

Israel – God’s Super Sign of End Times

Prelude to Prophecy Study 3 of 3

Dispensationalism: The Dividing Line of Prophetic Interpretation

Definition - The English word “dispensation” is borrowed from the Latin translation of the Greek verb, *oikonomia* meaning to manage, regulate, administer, or plan. The Oxford Dictionary definition **“the action of administering, ordering, or managing.”** The Greek word is used in ancient extra-biblical sources to indicate the management of a household. In the New Testament, one form of the Greek word translated as “steward” or its derivative is used 20 times in the N.T. (Luke 12:42; 16:1,2,3,8). Paul mentions a dispensation or an “administration” suitable to the “fulness of times.” Paul uses the word *oikonomia* just as dispensationalists do (Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Colossians 1:25-26). Even the covenant theologian Daniel Fuller admits this: “It is this latter sense which gives rise to the **perfectly valid theological usage of the word ‘dispensation’ to denote a period of time** during which God deals with man in a certain way.”ⁱ Paul David Nevin defines dispensation as **“God’s distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure, and judgment. From the divine standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life, or a responsibility for managing God’s affairs in his house. From the historical standpoint, it is a stage in the progress of revelation.”**ⁱⁱ

Dispensationalism sees God’s distinctive methods of governing mankind during different 8 dispensations or eras: **1. Innocence** - Gen. 1:28-3:24, **2. Conscience** - Gen. 4:1-8:14; **3. Human Government** - Gen. 8:15-11:9, **4. Promise** - Gen. 11:10-Exodus 18:27; **5. Law** - Exodus 19:1-John 19:42; **6. Grace** - Acts 2:1-Rev. 19; **8. Kingdom Millennium** - Rev.20:1-7)ⁱⁱⁱ

For brevity, this study begins with Dispensation #5 - The Law. Study #2 *Prelude to Prophecy* dealt in depth with Dispensation #4 - Promise, based on the faith of Abraham and the Abrahamic Covenant. The greatest doctrinal and theological divisions center on dispensation #5 – Law and dispensation #6 - Grace. Often covenant theologians falsely argue that dispensationalist theologians believe in two different methods of salvation, (1) that salvation was by making sacrifices and keeping the Law in the Old Testament and (2) salvation by faith in Christ in the New Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth. Abraham received God’s imputed righteousness by faith. However, many have asked, “How were people saved “before the cross” in the Old Testament?” If we can only be saved by grace through faith in Jesus and His payment for our sin, then how were the O.T. saints saved since the final payment had not been made? The answer is found in how people were saved in Jesus’ day. His listeners got saved under the Dispensation of Law since the Dispensation of Grace could not have begun before His death and resurrection. The reason many are confused about O. T. salvation is they lack an understanding of Israel’s Dispensation of Promise that preceded the Dispensation of the Law. Jesus was “made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that under the law” (Gal. 4:4,5). Did the Law give a new means of salvation and annul the promise-based salvation of Abraham? The answer to these questions is an emphatic **NO**. In Gal. 3:17-18 Paul declared, “the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.” Believing God for righteousness was enough before the Law and salvation by faith in God’s promise still stands as the only means during the Law and after the Law.

The Foundational Relationship of the Dispensation of Promise to the Dispensation of Law.

(#4) The Dispensation of Promise (Gen. 12:2,3; 13:14-17; 15:2-6).

This title *Dispensation of Promise* is derived from Hebrews 6:15. “Abraham obtained the promise”. The timeline of the “Promise” era is recorded from Genesis 12 through Exodus 18. Abraham faith in this seminal promise, became the touchstone of faith for every man. Dr. Charles C. Ryrie described the significance of this new era, “Until this dispensation, (of Promise) all mankind had been directly related to God’s governing principles. Now God marked out one family and one nation and in them made a representative test of all.” The ruling factor in Abraham’s life was

obedience in faith to that promise. In his Book There Really is a Difference, Dr. Renald Showers defines a “ruling principle” as that which “makes a difference in the way people live.”^{iv} Paul succinctly describes Abraham’s life of promise. “And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:20-22).

The fulfillment of the promise is Jesus. Paul reminds us that before his circumcision, “faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.” (Rom. 4:9,10) The entrance of the Dispensation of Law never annulled the efficacy of this promise. The Dispensation of Law is titled from the words divinely etched on Sinai stone. The “Torah,” Hebrew for Law, included 613 commandments containing the moral, civil, and ceremonial distinctions of Hebrew Civic life and worship for the national citizens. (Exodus 20 - Deuteronomy 34). Our eternal security, as well as salvation for the children of Israel in the past, is based on receiving an unconditional promise in faith. Under Law, salvation individually was by faith in the promise but sanctification for the national and for the individual held consequential blessings or cursings for Israelites. It was conditional and based on obedience or disobedience but did not annul their salvation by faith in the promise (Deut. 28,29).

God told Moses, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!” (Deut. 5:28,29) God desired a faith relationship. The key was a “heart in them” ie: complete trust in Him as their source of atonement and righteousness. The key to fellowship and blessing in this life was their obedience.

The purpose of the Law was to set forth the standard of moral character to be displayed in them that would best reflect God’s absolute holiness. His awesome display of power at Sinai was inexorably fixed in their minds like God’s words on the stones, but not all would invite His divine internal inscription on their hearts. That could only be received through repentance and faith in God’s promise just like with Abraham. Their failure to lovingly obey Him and love one another would continually remind them of their need to abandon efforts to establish their own righteousness and receive His righteousness. The Levitical system and the tabernacle allowed access for repentant lawbreakers. The animal sacrifices set the pattern of a blood-stained way to approach a Holy God. It would both temporarily atone for their sins and be a continual reminder that they were yet unclean of heart (Heb. 10:3,4). “The Mosaic Law never functioned as a way of salvation, but it did function as a rule of holy living”^v (Gal. 2:16). This Dispensation of Law was in effect a national covenant. Every Israelite citizen was potentially under penalties for violating the laws, including the death sentence for certain violations whether or not they individually had personal faith in the God of the Abrahamic promise. Citizens of all countries break laws and suffer consequences whether they believe in God or not.

The Mosaic Dispensation stayed in effect from Exodus 19 to the last breath of Jesus on Calvary. “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” Thousands, from righteous Abel to Zacharias, still only had temporary annual atonement/covering for their sin. Christ came as the blessed and blessing seed of Abraham to: “REDEEM them that were under the law.” (Gal. 4:5) The universal “blesser” foreseen in the promise to Abraham had to bear the curse of the law while under the law Himself and atone for the sin of His brethren who broke that Mosaic Law. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:13,14). Those under the Mosaic Law could enjoy salvation and forgiveness of sin, but they had limited access to God through a human mediator. In the Dispensation of Grace, we can now approach the throne of grace with confidence through the “One mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5). Jesus fulfilled the dispensation of promise after completely fulfilling the righteousness of, and He bore the curse of the Israelites sin under that Law dispensation. At the last supper or Passover Seder, Jesus

said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins," which He would shed the next day as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

Upon His last breath, the New Covenant was provided, establishing the Dispensation of Grace. This Church Age began in Acts 2:1 and will be in effect until Revelation 19:21. Although the catching away of the Bride Church ends the Church Age on earth and precedes the Tribulation, and although the Church will enjoy 7 years with her groom in Heaven, the Age of Grace will continue on earth as the 2 witnesses and the 144,000 Jewish evangelists preach The Gospel. Finally, this proclamation is extended to everyone on earth by the angel "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the **everlasting gospel** to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him" (Revelation 14:6,7). If only some are elect to be saved then why the global angelic invitation to be saved? The full ratification of the New Covenant for the national house of Israel and Judah will happen at the end of the Tribulation (Rom. 11:25; Jer. 31:31; Zech. 14:3,4).

The Dispensation of the Kingdom, ie: the Messianic Reign of Christ will prevail throughout the earth. That one thousand-year Millennial Dispensation will be announced in Heaven while the nations gather against Israel for the Battle of Armageddon. Jesus astride the regal stallion to engage those who make "war with the Lamb" and "shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful." Jesus will for the first time adorn the vestments embroidered with His royal title. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war... And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." Rev. 19:11-16

The Millennial Dispensation will conclude with the Great White Throne Judgment of the wicked dead of all dispensations (Rev. 20:11-15). "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him" (Eph. 1:10). Then the New Heavens and New Earth will dawn upon an eternal dispensation with a New Heaven and a New Earth and a New Jerusalem (Revelation 21).

Charles C. Ryrie, in his book *Dispensationalism* summarizes the difference between Dispensational Theology and Covenant Theology thusly, "Only dispensationalism does justice to the proper concept of the progress of revelation. There is extreme rigidity in covenant theology." Ryrie quotes James Orr, himself a Covenant theologian, who criticizes the covenant system along this line: "It sought to read back practically the whole of the New Testament into the Old. But its most obvious defect was that, because of the rigidity of its unifying principle of the covenant of grace, can never show within its system proper progress of revelation." Ryrie points out that, "Under the various administrations of God, different revelation was given to man, and that revelation was increasingly progressive in the scope of its content. There is no interpreter of the Bible who does not recognize the need for certain basic distinctions in the scriptures." He lists two of the most obvious ones. Trusting in the blood of Christ rather than bringing an animal sacrifice and observing the first day of the week rather than the seventh are examples of a change of in God's administration from one era to another. "A covenant theologian named George E. Ladd, who cannot agree with the dispensationalist's idea of the Jewish character of Matthew's gospel, nowhere explains, how he can interpret in any normal way our Lord's words of commission to the 12 recorded in Matthew chapter 10: 5-10 in He which **forbade the disciples to go to the Gentiles**, and the commission in Matthew 28: 19-20 that commands the same group to **go to the Gentiles**. Charles C. Ryrie remarks that that leaves three options; "One either (1) gives up in confusion or (2) resorts to spiritualizing one of the passages or (3) recognizes a dispensational distinction." The particular manifestations of the will of God in each dispensation are given their full, yet distinctive, place in the progress of the revelation of God through the ages. Dispensationalists claim to employ principles of literal, plain, normal, or historical dash grammatical interpretation consistently. As basic as one believes normal interpretation to be, and as consistently as he uses it and in interpreting scripture, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist."^{vi}

Note the distinction stated in scripture: “God, who at sundry **times** and in divers **manners** spake **in time past** unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath **in these last days** spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1,2). Paul, in Athens, alludes to a new accountability to a new revealed truth that is different than times past. “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath **determined the times before appointed** ... And the **times of this ignorance** God winked at; **but now commandeth all men every where to repent**: Because he hath **appointed a day**, in the which **he will judge** the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:26-31).

The rationale for the necessity of dispensational interpretation of prophecy is evident in the angel’s words to Daniel; “what shall befall thy people in the last days.” Hebrews describes “these last days” beginning with the words, “these last days.” We are now 2000 years along in “these last days.” John the writer of Revelation said of his time period, “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time” (1 Jn 2:18). We are now 76 years past the restoration of Israel to their promised land. They have to be present in the land before Jesus will return and establish His kingdom. The final countdown has begun as we will see in our 7-part series on the Book of Daniel entitled “The Impending Day of the Lord.”

In Second Peter chapter 3, we were warned of the increasing mockery towards those who look for the coming of Jesus. “And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*” It’s to be expected from the godless. But it is another thing to have your belief in prophetic scripture mocked by Christians who (1) Don’t believe in the Rapture. (2) Believe we will live through the Tribulation until we are killed by the anti-Christ (3) See the Church as replacing Israel and (4) therefore see no Millennium or see (5) no special place for Israel now or in the Millennium. It is completely unfathomable how those who believe Israel is no longer a distinct and chosen people separate from His Church are at best apathetic toward Israel now. Even more horrifying is their total lack of concern for reaching the Jewish people with the Gospel now. Whether a Jewish person goes into eternal Hell because they were killed by a terrorist or because their salvation was believed not possible by “Christians” makes no difference to the Devil; Hell is Hell. If it weren’t for tens of thousands of Jews who believed in Jesus and, against all norms, gave the gospel to Gentiles, then we would not be able to understand anything about the Bible, God, or prophecy much less about salvation. We are lost and with hope in this world without the Jews. Jesus said, “Salvation is of the Jews.”

ⁱ Ibid., p.33

ⁱⁱ Ibid. p.35

ⁱⁱⁱ Understanding God’s Program Through the Ages, Ken Symes, Bethel Baptist Printing Ministry, Canada, 2012

^{iv} There Really Is A Difference, Dr. Renald Showers, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990, p. 40

^v Ibid., p.43

^{vi} Dispensationalism, Charles C. Ryrie, Moody Bible Institute, 2007, p. 22-24

Appendix 1 Progressive Dispensationalism, Charles C. Ryrie, Moody Bible Institute, 2007, p. 22-24

Progressive dispensationalism teaches that (1) Christ has already inaugurated his Davidic reign in heaven at the right hand of the father which equals the throne of David though he does not yet reign as David king on earth during the Millennium. (2) **The concept of the church as completely distinct from Israel and as a mystery and revealed in the Old Testament needs revising, making the idea of two purposes and two peoples of God invalid.** (3) The New Testament makes complementary changes to Old Testament promises without jettisoning those original purpose promises (4) The one divine plan of “holistic” redemption encompasses all people in all areas of human life, personal, social, cultural, and political. **The dispensations of Progressive Dispensationalism** (1) **Patriarchal** from Adam to Sinai (2) **Mosaic** from Sinai

to the ascension of the Messiah (3) **Ecclesial** from the ascension to the second coming (4) **"Zionic"** part 1 - millennium part 2 - eternal state.

When comparing covenant theology with progressive dispensationalism it becomes clear that covenant theology has not ceded any ground on their eschatological statements, especially regarding the literal Kingdom and the literal throne of David as well Progressive Dispensationalists have ceded the position of different dispensations for different peoples through different times to one general covenant for all peoples of all times. **Progressive dispensationalist like the phrase regarding the Kingdom of God "already not yet."** In progressive dispensationalism, the **"already" is Christ's present reign is in partial fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and the "not yet" is referring to his millennial reign.**

Charles C. Ryrie sees this as a bifurcation of an old "Covenant Dispensational position, not a new theological parlance, and was used by C. H. Dodd in 1926 and George Ladd, both covenant theologians. Progressive dispensationalists argue from Acts chapter 2,3 that since Peter states that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of the father and since Jesus is the ultimate heir to the to the Davidic throne, he must now be reigning as the Davidic king and fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. Actually, what Peter is arguing for is the identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the Davidic king, since Jesus, not David, was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the father. Peter does not add that he is reigning as the Davidic king. That will happen in the future millennial Kingdom. If it is so clear that our Lord is now reigning as the Davidic king in the inaugural fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, why is that only alluded to in Acts 2? If he is reigning as the Davidic King, why was his first act the sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) something that is not included in the promises of the Davidic Covenant but is later given in the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31? Why does the writer of Hebrews chapter 12:2 say that Christ sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, not the throne of David?

However, it is preferable to see David's earthly throne as different from the Lord's heavenly throne, because of the different context of Psalm 110 and Psalm 132. Psalm 110 refers to the Messiah sitting on the Lord's throne, (v1) and serving in a Melchizedek priesthood order (4) but Psalm 132 refers to David's throne (11) and Aaronic priest (9,6). Progressives see the phrases "times of refreshing" and "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:19-21) as the first phrase, referencing the present time - the **"already"** aspect of the Kingdom and the latter phrase "restoration of all things" to the future return of Christ the **"not yet"** phase of the Kingdom. But that would not have been what Peter's audience understood nor is it supported exegetically. **The grammatical construction links both of the events the "times of refreshing" and the "restoration of all things" as the millennial, David Kingdom which will come when Christ returns and not before.** Nothing dramatically separates the promises; in fact they're joined together by the Greek connective *kai* = and. Therefore, both expressions refer to the promised restoration of the nation of Israel in the Millennium. The teaching of an already inaugurated Davidic reign in the revisionist dispensationalism is far from firmly established by clear exegesis of these texts.

The progressive dispensationalist argue that since we are saved on the basis of the new covenant then it must already be in effect partially here, partially in heaven, partially now, and partially later, although they do not clearly draw the distinctive lines separating those consistently with scriptures. **The "payment" rather than fulfillment or "inauguration" of the new covenant is what is talked about in Jeremiah 31.** In other words clearly our Lord paid for our sins that will be forgiven when the new covenant is in force he also paid for sins committed under the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Land covenants, as well as those committed for the church age or age of grace. If that were not so then there would have to be multiple deaths of Christ, one for each group who sins have been, are, or will be forgiven. The bloodshed to pay for the sins of those who experience the new covenant also pays for sins of those who believe in all ages. It is not a matter of inauguration of the new covenant but payment. The New Testament references focus on the blood as payment (Hebrews 10: 29; 12: 24; 13: 20). All of these are attempts to help substantiate the idea that David is already on his throne in other words the concept needed additional support which they purport to find in the new covenant mislabeling it as inaugurated with Israel. Two of the blessings of the new covenant for Israel in the future are similar to those experienced by the church today one forgiveness of sins to the ministry of the spirit. To sum up: in what ways are we today ministers of a new covenant? In the sense that (1) we minister in the power of the spirit to bring life, and not with self-righteous works of the law to bring death, (2) to place the substitutionary death of Christ the blood of the new covenant central and all of our ministry (3) proclaim the eschatological promises of the new covenant made with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah the distinctiveness of the church. Progressives do not see the church is completely distinct from Israel as normative dispensationalists have maintained. Neither did they consider the mystery concept of the church to mean that the church was not revealed in the Old Testament, only that it was unrealized. **A corollary of this new view erases the idea of two purpose of God one for the church and one for Israel.**