

# Introduction to Dispensations

**“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”**

**(Ephesians 3:20-21)**

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# Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Study to show thyself approved  
unto God, a workman that  
needeth not to be ashamed,  
**rightly dividing the word of  
truth** (2 Timothy 2:15).

This verse of Scripture ought to be very meaningful to those of us who are accountable to the Chief Shepherd of the flock. God has committed unto us sixty-six infallible, inerrant Books which we are to faithfully study, allowing the truth of His Word to become part of the very fabric of our being. We are then to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation (judgment)" (James 3:1). We are certainly not to take this awesome responsibility lightly.

C.I. Scofield authored a very helpful booklet. Its title (*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*) is derived from the above verse of Scripture. This is what Scofield says in the introduction:

**In the second chapter of Second Timothy the believer is presented in seven characters. He is called a son, verse 1; a soldier, verse 3; an athlete, verse 5; a husbandman, verse 6; a workman, verse 15; a vessel, verse 21; and a servant, verse 24.**

With each of these characters there is a *suited* exhortation. As a son, Timothy is exhorted to be strong in grace. *Grace* goes with *sonship*, just as *law* goes with *servitude*--as we learn from Galatians. Then, as a soldier, Timothy is exhorted to endure hardness, and to avoid worldly entanglements; these are right elements of good soldiership. As a vessel, he is to be cleansed, separated; as a servant, gentle, patient, meek; and so of each of these seven aspects of his life as a Christian.

In verse 15 he is told what is required of him as a *workman*:

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*"

The Word of Truth, then, has right divisions, and it must be evident that, as one cannot be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" without observing them, so *any study* of that Word which ignores those divisions must be in large measure profitless and confusing. Many Christians freely confess that they find the

study of the Bible weary work. More find it so, who are ashamed to make the confession.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to indicate the more important divisions of the Word of God.

Scofield then proceeds, in his brief, lawyer-like, logical style, to explain the following Biblical distinctions:

**The differences between the Jew, the Gentile and the Church of God.**

**The differences between the seven dispensations.**

**The differences between the two advents of Christ.**

**The differences between the two resurrections.**

**The differences between the five judgments.**

**The differences between law and grace.**

**The differences between the believer's standing and state.**

**The differences between salvation and rewards.**

**The differences between believers and professors.**

When such differences are not observed and understood, then great confusion results. For example, reformed theology often fails to distinguish between the two resurrections and between the various judgments, and the result is that they teach one general resurrection and one general judgment which takes place at the end of the world. This would be like a professor of history looking back at the twentieth century and saying that World War I and World War II and the Vietnam War and the Gulf War were actually all one giant war and should not be treated as separate wars. I should not like to have him as my professor for history! I would be utterly confused by this professor's propensity to blur all distinctions and lump everything together as one!

Let us now get back to our verse:

**Study**--Although the idea of "study" is certainly conveyed by this verse, this particular word actually means "be diligent, make every effort, exert yourself, give your utmost effort." The word is used in Ephesians 4:3--"endeavoring (making every effort) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is used in Hebrews 4:11--"We are to be diligent and to make every effort to enter into God's rest."

**to show thyself approved unto God**--We are to make every effort to present ourselves before God as approved workmen! When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ we want to hear Him say, "Well done My good and faithful student! You have learned from Me. You have correctly handled and faithfully taught My Word of truth." We want God's approval, not only for how we live our life, but for how we study His Word.

**a workman that needeth not to be**

**ashamed**--Bible study is hard work and yet very rewarding. There are precious gems to be found, but finding them involves laborious work and great effort. Digging is not easy. Spurgeon said, "There are some precious jewels which may be discovered even by the wayfaring man, but the mass of the gold is hidden in the bowels of the earth; and he who would be rich in

these treasures, must dig into Scripture. Thou must go down into its depths, and thou must rummage there until thou gettest at last at the treasure." May we be among those who "labour (toil to the point of weariness and exhaustion) in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17). Woe be unto the lazy and slothful workman who will be ashamed before Christ for his failure to "give himself wholly" to the study of the Word (1 Timothy 4:16).

**rightly dividing the Word of Truth**--the word "rightly dividing" literally means "to rightly cut, to cut straight."

## **2 Timothy 2:15**

**Rightly  
Dividing**

**ORTHOTOMEIO**

ὀρθοτομέω

**ORTHO=straight,  
right**

**TOMEIO=to cut**

The Bible student is to very carefully cut and divide the Word of God in order to understand it aright. As an illustration of this, consider the dissection of the human body. In medical school the students actually work with a human cadaver. It is very difficult to learn about the human body apart from having an actual human body to dissect.

The medical student first needs to realize that the body needs to be very carefully cut. You would not want to put it through a wood chopper or take a butcher knife to it. But with the right instruments and specialized knives, very careful cuts can be made. The whole purpose of the dissection is to learn about the human body. As the student examines the human body he is looking for both similarities and differences. He sees veins and arteries which in some ways are similar but in other ways are different. The small intestines are similar to the large intestines, but there are differences also, especially in size.

The medical student also notices that there are some things that run throughout the body but there are other things that are found in only one section of the body. For example, the circulatory system runs throughout the body as does the nervous system, but the digestive system runs through only the top half of the person and not in the legs. The same is true for the respiratory system. The reproductive system is even more localized.

In much the same way, when we study God's Word we must carefully cut and dissect the Word of truth. We are to note the things that are similar and the things that are different. For example, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the twelve disciples and the seventy disciples all preached the same message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9). This is an example of similarity. The commission given by Christ to the disciples in Matthew 10 was intended for Israel only, not for the Gentiles and not for the Samaritans (Matthew 10:5-6). The commission given by Christ to the disciples after the resurrection was intended for all nations, including the Samaritans and the Gentiles (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). This is an example of a clear difference.

There are many things in life that need to be distinguished. Certain differences must be recognized and understood. For example, snakes are snakes, but most people would want to distinguish between a harmless garter snake and a deadly rattlesnake. Mushrooms are mushrooms, but those who gather mushrooms for eating must make a difference between the kinds that are edible (fit to be eaten) and the kinds that are not edible and even poisonous. So also there are many things in God's Word that need to be carefully distinguished.

The diligent workman also notices that there are certain things that are found throughout the Bible. Here are some examples: 1) the way of salvation---always "by grace through faith"; 2) the nature and character of God--He never changes; 3) the nature and character of Satan; 4) the sinfulness of sin; 5) the wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart; etc. There are other things that do not run throughout the Bible: 1) Worshippers once brought a lamb, but this is not the case today; 2) Under the law there were certain foods that were not to be eaten, but today every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused (1 Tim. 4:4); 3) Some animals are ferocious and carnivorous today but there is coming a time when this will not be the case (Isaiah 11); 4) God's temple used to be a magnificent building constructed by the Jews but today God's temple is a body of believers (1 Cor. 3:16); etc.

This was the purpose of Scofield's booklet, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*. It was written to help believers understand things in God's Word that need to be distinguished. If we confuse the judgment seat of Christ (which is for believers) with the Great White Throne Judgment (which is for the unsaved) then only confusion can result. If a passage is speaking of a professing believer and we think it is talking about a true believer, then we could easily fall prey to the error that a believer can lose his salvation (there's a big difference between professing Christ and possessing Christ--1 John 5:12). For a discussion of some of these key differences see **THE TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST, THE FIVE JUDGMENTS and THE TWO RESURRECTIONS.**

May the God of truth enable us to carefully and rightly dissect His precious Word, allowing God's Word to say what it says, remembering that God says what He means and means what He says. May we be those who tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:1-2).

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONS

In this set of notes we will be studying "DISPENSATIONS." This is a big word and we want to try to understand what it means. But before we take a look at the word itself, there is something that we must first understand.

### Recognizing Differences

God never changes. He is always the same. In Malachi 3:6 we read these important words spoken by God Himself: "I am the \_\_\_\_\_, I \_\_\_\_\_; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." We can always count on God being God. We never have to worry about God suddenly becoming different from what He is.

But this unchanging God has different ways of dealing with different men throughout the course of history. God deals with different men at different times in different ways! God did not deal with the Apostle Paul in the same way that He dealt with Abraham. God was merciful to both of these men and God saved both of these men and God will spend eternity with both of these men, but God did not deal with these two men in the same way. These two men lived at different times in history and they had different responsibilities and obligations before God. The same could be said about Noah and Solomon. God dealt differently with these two men. Noah's responsibility was to build an ark. Solomon lived hundreds of years later and his responsibility was to build a temple.

### Difference in the Amount of Truth Revealed

Throughout the thousands of years of human history God has been revealing His truth to men. We must understand that God reveals His truth to men gradually and not all at once. God revealed certain things to Adam, but there were many things that God did not reveal to him. Later God revealed even more things to Abraham. Later in history God revealed even more things to Moses and to David. When Jesus walked this earth He revealed certain things to His disciples which had never been revealed to Old Testament believers:

"For verily I say unto you, that many \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to \_\_\_\_\_ those things which ye hear, and have \_\_\_\_\_ heard them." (Matthew 13:17)

But even these disciples were not given all of the truth. There were many things that Jesus did not tell them because they were not ready to hear them:

"I have yet \_\_\_\_\_ things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12)

Later after the death and resurrection of Christ God revealed even more things to the Apostle Paul (see Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3-5). Finally after Paul and the other apostles had died, God revealed even more of His truth to the Apostle John, the man who penned the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1-3,9-12,etc.).

## INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONS

God uses the same kind of method with individuals as well. When you were saved, did God suddenly teach you everything that you need to know? \_\_\_\_\_ Does God reveal His truth to believers all at once or does He reveal His truth to believers gradually? \_\_\_\_\_ God gives "baby" Christians "milk" and He wants to give more mature Christians "meat" (1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2). If God were to give us all of His deep truths when we first get saved, we would never be able to "digest" it all! We would not be ready for it! [It would be like serving steak and potatoes to a newborn!] A first grader is not ready to do geometry! Geometry, algebra, calculus, etc. will come at a later stage and at an older age, but the young student must first learn to add and subtract!

**What Bible Do You Have?**

God has revealed Himself in a Book which we call THE BIBLE. Did you know that the Bible did not come all at once? Did you know that Noah never had a Bible? Did you know that when the Church first began (on the day of Pentecost, Acts chapter 2), the believers did not have any of the books of the New Testament?

God has been revealing His truth progressively and gradually through the centuries. He did not give man the Bible all at once. Let's think about some of the famous and godly men of history and let's ask them what kind of Bible they had:

Adam:	"I had no Bible at all, but I walked with God in the cool of the garden."
Abraham:	"I had no Bible at all, but at different times God would appear to me and speak to me" (see Genesis 17:1; 18:1; etc.)
Moses:	"My Bible contained 5 books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy"
David:	"My Bible contained the same 5 books that Moses had as well as Joshua and Judges and many of the Psalms which I wrote, etc."
Ezra:	"My Bible contained most of the Old Testament books but not all of them"
John the Baptist:	"My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books but none of the New Testament books"
Paul:	"My Bible contained the Old Testament books and most of the New Testament books but not all of them"
John:	"My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books and all of the New Testament books. Shortly before I died God used me to write the last New Testament book."
(write your own name)	"My Bible contains all of the Old and New Testament books – _____ books (how many?) in all!"

The Bible you have in your hands is much thicker than the Bible that David had!

### Some Obvious Differences

Throughout history God has been merciful and gracious to man and He has made it possible for men and women to have a wonderful, personal relationship with Himself. Throughout the centuries God has been saving people "by G\_\_\_\_\_ through faith" (see Ephesians 2:8). Was Abraham saved this way (Genesis 15:6)? \_\_\_\_\_ This is how Abraham was saved (Romans 4:3); this is how David was saved (Romans 4:6); and this is how we are saved also (Romans 4:5)! Those who are eternally saved (whether Noah, Isaiah or Peter) will all be able to say the same thing: "I AM SAVED ONLY BY THE GRACE OF GOD (God's kindness and love to me which I did not even deserve). THANK YOU LORD FOR SAVING MY SOUL!"

Throughout the years of history this GRACIOUS GOD has been saving SINFUL MEN, but we must remember that God deals with different men at different times in different ways. We need to carefully think about some of these differences.

Consider this: When you came to church, did you bring a lamb with you? \_\_\_\_\_ Have you ever brought a lamb to be offered as a sacrifice for sin? \_\_\_\_\_ Did Old Testament believers do this (1 Samuel 7:9; Leviticus 3:7; 4:32)? \_\_\_\_\_ Do believers living today still offer animal sacrifices? \_\_\_\_\_ Moses and Joshua and David and Solomon offered animal sacrifices but we no longer do this today. This is an important difference.

Here is something else to think about: What do we do today if we find someone working on Saturday (the seventh day of the week)? Do we put this person to death? \_\_\_\_\_ Was there once a law which said that those who work on Saturday must be put to death (Exodus 35:2)? \_\_\_\_\_ Compare also Numbers 15:32-36 where we learn that a man was actually put to death for "gathering sticks" (violating the Sabbath law) on Saturday! Certainly we do not do this today, do we?

Today when we want to worship God do we go to a TEMPLE in Jerusalem? \_\_\_\_\_ The Jews in the Old Testament were told to worship God in this way. In Bible believing churches today you will find Pastors and Elders and Deacons, but will you find a special group of men called PRIESTS? \_\_\_\_\_ In Old Testament times the sons of Aaron were PRIESTS and no one else could be a priest. Today *every believer* is a PRIEST (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6), which means that we can come directly to God through Christ and we do not need to go through any other man. Today parents are not required to circumcise their baby boys. Parents can choose to have this done or not to have this done. In Old Testament times did Jewish parents have a choice or was it required (Genesis 17:10-14)?

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Long ago Adam was told that there was one fruit tree that he was not to eat from (Genesis 2:16-17). Is this true today? Is there a fruit tree today that people are commanded not to eat from? \_\_\_\_\_ Is there a "forbidden tree" in the world today? \_\_\_\_\_ Did God deal with Adam in the same way that He deals with us today? \_\_\_\_\_

Think about this: Did Abraham assemble together with other believers every Sunday? \_\_\_\_\_ Did David ever baptize people in water? \_\_\_\_\_ Did Moses ever gather all of the children of Israel together so that they could have a Communion service? \_\_\_\_\_ Was Solomon ever told to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (compare Mark 16:15)? \_\_\_\_\_ These are obvious differences that we need to recognize. God did not require the same thing from these men as He does from us and God does not require the same thing from us as He did from these men. God deals with different men in different ways at different times.



Here is another difference: Read Matthew 10:5-7. Who did Jesus tell His disciples to preach to? \_\_\_\_\_ Who did Jesus tell His disciples *not* to preach to? \_\_\_\_\_ Now read Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15. Who did Jesus tell His disciples to preach to? \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus told these men different things at different times and as we read the Bible we need to learn to recognize these differences.

## Differences Before and After

As we read and study the Bible we soon learn that there are certain key events which took place that made a big difference! These events brought about some amazing changes and differences. Some of the major events of the Bible are these:

- The fall of man (when Adam sinned)
- The flood in the days of Noah
- The judgment of the tower of Babel
- The call of Abraham (Genesis 12)
- The giving of the law (Exodus 19-20)
- The crucifixion of Christ
- The coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)
- The coming of Jesus Christ to the earth (His second coming)

Let us briefly consider some of these events and think about the difference that they made:

First, let us consider the fall of man:

### THE FALL

<b>Before the Fall</b>	<b>After the Fall</b>	+
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Can you think of how things were different before the fall and how things changed after the fall? Is there a difference between Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:7? \_\_\_\_\_ Is the FALL OF MAN an event which affects people even today (Romans 5:12)? \_\_\_\_\_

### THE FLOOD

<b>Before the Flood</b>	<b>After the Flood</b>	+
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Before the Flood, what was man's diet to consist of (Gen. 1:29)?

\_\_\_\_\_ After the Flood, what was man's diet to consist of (Gen. 9:2-3)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Before the Flood, were murderers put to death by capital punishment (Gen. 4:15)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 After the Flood, were murderers to be put to death by capital punishment (Gen. 9:6)? \_\_\_\_\_

**THE TOWER OF BABEL**

<b>Before Babel</b>	<b>After Babel</b>	<b>†</b>
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Before the Babel judgment, how many languages were there on the earth (Gen. 11:1)?

\_\_\_\_\_ After this judgment, how many languages were there (Gen. 11:7-9)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Before Babel the peoples of the world were together in one place; after Babel the peoples of the world were divided into nations in many places (see Genesis 10, the table of nations, which chronologically follows Genesis 11).

**ABRAHAM**

<b>Before Abraham</b>	<b>After Abraham</b>	<b>†</b>
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Prior to Abraham there was only one group of people in the world, commonly referred to as "GENTILES." After Abraham there were two groups of people in the world, JEWS AND GENTILES. Before Abraham circumcision was never commanded by God to be a sign for anything, but in Abraham's time and after it was (Romans 4:9-12).

**MOSES**

<b>Before Moses</b>	<b>After Moses</b>	<b>†</b>
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Prior to Moses there were no written commandments, but after Moses received the law from God then there were written commandments. Prior to Moses there was no Sabbath observance. Such was instituted during the days of Moses. Prior to Moses there were no detailed dietary laws (Leviticus 11), but such laws were incorporated in the law which God gave to Moses and to the children of Israel.

## INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONS

## THE CROSS OF CHRIST

**Before the Cross**
+
**After the Cross**

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We have already mentioned some of these differences. As we move from before the cross to after the cross we notice these changes: from the Sabbath to Sunday, from animal sacrifices to the perfect sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:1-14), from the sons of Aaron as priests to every believer being a priest, etc. Before the cross, under the law of Moses there were dietary regulations (Leviticus 11--things they could eat and things they were told not to eat). After the cross, notice the difference in 1 Timothy 4:3-5. Can you think of other changes or differences?

## PENTECOST

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**Before Pentecost**
|
**After Pentecost**

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Before Pentecost the Holy Spirit was W\_\_\_\_\_ the disciples but after Pentecost the Holy Spirit was I\_\_\_\_\_ the disciples (see John 14:17). Before Pentecost there were two groups of people in the world (Jews and Gentiles). After Pentecost there were three groups of people in the world (Jews, Gentiles and God's Church--see 1 Corinthians 10:32). After Pentecost there was a unique organism on earth---the CHURCH which is Christ's BODY, but prior to Pentecost this was not the case [see our study, When Did The Church Begin?].

**THE RAPTURE ("CATCHING UP OF TRUE BELIEVERS")**  
**JOHN 14:1-3; 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18**

+
**(Church Age)**
|
**(Tribulation Period)**  
**Before the Rapture**
**After the Rapture**

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Before the rapture there are three groups of people in the world: J\_\_\_\_\_, Gentiles and the \_\_\_\_\_ of God (1 Cor. 10:32). After the rapture there are only two groups in the world (Jews and Gentiles). Before the rapture the Holy Spirit is dwelling in a unique TEMPLE (1 Cor. 3:16-17; and compare 1 Cor. 6:19-20). After the rapture the Holy Spirit is still active in the world but He no longer indwells this TEMPLE. The next temple we read of is a temple of God located in Jerusalem (2 Thess. 2:4) which is a temple not consisting of believers but consisting of a literal building.

**SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

	<b>The World As We Know it Today</b>	<b>The World As It Will Be in the Kingdom</b>
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Jesus spoke about a day when the KINGDOM would come (Matthew 6:10), but this kingdom has not yet come. We are not living in the kingdom age yet! But when this kingdom does come (ushered in by the second coming of Christ), then the world will be very different than it is today. The careful Bible student will recognize these differences.

For example, consider the animals that will live in the kingdom (see Isaiah 11:6-9). Will the animals living then behave differently than the animals living today? \_\_\_\_\_ In the world as we know it today there are WARS and fighting among men (compare Matthew 24:6-7). Will things be different in the kingdom age (Micah 4:3)? \_\_\_\_\_ Today we need to spread the gospel and tell people about the Lord so that they will come to know Him (Mark 16:15; etc.). Will this be necessary in the Kingdom Age (Jeremiah 31:34 and Isaiah 11:9)? \_\_\_\_\_ These are important differences and we need to learn to recognize them!

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A dispensationalist is a person who believes the Bible [that God means what He says and says what He means] and who has learned to recognize these important differences that are found throughout history. Now we are ready to think again of this word "DISPENSATION" and find out what it means!

**The Word "DISPENSATION"**

This word is found 4 times in the New Testament. Look up the following chapters and find the verse where the word "dispensation" is found:

1. Ephesians Chapter 1, Verse \_\_\_\_\_
2. Ephesians Chapter 3, Verse \_\_\_\_\_
3. 1 Corinthians Chapter 9, Verse \_\_\_\_\_
4. Colossians Chapter 1, Verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Greek word for "DISPENSATION" is the word *oikonomia* (compare the English word "ECONOMY"). This Greek word is actually made up of two words: 1. *oikos*=house 2. *nomos*=law. Thus the word means, "the law of the house, house-law." Think about the family in which you live. Are there any "laws of the house"? Are there any "house rules" for you to follow? Has the "head of the house" given you any responsibilities or obligations to fulfill? Do you get into trouble if you "break the rules"?

This same Greek word is translated by the word STEWARDSHIP in Luke 16:2,3,4. Therefore, if we are to learn what a dispensation is then we must learn something about STEWARDSHIP!

### Stewardship

What is a STEWARD? A steward is a "household manager." He is one who looks after the goods and property of another. He is one who takes care of that which belongs to another. Most of us do not need stewards because we are not rich enough! We can take care of the few things we have by ourselves! But if a man has 10 houses, 8 boats, 2000 acres of land, 500 head of cattle, 3 swimming pools, 25 cars, 8 trucks and one oil field, then certainly he would not be able to take care of all of these things by himself. He would need men to help him to manage all of these things. A steward is a MANAGER – one who is responsible to take care of those things that belong to someone else.

There is one essential requirement for a STEWARD. He must be . . . (see 1 Corinthians 4:2 and circle the correct answer)

- a. good looking
- b. a brilliant thinker
- c. very talented
- d. faithful (takes care of the responsibilities that have been given to him)

Consider the steward described in Luke 16:1-4. Was this man a faithful or unfaithful steward?

\_\_\_\_\_ We learn about a faithful steward in Genesis chapter 39. Read Genesis 39:1-6. Who was Potiphar's steward? \_\_\_\_\_ All that Potiphar had was put into this man's H \_\_\_\_\_ (Genesis 39:4,6). Joseph took care of everything that belonged to his master and his master (Potiphar) knew that his house and his possessions were "in good hands."

Remember, a steward is the MANAGER of the house but he is not the OWNER of the house. Who was the MANAGER of the house – Potiphar or Joseph? \_\_\_\_\_ Who was the OWNER of the house – Potiphar or Joseph? \_\_\_\_\_ It was Potiphar's house! It did not belong to Joseph! In Luke 16:1, who was the OWNER of the house?

### Privileges and Responsibilities

Joseph had the responsibility and privilege of handling whatever Potiphar put into his hand or into his care. So it is with man's stewardship before God. The believer, in whatever age he lives, has the responsibility and privilege of handling whatever God has put into his hand. God put into Abraham's hand some great and wonderful promises (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-8). God put into Moses' hand a set of holy laws and commandments (Exodus 19-21). God put into Paul's hand a new understanding of the matchless grace of God (Ephesians chapter 3). Each believer has the joy and duty of handling whatever God has put into his hand. This is what stewardship is all about.

Stewardship may be compared to a person who has been given a job. Suppose the owner of a very nice store in town were to come to you and offer you a job in this place of business. This is a job which has not been given to everyone but it has been given to you.

This job carries with it *certain privileges*. There are probably many who would like to have this kind of a job, but it has not been given to them. It has been given to you. You are the one who receives the benefits that come from working in this store. You will learn many things, you will gain valuable experience, you will profit from working with other people, you will receive hourly wages and someday if you are faithful you may even get promoted!

This job carries with it *certain responsibilities*. The owner of the store is going to expect certain things out of you. If you are lazy and often late to work and if you are rude to the customers, do you think your boss will be very happy? The owner of the store will expect you to faithfully carry out your duties and to handle rightly whatever has been placed in your hands. If you handle the job well you will be rewarded. If you fail to handle the job well, you may even be fired.

Stewardship means that God has put something into man's hand, and it is *man's responsibility* and *privilege* to handle it in the right way.

### **What is a Dispensation?**

Let us now come back to the word we are trying to understand. The word "DISPENSATION" means the same as the word "STEWARDSHIP." A DISPENSATION is a stewardship and this stewardship involves three things:

#### **1. THE LORD OF THE HOUSE**

If there is a stewardship then there must be a LORD or OWNER of the house! There must be One who lays down the "laws of the house." There must be One who sets forth the obligations and responsibilities and privileges. As we read the Bible we discover that the LORD OF THE HOUSE is the LIVING GOD (compare Hebrews 3:4). He is the MOST HIGH GOD, the LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (Genesis 14:19, 22). God is the OWNER and He is the BOSS!

#### **2. THE HOUSE**

Not only must there be a Lord or an Owner, but there also must be a domain over which the Lord executes His rule and shows His authority. God's house is the WORLD: "The earth is the \_\_\_\_\_ and the fullness thereof; the \_\_\_\_\_, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1 and see also Exodus 9:29 and Genesis 18:25). The world belongs to Him and He rules over it and He governs it according to His will and according to His wisdom.

#### **3. THE STEWARD**

There must be a Lord (Owner) and there must be a House and there must also be a steward. The steward is the one who has been made responsible. He is to be faithful and obedient to the known will of the Lord of the house. The steward is assigned certain duties or directed to be in charge over certain things or responsible to do certain things (compare Acts 17:30 and 1 John 3:23 where we see that all men today have a responsibility before God). The steward must follow the "house rules" that the Lord has given him. If the steward fails to follow these "house rules" then he will be in trouble. MANKIND is God's steward (see Titus 1:7; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and 1 Peter 4:10).

Let us summarize these three points:

The Lord of the house is THE LIVING GOD.  
 The house is THE WORLD.  
 The steward of the house is MANKIND.

### **Not Just One Dispensation**

God has ruled His house in different ways at different times. This means that God's HOUSE RULES have not always been the same. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Apostle Paul all lived in the same world under the same God but they all lived under DIFFERENT HOUSE RULES. The house rules that Abraham lived under were not the same house rules that Peter lived under. If there have been different HOUSE RULES then this means that there have been different DISPENSATIONS.

We should be careful to note that a dispensation is more than just "HOUSE RULES." In every dispensation God has given to man not just rules but also a certain amount of TRUTH which man is to believe and obey and handle in the right way. Along with the rules and laws there are also privileges and opportunities and responsibilities that are involved because God has put His truth into man's hand.

Also, when we talk about "different house rules" we do not mean that in every dispensation there is a completely different set of rules and responsibilities and privileges. Some of the rules and privileges remain the same, but some change.

Consider the following illustration: Mr. Jones is a father who has 3 different sets of "house rules and privileges." This is because he has three different boys, each of a different age. This father has put more into the hand of his oldest boy because he is better able to handle it. The older son has more privileges but he also has more responsibilities. Here are the three sets of "house rules and privileges":

This illustration involves the *same Father* who has *different sons born at different times*:

#### **For 10 year old boy**

- He must not disobey his parents.
- He must honor and respect his parents.
- He must not lie, steal, etc.
- He may stay up until 8:30p.m.
- He is given a small weekly allowance (money).
- He has some homework rules. He does not have the privilege of driving a car.
- ETC.

#### **For 15 year old boy**

- He must not disobey his parents.
- He must honor and respect his parents.
- He must not lie, steal, etc.
- He may stay up until 10:00 p.m.
- He is given a larger weekly allowance.
- He is given more rules about homework.
- He does not have the privilege of driving a car.
- ETC.

**For 20 year old boy**

- He must not disobey his parents.
- He must honor and respect his parents.
- He must not lie, steal, etc.
- He has a different bedtime rule.
- He is not given any allowance -- he must earn his own money by working.
- He has no homework rules because he is no longer in school.
- He has the privilege and responsibility of driving a car.
- ETC.

Do you see some things that are the same for all three of these boys? Why is this so? Do you see some things that change as a person gets older? Why is this so?

The same is true with the different dispensations. Just as we considered the same father (Mr. Jones) with different Sons born at different times, so we have *the same God* but different believers born at different times. There are some rules and privileges which remain the same and there are some rules and privileges that are new or different. Consider these three men who were born at different times and who all lived during different dispensations:

***Noah (after the flood)***

- He had the privilege and responsibility of believing what God had said.
- He had the privilege of walking with God (Gen. 6:9).
- He had the responsibility of obeying God (compare Heb. 11:7).
- The murderer should be put to death (Genesis 9:6).
- Animals should be sacrificed to God (Genesis 8:20).
- God did *not* tell him to keep the Sabbath or to circumcise male children or to baptize believers in water.

***David (under the law of Moses)***

- He had the privilege and responsibility of believing what God had said (and he knew more about what God said than Noah did).
- He had the privilege of walking with God.
- He had the responsibility of obeying God (Deut. 8:1).
- The murderer should be put to death (Exodus 21:12).
- Animals should be sacrificed to God (Leviticus 1-5).
- God told him to keep the Sabbath and to circumcise male children (Deut. 5:12-14 and Leviticus 12:3).
- God did not tell him to baptize believers in water.



*Paul (a New Testament believer under grace)*

- He had the privilege and responsibility of believing what God had said (and he knew more about what God said than Noah or David).
- He had the privilege of walking with God.
- He had the responsibility of obeying God (1 John 2:3-5).
- The murderer should be put to death (Romans 13:1-4).
- Animal sacrifices are no longer necessary (Hebrews 10).
- God did not tell him to keep the Sabbath or circumcise male children.
- God did tell him to baptize believers in water (Matthew 28:19-20).

Do you see certain things that remain the same for each of these men? Why is this so? Do you see certain things that change or are different? Why is this so?

When one enters into a new dispensation or stewardship, this does not mean that all of the rules and conditions change. Some things remain *the same*. For example, in every dispensation it has been wrong to lie and murder and steal. Also in every dispensation it has been right to believe what God has said (see Hebrews chapter 11). There are certain things that the different dispensations *share in common*. But as we have seen in this chapter, there are also important differences that must be recognized. We need to pay close attention to the things that are *different* and the things that *have changed*.

Here is another illustration that may help. What if you lived 200 years ago? Would you have a TV? a car? electricity? Conditions were very different in those days. Instead of washing the car you might need to take care of the horse! Instead of washing clothes in a washing machine, you would use a hand scrub board, soap and water, etc. On cold winter days you might have to go out and bring in some logs instead of simply turning up the thermostat (although many heat with wood even today). Your responsibilities would be different if you lived then instead of today. Some things would remain the same. You would need to eat then just as people need to eat today. Etc.

The same would be true if you were to live 100 years from now (if the Lord has not come by then). Conditions would be very different. Instead of cars there might be some other means of transportation. It's hard to imagine what kind of computers they would have then! Some things would remain the same but many things would be different.

Joshua, David and Isaiah all lived under the SAME SET OF HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES. This means that they all lived during the same dispensation. The house rules and privileges that belonged to them were spelled out in the law of Moses. Peter, Paul, John and Timothy all lived under the same HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES. The house rules and privileges that belonged to these men are found in the New Testament letters (from Romans to Revelation chapters 1-3). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph all lived under the same set of HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES and thus these men lived during the same dispensation. These men were responsible to believe the promises that God had given to them.

**“Distinguish the ages and the Scriptures agree”**

**—Augustine**

**The Different Dispensations**

*Consider the seven dispensations:*

↑ ↑ ↑  
**ETERNITY PAST**

(1) INNOCENCE (Adam)	Innocence ends with man's fall into sin.
(2) CONSCIENCE (Enoch)	In future dispensations, men continue to live under conscience.
(3) HUMAN GOVERNMENT (Noah, after the flood)	In future dispensations, men continue to live under human government (until the kingdom age when men will live under God's direct and absolute rule)..
(4) PROMISE (Abraham)	In future dispensations, the promise is not put aside nor is it annulled (see Galatians 3).
(5) LAW (David, John the Baptist)	The law is temporary, "until the Seed should come" (Gal. 3:19). The dispensation of law ended at Calvary's cross.
(6) GRACE (Paul)	While the grace of God was evident in other ages, it receives its fullest manifestation and demonstration during this present age (Ephesians 2-3).
(7) KINGDOM	The rule of God has been operative throughout all dispensations, but supremely manifested when Christ Himself rules over the nations from the throne of David in Jerusalem. God's rule will continue in the eternal state.

**ETERNITY FUTURE: THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH (THE ETERNAL STATE)**  
↓ ↓ ↓

In the above chart, under the name of each dispensation is also given the name of a man who lived during this time (except for the KINGDOM dispensation which is yet future).

Each dispensation is a period in which God had different HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES and men were given different responsibilities according to the light and truth which God had given to them. In each new dispensation God gives more truth and more light than was given in the previous dispensation. Thus throughout history there is a PROGRESS OF REVELATION (God's truth is gradually and progressively revealed to man).

Each of these dispensations will be studied in detail in later chapters (beginning with Chapter 3). At that time some of the statements made in the above chart will be further explained and clarified.

### **Four Things To Look For**

When we study each of these dispensations we will be looking for four things:

#### **1. MAN'S STATE AT THE BEGINNING.**

What were things like at the beginning of the dispensation? What was man responsible to do? What did God reveal to man? What truth did God put into man's hand?

#### **2. MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY.**

God has given man certain responsibilities and man is required to be a faithful steward of what God has placed in his hand. What responsibilities and obligations has God given to man? What was man told to do or not to do?

#### **3. MAN'S FAILURE.**

How has man succeeded or failed to meet his responsibilities? In what ways did man obey or disobey the HOUSE RULES? In every dispensation we will see the terrible failure of man. This reminds us again and again that man is a great sinner who is in need of a great Saviour!

#### **4. GOD'S JUDGMENT.**

When God puts something into man's hand and man fails to handle it properly, then judgment must follow. We will learn that each dispensation ends in man's failure and God's judgment.

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**A dispensationalist is one who believes that God means what He says and says what He means, and that it is the responsibility of every believer to humbly take God at His Word (Isaiah 66:1-2).**

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONS

In the last chapter we tried to answer the important question, “What is a DISPENSATION?” Can you remember what this word means? What do we mean when we say that Abraham and Paul lived during different dispensations? How was David's stewardship different from Paul's stewardship? Even though Abraham and David and Paul lived in different dispensations, they were all believers in the living God. What did they share in common?

In this chapter we want to try to answer another important question: “What is a DISPENSATIONALIST?” A dispensationalist is a PERSON who understand **God's dispensations** and who seeks to enter into the STEWARDSHIP which he has been given by God. God has entrusted him with certain privileges and responsibilities in light of the day in which he lives, and he is seeking to faithfully handle all that God has put in his hand.

Not everyone who reads and studies the Bible is a dispensationalist. Not everyone has a clear understanding of the things which were discussed in Chapter 1 of these notes. To better understand what a DISPENSATIONALIST is, let us **describe** this person. A dispensationalist can be described in at least 4 ways:

#### 1. A DISPENSATIONALIST RECOGNIZES CERTAIN OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES THAT ARE FOUND IN THE BIBLE.

As we studied in the last chapter, a dispensationalist realizes that God has different ways of dealing with different men at different times throughout the course of history. He also realizes that God has been gradually revealing more and more of His truth to men. For example, Paul was told certain truths that David was never told and David had certain information from God that Noah never had. The Bible that Moses had was not the same as the Bible that Isaiah had; the Bible that Isaiah had was not the same as the Bible that the Apostle John had. As the centuries passed, God gave more and more books of the Bible. More and more truth was revealed. Today we have a completed Bible, containing 66 Books.

The dispensationalist recognizes these important differences:

1. The differences that took place after the fall of man.
2. The differences that took place after the great flood.
3. The differences that took place after the judgment on the tower of Babel.
4. The differences that took place after God called Abraham.
5. The differences that took place after the giving of the law.
6. The differences that took place after the death and resurrection of Christ.
7. The differences that will take place after the rapture of the church (when Christ will remove the church from the earth—see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and John 14:3).
8. The differences that will take place after Satan is cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-12).
9. The differences that will take place at the end of the thousand year kingdom (Revelation chapters 20-22).

We will carefully study these differences later in this set of notes when we study each of the dispensations.

## 2. A DISPENSATIONALIST INTERPRETS OR UNDERSTANDS THE BIBLE LITERALLY.

The word “literally” means “word for word, without exaggeration; without imagination.” When a person interprets the Bible literally he understands the words that he reads in their ordinary or primary meaning, in their usual and normal sense. He does not try to find secret or imaginary meanings for the words found in the Bible

A dispensationalist is a person who take the Bible seriously! He believes what the Bible says. He simply takes God at His Word and he believes that God **MEANS WHAT HE SAYS** and **SAYS WHAT HE MEANS!** He does not make God’s Word say something else, but he lets God’s Word say just what it says.

Let’s consider some examples: According to the Bible God created the universe, the world and everything in the world in how many days (Exodus 20:11 and compare Genesis chapter 1)?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ The person who interprets this literally says this: “Six days means six days! God said that He created everything in six days and God means what He says! God said it, I believe it and that settles it!” [Or better, “God said it and that settles it, whether I believe it or not!”]

Did you know that there are many people today who do not believe that God created everything in six days? There are many people who say that the “days” mentioned in Genesis chapter one do not really mean “days” but they mean something else. They say that the days of creation were not really days at all but each “day” was really an **age** (a long period of time, with each “day-age” lasting thousands or perhaps even millions of years). They would say that creation took place in six very long ages! This is an example of how people take what God has said and make it mean something else (“**day** does not mean **day** but it means a **very long age**”). The person who takes the Bible literally believes that when God says “six days” (Exodus 20:9,11), He means “six days” and not something else.

**Note:** It is possible that the word “DAY” can be used to refer to a period of time that is longer than 24 hours. For example in Jeremiah 30:7 we read about a DAY which refers to the time of Jacob’s trouble. This day will last 3½ years (Revelation 12:6,14). Also we could say “we are now living in the **day of grace**” (the **day** of God’s longsuffering—2 Peter 3:8-9). Is this more than a 24-hour day? Consider this: “George Washington lived in a **day** when there were no cars or telephones or airplanes!” Did Abraham and Moses and Paul also live in this same day? In this last example the word “means “time” (“George Washington lived in a **time** when there were no cars, etc.”). When the word “day” does not mean a 24-hour period the context will usually make this clear. But when the word “day” is used in the plural (“days”) and when a number is put before it such as in Exodus 20:11 (six days) or in Genesis 1:13 (“the **third** day”) then we can be sure that it is talking about a 24-hour day. See our study: [The Six Days of Creation](#).

Another example of taking the Bible literally is found in Revelation Chapter 20. Read the first seven verses of this chapter. How many times do you read these words: “thousand years” ?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ These verses teach us that Jesus Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years! What does God mean when He says “a thousand years”? The dispensationalist takes the Bible literally and says, “A thousand years means a thousand years! If God says a thousand

years then it must mean a thousand years!" But here again there are many people who claim to believe the Bible and yet they do not believe that Jesus Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. They try to make the thousand years mean something else.

Here is an example of a non-literal approach to the "thousand years" mentioned in Revelation 20. The thousand years represent...

"...a vast, undefined period of time...It has already lasted almost 2,000 years, and will probably go on for many more. The thousand years is to be understood as a symbolical number, denoting a long period...It may require a million years" David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance—An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 507.

This writer says that the thousand years is "a vast, undefined period of time" whereas the Bible defines it as a period of a thousand years. This writer says that it is a symbolical number, but this approach is dangerous because when a person abandons the literal sense ("a thousand years"), then he can make it mean anything he wants. This writer went so far as to say that the thousand years might even last a million years! If it does not mean what it says, then the interpreter can make it mean whatever he wants it to mean.

Did you know that when people read the newspaper they understand it literally? Suppose you saw these headlines: "THE PRESIDENT WILL VISIT CHINA IN FOUR DAYS." How would you understand this? Would you say, "This must not mean the President, it must mean the Secretary of State. This visit will not be in four days, it will probably be in a month. China does not mean China; it must mean India." This would be silly! No one would interpret a newspaper article in such a way. If we make the words mean something other than what they are supposed to mean then nothing would make sense! Any intelligent person would understand that "president" means "president" and "China" means "China" and "four days" means "four days." This is the normal, natural and literal way of understanding these simple words! This is the way we need to understand the Bible also.

The Bible is not some mysterious Book with secret meanings. The Bible is a very simple Book, and the only reason men do not understand it is due to unbelief and a failure to take God at His Word. The Bible is not a Book whose message must be decoded by brilliant men who have learned the secret code. No, the Bible is so simple that a young child can understand its message and receive the Saviour by faith. Do not look for hidden meanings in the Bible. Just come to God with a humble and open heart that is willing to believe and obey whatever God says in clear language that is not difficult to understand. See our paper, **Spiritual Requirements for Understanding God's Word.**

When we receive a letter from someone, we understand the letter literally. Suppose your friend sends you a letter and writes, "I fell off a horse and broke my leg and spent two days in the hospital." Would you make these words say something else or would you accept these words as they are? It would be silly to say that "horse" really means "elephant" and "leg" really means "head" and "two days" really means "two months." If your friend had meant to say "elephant" instead of "horse" then he would have made that clear in his letter.

### A Simple Rule

When we study the Bible we always should understand a word in its literal, normal, natural and

basic meaning **unless** this meaning does not make sense. Here is our rule: **IF THE PLAIN (BASIC, NORMAL) SENSE MAKES GOOD SENSE, SEEK NO OTHER SENSE LEST IT RESULT IN NONSENSE.**

We have already seen that the “days” in Genesis chapter one make good sense. It is no problem for the ALMIGHTY GOD to create this universe in six days! We should not try to make these days mean something else (“seek no other sense!”). The same is true with the “thousand years” found in Revelation 20. We should not try to make the “thousand years” mean something else.

Sometimes when we are reading the Bible the plain sense will not make good sense. For example, in John 10:9 Jesus said, “I am the \_\_\_\_\_.” Now we know that Jesus was not actually a door that sheep pass through (see John 10:1,2,7). This does not make good sense. Jesus meant that He was like a door. A door is something that animals or people must pass through. To get into a room you must open a door and pass through. To be saved a person must go through Christ. He is the only Saviour! It is only through Him that we can enter in and find God's great salvation.

Another example is found in John 15:5. Jesus was not actually a vine and his disciples were not actually branches. But again we understand what Jesus meant. The vine and the branches give us a beautiful picture of the Saviour and His believers. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it stays connected to the vine, so believers cannot bear fruit unless they stay connected with Jesus Christ (stay in close fellowship with Him).

Here is one more example. On the night before He went to the cross Jesus took bread and said to His disciples, “Take, eat; this is my body” (Matthew 26:26). He also took the cup and said, “This is my blood” (Matthew 26:27-28). Was this bread really His body? Did this cup actually contain His blood? Did the disciples really eat His body and did they drink His actual blood? Of course not! This does not make sense and this is not what Jesus meant.

This illustration might help: Suppose a man has a picture or a photograph of his wife. One day he shows it to a friend and says, “Look, this is my wife.” What does he mean? Obviously he does not mean that this small piece of photographic paper is actually his wife! He is merely using a common figure of speech called a metaphor. What he really means is, “This represents my wife. This is a picture of my wife. When you look at this picture you will think of my wife.”

This is what Jesus meant when He spoke of the bread and the cup. Our Lord was saying, “This bread *represents* My body and this cup *is a picture of* my blood. When you eat this bread and drink this cup you will be reminded of Me and what I am going to do for you on the cross.” This is what we remember every time we take communion (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

### **Let the Bible Say What It Says!**

We need to always let the Bible say what it says. We must never **force** the Bible to say what we want it to say. Just let the words say what they say, and don't look for the words to have some strange or secret meaning! Consider 1 Samuel 17:40. How many stones did David take out of the brook? \_\_\_\_\_ Someone might take a verse like this and make it say what it never was meant to say. He might say something like this: “These five stones mean five different things. The first stone is for courage, the second stone is for faith, the third stone is for strength, the fourth stone is for victory and the fifth stone is for success!” Does the Bible say this about these stones? \_\_\_\_\_ These stones were just stones. And one of these stones went into the forehead of

Goliath! It is true that David had courage and faith and that God gave him strength and victory and success, but we learn about this by reading the 17th chapter of 1 Samuel, not from the five stones that David picked up. We need to be careful that we do not give strange meanings to simple words!

A dispensationalist is a person who takes the Bible seriously and who interprets the Bible literally. He lets the Bible say just what it says!

See the MBC paper, [Do I Interpret the Bible Literally? Seven Tests to See if I Do.](#)

### 3. A DISPENSATIONALIST MAKES A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH.

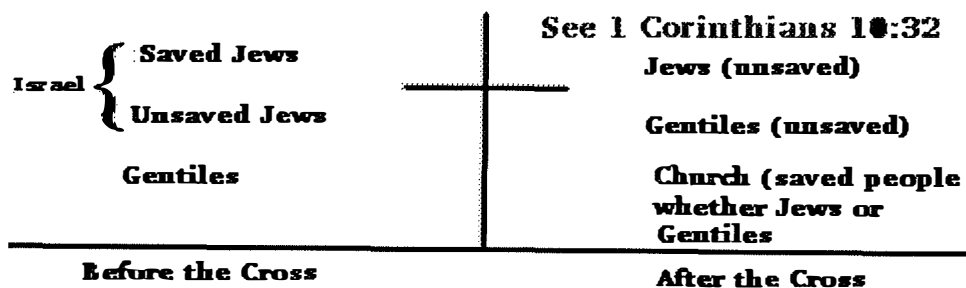
Those who read the Bible need to make a very careful difference between Israel and the Church. There are many people who believe that saved Israelites (Jews) who lived during Old Testament times were part of the church. This is not true. The church did not begin until the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost (Acts chapter 2). Before this time no one was part of the church.

An **Israelite** is a person who has descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Romans 9:4-5; and keep in mind that Jacob's other name was "Israel"). Moses and Joshua and David and Solomon and Isaiah--all of these men were Israelites. Today Israelites are often called "JEWS."

**Gentiles** are those who are not Israelites. A Gentile person is a person who has not come from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Ephesians 2:11-12).

The **Church** is something new that God is doing. Moses and Joshua and David and Isaiah were saved men and were Israelites but they were not part of the church. In Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18 we learn that the CHURCH is the **body of Christ**. Today when a person is saved he is "baptized" or placed into the body of Christ and he becomes a part of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13). Peter and John and Paul and Timothy were all members of the body of Christ. They were all part of the Church. Those who believe in Christ today become part of the Church also.

The following diagram may be helpful:



As we see from the above diagram, those who lived in the days before the cross were not members of the church. The Church did not begin until after the death and resurrection of Christ. (See Matthew 16:18--Jesus said, "I WILL build My Church." The building of the church was something that Christ would do **in the future.**)



For further help see the following MBC study: **When Did the Church Begin?**

There are many people who misunderstand the Bible because when God tells us something about ISRAEL (the Jewish people), they think that He is speaking about the CHURCH. Suppose that you read in the newspaper that Sally was given a free trip to Boston and Betty was given a free trip to New York City. If you were to then go and tell everyone that Betty was going to Boston, this would be very confusing! The same kind of confusion comes if we read the Bible the wrong way. God has something very special for the Church and God has something very special for the nation Israel. But we must be careful not to take the wonderful promises that God has given to the nation Israel and say that these are for the church! That is like saying that Sally's trip to Boston should be given to Betty.

A dispensationalist is one who makes a difference between Israel and the church. He also believes that God has made some wonderful promises concerning the future of the nation of Israel and that God will keep these promises (compare Romans chapter 11). See the paper, **A Comparison and Contrast Between Israel and the Church.**

#### **4. A DISPENSATIONALIST SEES THE GLORY OF GOD AS THE UNIFYING THEME OF THE BIBLE.**

God is doing something very special in each and every dispensation. There is one thing that God is concerned about more than anything else: HIS GLORY! The **glory of God** is the outward expression of who God is. The glory of God is the making known of God's WEALTH and WORTH and WEIGHT. God is a great God and throughout history He has been making Himself known to men and angels.

We have been studying many of the **differences** found in the Bible. However, we must also realize that there is something that God has always been doing, even though He has been doing this in different ways and at different times and with different people. Consider the following verses and see if you can tell what God has been doing in the world:

1. Joshua 4:24 (the days of Joshua). What does God want people to know?

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2. 1 Samuel 17:46 (the days of David and Goliath). What does God want all the earth to know?

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3. 1 Kings 8:43 (the days of Solomon). What does God want all people to know?

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4. 1 Kings 18:36 (the days of Elijah). What does God want people to know?

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5. 2 Kings 19:19 (the days of King Hezekiah). What does God want all the kingdoms of the earth to know?

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6. Ezekiel 36:23 (the days of Ezekiel). What does God want unsaved people (heathen) to

know?

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7. Psalm 46:10. What does God want every person who has ever lived to know?

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For a related study see the paper, **God's Primary Purpose**.

Throughout history God has been making Himself known to men. Whether men are saved or not saved, God will be glorified and all will know that HE IS GOD! Someday **every** knee shall \_\_\_\_\_ and **every** tongue shall \_\_\_\_\_ that Jesus Christ is Lord (see Philippians 2:10-11).

There are many people who believe that God's **main** purpose is to SAVE PEOPLE. The Bible clearly teaches that God desires to save all men (1 Timothy 2:4; John 3:16; etc.) and that God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the \_\_\_\_\_ (1 John 4:14 and compare John 3:17). But the salvation of men is not God's **main** purpose.

Consider for example the days of Noah. How many people were saved in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:20)? \_\_\_\_\_ Only eight people were on that ark! All the rest of the people on the face of the earth PERISHED (2 Peter 3:6)! Does this mean that God was a failure because so few people were saved? If saving lost men were the one thing that God was most concerned about, then we would have to say that in the days of Noah God must have failed because so few were saved and so many perished. Even today the Bible says that only F\_\_\_\_\_ will be saved (Matthew 7:14). We know that GOD HAS NEVER BEEN A FAILURE! Even in the days of Noah God was making Himself known to men. God made it known to all men that He was a HOLY GOD who hates sin and must judge sin. He also showed that He was a GRACIOUS God to those who believe Him and obey His Word (Genesis 6:8-9; Hebrews 11:7). God succeeded in making Himself known, even to a world that rejected Him.

No matter what period of history you are reading about in the Bible, you can be sure that God is demonstrating and revealing and making known WHO HE IS to men! A dispensationalist is one who recognizes that God's main purpose is to bring GLORY to Himself in each and every period of human history.

For further study, see the paper, **The Glory of God**.

## **THOSE WHO ARE NOT DISPENSATIONALISTS**

As we mentioned before, not everyone is a dispensationalist. There are many who believe in what they call "Covenant Theology." Instead of believing in the different dispensations, they believe in what they call **TWO MAIN COVENANTS**. Let us briefly consider what these people believe:

### **Covenant Theology**

Those who believe in Covenant Theology (including many who believe in REFORMED THEOLOGY--see our study, **Problems with Reformed Theology**) say that there are two main covenants and that all of God's dealings with men can be explained in light of these two

covenants:

### 1. The Covenant of Works.

A Covenant is a special agreement between God and man. Those who believe in Covenant Theology say that God made a special covenant with Adam which is called THE COVENANT OF WORKS. Four things are said about this covenant:

1. It was an agreement which God made with Adam.
2. It contained the promise of eternal life.
3. The condition which Adam had to meet was PERFECT OBEDIENCE. He had to do exactly what God said.
4. The penalty for disobedience was DEATH (see Genesis 2:15-17).

Of course, Adam disobeyed God's command and thus Adam failed to meet the requirements of the "covenant of works."

### 2. The Covenant of Grace.

Because of Adam's sin and failure, a second, covenant, THE COVENANT OF GRACE, was brought into operation. This covenant is defined as a gracious agreement between an offended God and sinful man, in which God promises salvation to man if man will believe in the promised Saviour (compare Genesis 3:15). The Covenant of Grace is the only hope that sinful men have of entering into eternal life. The only way sinful men can be saved is by the grace of God through faith in God's Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Some Problems

Much of what these people say is very true. It is true that Adam failed to obey God and it is also true that God has devised a gracious plan whereby He can save lost sinners. But those who believe in Covenant Theology try to use these two Covenants alone (especially the Covenant of Grace) to explain all relationships between God and men from the beginning to the end of time.

If these two Covenants are so important you would think that the Bible would mention them many times. But the fact is that the Bible **never** says anything about a "Covenant of Works" or a "Covenant of Grace." These are terms that men have made up and they are not found in the Bible.

The Bible does mention several different covenants, but it never mentions the "covenant of works" or the "covenant of grace." Here are **some** of the covenants that we do find mentioned in the Bible:

1. The covenant God made with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17).
2. The covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 17:1-4).
3. The covenant God made with Moses and the children of Israel (Exodus 19:5-8).
4. The covenant God made with David (2 Samuel 7).
5. The covenant God made with Israel called "the new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Many different covenants are mentioned in the Bible, but the Bible never talks about a "Covenant of Works" or a "Covenant of Grace."

Those who believe in Covenant Theology try to understand all of the Bible in light of the “Covenant of Grace.” They believe that God’s main purpose in the world, in any age, is the redemption and salvation of lost men. The dispensationalist does not minimize the importance of God’s plan of redemption in the Bible, but he also understands that God has even a greater purpose: TO BRING GLORY TO HIMSELF. The salvation and redemption of men by God’s grace is one of the chief ways that God receives glory unto Himself:

<b>Ephesians 1:6</b>	“to the _____ of the _____ of His grace”
<b>Ephesians 1:12</b>	“that we should be to the _____ of His _____”
<b>Ephesians 1:14</b>	“unto the _____ of His _____”

God will even be glorified by the damnation of lost men (such as Pharaoh—see Romans 9:21-22). This means that even men suffering in hell will bring glory to God. Whether men are saved or lost, God’s purpose will be fulfilled and God will make Himself known to all men!

## Ultra-Dispensationalists

Another wrong understanding of the Bible is known as Ultradispensationalism. The word “ultra” means “going beyond others, going beyond due limits, being **extreme**.” An ultra-dispensationalist is a person who has carried the idea of dispensations too far! This person sees too many differences in the Bible and this results in confusion.

The main problem centers around this very important question: WHEN DID THE CHURCH BEGIN? Dispensationalists believe that the Church began when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost (about 30 A.D.), as described in Acts chapter 2. Ultra-dispensationalists believe that the Church began much later. Some say the church began in Acts Chapter 13 (about 47 A.D.) and some say the church began in Acts Chapter 28 (about 60 A.D.).

Because they begin the church much later, ultra-dispensationalists say that there are certain things that we read in the New Testament which are **not** for today. For example, they teach the following:

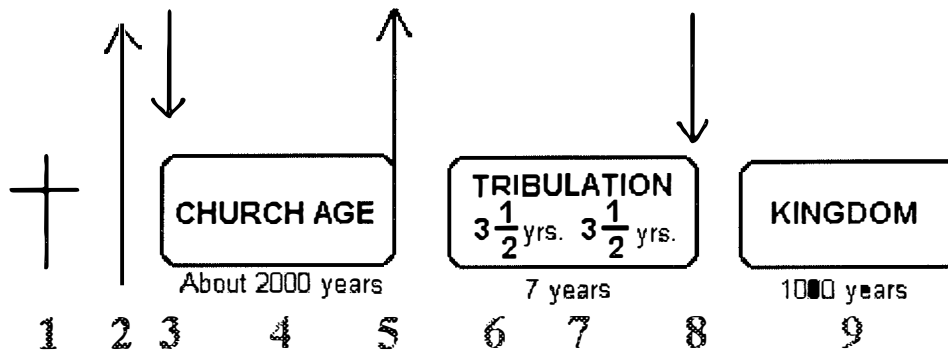
1. Water baptism is not for today.
2. The Lord’s Table (Communion) is not for today (not all Ultra-dispensationalists believe this but many do).
3. The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16 is not for today. They would say that these commands given by Christ were never meant for the Church.

Did the Church really begin in Acts Chapter 13 or Acts Chapter 28? There is a simple way to show from the Bible that this is not true. According to Acts 2:47 we learn that God was adding people to His \_\_\_\_\_. Therefore the Church must have already begun! Also in 1 Corinthians 15:9 the Apostle Paul said, “I persecuted the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.” We read

about this persecution in Acts 7:58; 8:1-3 and 9:1-2. In Acts chapter 9 we read about Saul's (Paul's) conversion. This is when Paul was saved! If Paul persecuted the Church before he was saved, then the Church must have been in existence at this time! You cannot persecute something that does not exist. Therefore the Church must have begun before Paul was saved. The Church could not have begun in Acts Chapter 13 or in Acts Chapter 28 because Paul was already saved by then!

For a more detailed study on when the church began, see [When Did The Church Begin?](#)

### Terms To Understand



### THESE NUMBERS ARE EXPLAINED AS FOLLOWS:

- 1 The Lord Jesus Christ is crucified for the sins of the world.
- 2 The risen Christ returns to heaven (Acts 1).
- 3 The Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost and the Church Begins (Acts chapter 2).
- 4 The Church Age (every person who believes in Christ becomes a member of the Church which is the body of Christ—see 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:47).
- 5 The rapture of the Church (John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- 6 The seven year period of tribulation (time of great trouble on the earth). The last half of this seven year period is called the time of “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21 and see Jeremiah 30:7).
- 7 The middle of the tribulation (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15).
- 8 The return of Jesus Christ to the earth (Revelation 19; Mt.24:30).
- 9 The thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth (Rev. 20).

### Terms That Are Helpful to Understand

**Question Number 1—When will the rapture take place? Will this event take place before, during or at the end of the tribulation? See number 5 on the chart given on the previous page.**

* Pre-tribulation Rapture:	This is the belief that the church will be raptured (taken to heaven) <b>before</b> the seven years of tribulation.
Mid-tribulation Rapture:	This is the belief that the church will be raptured in the middle of the seven years of tribulation.
Pre-wrath Rapture:	This is the belief that the church will be raptured about 3/4 of the way through the seven years of tribulation.
Post-tribulation Rapture:	This is the belief that the church will be raptured <b>after</b> the 7 years of tribulation.

**Question Number 2—When will Jesus Christ come to the earth? When will this event take place in relation to the millennial kingdom? See number 8 on the chart given on the previous page.**

* Premillennial:	This is the belief that Jesus Christ will come to the earth <b>before</b> the 1000 year kingdom. The term “millennium” refers to that thousand year period described in Revelation 20:1-7.
Postmillennial:	This is the belief that through the preaching of the gospel man will bring in the kingdom and that Christ will not come until <b>after</b> the kingdom has already come to earth.
Amillennial:	[This term means “no kingdom” or “ <i>no millennium</i> ”.] This is the belief that there will be no literal, earthly kingdom of Christ. Those who are amillennial usually believe that the many verses in the Bible that describe the kingdom are being fulfilled today in the Church.

\* The asterisk indicates that this is the view which is taught in the Bible.

A Dispensationalist believes that Christ's coming to earth as King will take place before the millennium (premillennial) and he believes that Christ will come for His church before the tribulation period (pretribulation rapture).

For more information on Prophecy, see the MBC set of Bible study worksheets entitled *Prophecy--Preview of Coming Events*.



## Simply Taking God at His Word!

From Genesis to Revelation it becomes quite evident that “GOD HATH SPOKEN” (Hebrews 1:1-2). He has spoken with unique authority and with unquestionable clarity. It is man’s full responsibility to understand and believe God’s Word as it is revealed on the pages of sacred Scripture.

Since the dawn of human history the subtle Serpent has been causing men to question and doubt God’s Word; “YEA, HATH GOD SAID?” (Genesis 3:1). Today this same spirit is working in the children of disobedience, creating in them an ungodly suspicion as to *what* God has spoken or even *whether* God has spoken.

How frequently we hear the objection, “But that’s just *your* interpretation!” What they are really saying is this: “We cannot really be *sure* about what God says. The Bible means different things to different people. Please don’t force your interpretation on us!” Of course, if Scriptural statements can mean different things to different people then the message of the Bible is totally ambiguous and utterly worthless.

It is refreshing to read the inspired writings of the Old Testament prophets. They gave forth God’s Word with a healthy and positive dogmatism. They would *never* introduce their message as follows:

*“I think this is what God said...”*

*“The mouth of the LORD may have spoken this, but, on the other hand, perhaps it is merely my own subjective interpretation...”*

*“Here is God’s message. Interpret it any way you want...”*

No, on the contrary, they asserted the following:

*“Thus saith the LORD!”*

*“The mouth of the LORD hath spoken it!”*

*God means what He says and says what He means!*

Consider a specific verse of Scripture such as John 3:16. Those who believe in God’s Son will have everlasting life. Those who do not believe in God’s Son will perish. This not someone’s fanciful interpretation. *This is what it says!*

Every true believer in Christ strongly affirms that the Bible speaks with certainty and plainness. God has given to us a clear written record (1 John 5:11-12). Those who believe not this record do so to the danger of their own eternal souls (1 John 5:9-10). But those who do believe it are saved forever!

