under the moral aspects of the Mosaic Law as the rule of life, but not as a means of salvation.
Rapture and Tribulation	At the rapture Christ will come for His saints and then come with His saints after a 7-year Tribulation period.	Except for some who are Premillennial most would claim that there is no rapture. There is no 7-year Tribulation period.
The Second Coming and Millennium	Christ's 2nd Coming will be Premillennial. He will govern the entire world for 1000 years, from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem. Even though the Gospel will be preached, the world will get worse until Christ comes.	Most are Amillennial believing that Christ is reigning now over a spiritual kingdom. Some are Postmillennial who teach that believers are "bringing in" the Kingdom on earth. Some are Premillennial.
Resurrection	The resurrection of believers and unbelievers is separated by the 1000-year Millennium.	There is one general resurrection of believers and unbelievers.
Judgment	There are multiple judgments—The Great White Throne judgment of unbelievers, the Bema Seat judgment of believers, the Sheep & Goat judgment of the nations, etc.	There is only one judgment at the end of the age which includes all.

CONCLUSION

Belief determines outcome. For instance, one's hermeneutical presuppositions make a difference. A literal interpretation of Scripture presents God's unified sovereign plan for history. Numerous prophetic passages of Scripture, if taken literally, clearly portray divine plans yet to be accomplished. A literal view of Scripture portrays a coming rapture of the Church followed by a terrible time of great tribulation. Then Christ will return to rule righteously over His literal, earthly Kingdom as promised in the Davidic Covenant.⁴³ If the hundreds of prophecies having to do with these, and other, future events are never literally fulfilled within the scope of history, would it not appear that God did not, or could not, fulfill His plan as promised?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Books:

- Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983).
- Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism, Revised and Expanded*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1995).
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- John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, (Findley, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1959).
- Mal Couch, Gen. Ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1996).
- Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord, Come!, A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995).

⁴³ Covenant Theologians acknowledge the outcome of literal interpretation. Amillennialist Floyd Hamilton states, "Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures. That was the kind of Messianic Kingdom that the Jews of the time of Christ were looking for, on the basis of a literal kingdom interpretation of the Old Testament promises." Another amillennialist, Oswald Allis, admits that "the Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age." Cited in Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 83, 86.

- Renald E. Showers, *There Really is a Difference, A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*, (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990).
- Willis, Master & Ryrie Eds., *Issues in Dispensationalism*, (Chicago, Moody Press 1994).

Articles:

- Grant Hawley, “[Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked Part 1](#)”
- Grant Hawley, “[Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked Part 2](#)”
- Grant Hawley, “[Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked Part 3](#)”
- Thomas Ice, [A Short History of Dispensationalism](#)
- Thomas Ice, [Dispensational Hermeneutics](#)
- Thomas Ice, [The Literal Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy](#)
- Thomas Ice, [What About The Land Promises to Israel](#)
- Thomas Ice, [What Is Dispensationalism](#)