

INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONALISM

April 25, 2024

II. INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONALISM.

A. Definition.

1. Some Disappointment.

2. Summary Definition (Preliminary)

- a) *"Dispensationalism is a theological system that recognizes these ages ordained by God to order the affairs of the world."*¹

3. Fuller Definition (Preliminary)

Dispensationalism is a form of biblical theology primarily focused on the doctrines of the end times and church through the consistent application of a plain understanding of the words of Scripture resulting in a consistent distinction being maintained between Israel and the Church, and the view that the unifying theme of the Bible is God's kingdom plan. (DSH)

a) Biblical Theology.

- (1) **Systematic Theology** — "A science which follows a humanly devised scheme or order of doctrinal development and which purports to incorporate into its system all the truth about God and His universe from any and every source."² (Others³)

- (2) **Historical Theology** — "A science which traces the historical development of doctrine and is concerned, as well, with the distinctly sectarian variations and the heretical departures from biblical truth which have appeared during the Christian era."⁴

- (3) **Practical Theology** — "Concerned with the application of the truth to the hearts of men."⁵

- (4) **Biblical Theology** — "Biblical theology gives special attention to the teaching of individual authors and sections of Scripture, and to the place of each teaching in the historical development of Scripture."⁶

(5) **Summary of Biblical Theology**

Biblical theology is that discipline of study which seeks to understand what each passage and book of the Bible says and means and how it is presented historically according to the progressive revelation of Scripture.

(6) **How this relates to Dispensationalism.**

- (a) Dispensationalism is Inductive
 (b) Dispensationalism is Historical
 (c) Dispensationalism is Descriptive

¹ [gotquestions.org https://www.gotquestions.org/dispensationalism.html](https://www.gotquestions.org/dispensationalism.html)

² Chafer, **ST**, vol. 1, p. 5.

³ Is the discipline which "attempts to summarize truth or the belief system of a religious group through an organized system of thought carried out within a particular cultural and intellectual context." (**Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms**, p. 111)

"Systematic theology involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teaching clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic." (Grudem, **ST**, p. 21)

"The correlation of the data of biblical revelation as a whole in order to exhibit systematically the total picture of God's self-revelation." (Ryrie, **BT**, p. 538)

"The science of God...a summary of religious truth scientifically arranged, or as a philosophical digest of all religious knowledge." (WL Alexander, **Biblical Theology**, I, 1)

"The science of God and the relations between God and the universe." (AH Strong, **ST**, p. 1)

"To systematize the facts of the Bible, and ascertain the principles or general truths which those facts involve." (C Hodge, **ST**, I, p. 18)

⁴ Chafer, **ST**, vol. 1, p. 5.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Grudem, **ST**, p. 22.

- b) **Doctrines of the End Time and the Church** — Dispensationalism is primarily about the doctrinal areas of Eschatology, Israel, and the Church.
- c) **Consistent Application of a Literal / Plain / Nature Interpretation of the Text** — Dispensationalism is unique in its consistent, through-the-whole-Bible application of the grammatical-historical-contextual interpretation of Scripture.
- d) **Consistent Distinction Between Israel and the Church** — Dispensationalism holds the nation of Israel and the Church as always being distinction.
- e) **The Theme of the Kingdom of God** — While not every Dispensationalist hold the Kingdom of God as THE theme of the Bible, every Dispensationalist hold that the Kingdom of God is a MAJOR theme in the Bible.

4. Final Suggest for a Definition of Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is based on the close study of the text of Scripture in this original context keeping with the progressive revealing of truth understanding what the writer intended to communicate resulting in the recognition that God's has worked in different ways with man throughout history.

B. Description

1. Characteristics of Dispensationalism.

- a) **C. Ryrie's 3 Parts of Dispensationalism (the *Sine Qua Non*)**⁷
 - (1) The distinction between Israel and the church.
 - (2) The literal interpretation of the Bible.
 - (3) The doxological purpose of the Bible.
- b) **M. Vlach's "Six Essential Beliefs of Dispensationalism."**⁸
 - (1) The primary meaning of any Bible passage is found in that passage.
 - (2) Types exist but national Israel is not an inferior type that is superseded by the church.
 - (3) Israel and the Church are distinct.
 - (4) Spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles is compatible with a future functional role for Israel as a nation.
 - (5) The nation of Israel will be both saved and restored with a unique functional role in a future earthly millennial kingdom.
 - (6) There are multiple senses of "seed of Abraham," thus the church's identification as "seed of Abraham" does not cancel God's promises to the believing Jewish "seed of Abraham."
- c) **J. Feinberg's Essentials of Dispensationalism.**
 - (1) Belief that the Bible refers to multiple senses of terms like "Jew" and "seed of Abraham."
 - (2) An approach to hermeneutics that emphasizes that the OT be taken on its own terms and not reinterpreted in light of the NT.
 - (3) Belief that OT promises will be fulfilled with national Israel.
 - (4) Belief in a distinctive future for ethnic Israel.
 - (5) Belief that the church is a distinctive organism.
 - (6) A philosophy of history that emphasizes not just soteriological and spiritual issues but social, economic, and political issues as well.

⁷ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 38-41.

⁸ Vlach is not a traditional dispensationalist. He places himself between what is called revised (Ryrie, Walvoord) and progressive dispensationalism.

Ryrie	Vlach	Feinberg
Distinction between Israel and the Church	Israel and the Church are distinct.	Belief that OT promises will be fulfilled with national Israel.
	Spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles is compatible with a future functional role for Israel as a nation.	Belief in a distinctive future for ethnic Israel.
	The nation of Israel will be both saved and restored with a unique functional role in a future earthly millennial kingdom.	Belief that the church is a distinctive organism.
	There are multiple senses of "seed of Abraham," thus the church's identification as "seed of Abraham" does not cancel God's promises to the believing Jewish "seed of Abraham."	
Literal Interpretation of the Bible	The primary meaning of any Bible passage is found in that passage.	An approach to hermeneutics that emphasizes that the OT be taken on its own terms and not reinterpreted in light of the NT.
	Types exist but national Israel is not an inferior type that is superseded by the church.	Belief that the Bible refers to multiple senses of terms like "Jew" and "seed of Abraham."
Doxological Purpose of the Bible		A philosophy of history that emphasizes not just soteriological and spiritual issues but social, economic, and political issues as well.
	<i>As can be seen in this table, most of the additions that Vlach and Feinberg have added to Ryrie's 3 Essentials are in the area of the distinction between Israel and the Church, and the literal interpretation of the Bible. Feinberg also adds clarification to the point of doxological purpose, which, in my opinion, is really the place that needs more attention by dispensationalist. More attention to this point would be helpful in distinguishing between Traditional/Revised Dispensationalist and Progressives Dispensationalists, along with drawing sharper distinction with Covenant Theology, New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism.</i>	

2. An Evaluation of Ryrie's Points Along With Additions by Vlach and Feinberg.

a) The Distinction Between Israel and the Church. (C. Ryrie)

- (1) Vlach
- (2) Feinberg

b) The Literal Interpretation of the Bible. (C. Ryrie)

- (1) Vlach
- (2) Feinberg

c) The Doxological Purpose of the Bible. (C. Ryrie)

3. The 5 Parts of our Description of Dispensationalism (II. A. 3).

- a) A form of biblical theology
- b) The doctrines of the end times and church
- c) The consistent application of the plain understanding of the words of Scripture
- d) The consistent Distinction between Israel and the church
- e) The unifying theme of the kingdom of God

C. It Is A System

1. Presents a cohesive whole — the parts must fit together.
2. Comprehensive — take into account all the revelation of the Bible.
3. It has a unifying point.

III. FALSE OR UNFOUNDED CHARGES AGAINST DISPENSATIONALISM.

- A. Teaches More Than One Way Of Salvation.**
- B. Chops Up The Bible.**