

DISPENSATIONALISM

"RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH"

**HELPFUL PRECEPTS FOR
INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE THAT WERE...**

- *EMPLOYED BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST**
 - *EMBRACED BY THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS**
 - *CHAMPIONED BY 16TH-CENTURY REFORMERS**
 - *REFINED DURING THE 19TH - 20TH CENTURIES**
- AND ARE BENEFICIAL
FOR STUDENTS OF THE WORD TODAY**

GARY RAY

οὗτοι δὲ ἦσαν εὐγενέστεροι τῶν ἐν
Θεσσαλονίκη, οἳ τινες ἐδέξαντο τὸν
λόγον μετὰ πάσης προθυμίας, τὸ καθ'
ἡμέραν ἀνακρίνοντες τὰς γραφὰς εἰ
ἔχοι ταῦτα οὕτως
(Acts 17:11)

DISPENSATIONALISM

Helpful precepts for interpreting Scripture

I Am A Watchman Publications

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

There are many misconceptions about what dispensationalism is, its origins, and how it should be viewed as a system for interpreting Scripture today.

Is the hermeneutic system approximately 200 years old? No. Did John Darby invent dispensationalism? No. Is the word dispensation in the Bible? Yes. Do dispensational study precepts have Old Testament roots? Yes.

This book will profile what dispensationalism is and is not; it will reveal how church fathers and 15th, 16th, and 17th-century Reformers utilized dispensational principles. The book will profile how refinements in the Greek and English texts made the development of a formal dispensational system possible in the 19th and 20th centuries, and it will present practical information regarding how to employ dispensational interpretation principles today.

The goal is to *rightly divide the Word of truth*.

May God richly bless you in that worthy endeavor.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Ray is a teacher, preacher, writer, and Watchman for the Lord. The term *Watchman* is used more than a dozentimes in Scripture, most notably in (Ezekiel 33:1-8). A Watchman is committed to growing in spiritual knowledge and service. He has a particular concern for the spiritual welfare of others and watches for signs (fulfilled Bible prophecies) which announce what God is about to do in the last days.

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Gary is a lifelong learner, knows and appreciates the grace of God, and enjoys both teaching and inspiring those whom God loves. His passion is to ensure all are aware of, and prepared for, the promised return of the Lord. His aim is to present spiritual truths in ways that are interesting and relevant.

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DISPENSATIONALISM

— *Rightly dividing the Word of truth* —

INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONALISM

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

II Timothy 2:15

There is perhaps no better expression to describe dispensationalism than *“rightly dividing the word of truth.”* Since this is a biblical expression, one may think dispensationalism would be welcomed with open arms. But sadly, some believe that the dispensational approach to interpreting Scripture does not align with *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (2 Tim. 3:16) and should therefore be discounted. This book addresses that misconception.

Leaning heavily on 2 Timothy 3:16, many argue it dishonors God to *divide* the Bible into dispensations and note the similarities and contrasts between them. Those critical of the dispensational system of interpreting Scripture often argue that since *all* Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is *profitable* for our learning, there is no

need to consider *when* it was written, *to whom* it was written, or in what genre it was written.

The hyper-dispensationalist will say that only a few books in the Bible apply to believers today. Hyper-anti-dispensationalist demand that believers today apply every verse in the Old and New Testaments literally and completely. Both positions are flawed.

Adherents in both camps seek to use Scripture to justify their positions. Anti-dispensationalists favor Galatians 3:28:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

2 Timothy 2:15, noted at the top of the previous page, is, of course, favored by dispensationalists. I submit that both verses are true, and that the fullness of what God wants to reveal through His Word occurs when verses are studied in light of their full context.

Strictly speaking, Paul was not a bondservant but said he was in Philippians 2:7. Paul allowed women to speak¹ in church but appears to forbid it in 1 Corinthians 14:34. Jesus did not advocate self-mutilation but said, *“If your right hand offend thee, cut it off.”*² Without viewing verses in their full context, the correct or complete interpretation of the passage can be lost.

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:5

² Matthew 5:30

Scripture notes that we have a formidable adversary, “*the devil, [who] as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*”³ He is the *Father of lies*,⁴ a master *deceiver*,⁵ and the author of *confusion*.⁶ Believers must *remain vigilant*,⁷ knowing the enemy will expertly use lies, deception, and confusion to impede an understanding of God’s Word.

2 Timothy 2:15 speaks of *rightly dividing the Word*. 2 Timothy 3:16 notes that *all Scripture is profitable*. These verses, written a few paragraphs apart, in the same book, by the same person, and to the same people, can appear to be diametrically opposed to each other if the proper context is not taken into account.

Scripture does not oppose or contradict Scripture. Scripture can illuminate, build on, point-to, and fulfill Scripture, but never will it oppose anything in the written Word. Therefore, it is incumbent for students of the Word to utilize a hermeneutic system designed to facilitate an understanding of how Scripture passages complement rather than contradict each other.

2 Timothy 2:15 notes that the worthy *workman* will get the most out of

³ 1 Peter 5:8b

⁴ John 8:44b

⁵ Revelation 12:9

⁶ James 3:16

⁷ 1 Peter 5:8a

studying the Bible by *rightly dividing it*, that is, to understand that God speaks in different ways to different people at different points in history. 2 Timothy 3:16 is true—*all Scripture is profitable* and beneficial, but the fullness of personal application flows from first understanding the fullness of the context. Dispensationalism simply provides the reader with a general grid to aid in that process.

Satan is subtle and crafty. With practiced precision he prompts compromise—the mixing of truth and lies, holiness and heresy. In stark contrast, Jesus referred to Himself to as *the truth*.⁸ Being able to *rightly divide the Word of truth* serves to guard against deception, lies, heresy—all clear objectives of the enemy. Today, many *mainline* denominations struggle with fundamental issues such as *Is Hell to be understood as a literally or figuratively? Is the Bible true? Did Jesus really die on the cross?* In many respects, the church seems to have lost its way.

Rightly dividing the Word is work

It is surprising to me that in an age when tremendous technology puts an abundance of information available at our fingertips, there is a profound level of ignorance in the world (and even in the church) about spiritual things. Why? There are likely many reasons, but simple laziness may top

⁸ John 14:6

the list. More than 30% of Americans never⁹ read their Bible. Few really *study* Scripture, and fewer still are willing to work to understand or *rightly divide* Scripture. Too many read without discernment or a genuine hunger for the deeper things. Few say, “God, speak to me today through Your word—let Thy will be done in my life.” Those who read *for enjoyment* or in a quest for *encouragement* do not understand that the call of a true

disciple is one of sacrifice and daily taking up our cross and following Him.¹⁰

Barriers to study

Recognizing the full context of the verses we study is key to understanding the passage and its application for believers today. The process requires diligent study and is often difficult. Superficial-level reading is not sufficient to receive the counsel God desires to impart through His Word. The Bible is sacred, inspired, timeless, unique—it is a precious gift that many have died to preserve through the ages. Let me encourage you to keep the magnitude of God’s gift, His Word, in mind as you consider the effort you invest in study and “*rightly dividing the Word of truth.*”

⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/299433/bible-readership-in-the-usa/>

¹⁰ Luke 9:23

The *I have a right to my opinion* mindset can also play a role in correctly interpreting Scripture. Believers are not to interpret passages with the goal of supporting one's personal theological position, opinion, or preference. Scripture notes believers are to honor the Word of God above all men; discerning ***His*** opinion and counsel is paramount. Therefore, believers must approach the interpretation of Scripture openly, humbly, reverently, with fear and trembling,¹¹ and with the goal of rightly understanding God's Word and its application for believers today.

A warning to those who lead

Scripture foretells of a time when believers will yearn for a compromised Gospel, and weak leaders will accommodate them. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 reads:

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

Sadly, Bible prophecy notes that in the last days, the church will slip into apostasy.¹² In the book of Revelation, Jesus characterizes the Church of

¹¹ Philippians 2:12-13

¹² 2 Thessalonians 2:3

the last days as “lukewarm” (a state which is detestable to the Lord)¹³. Against heresy, apostasy, and spiritual complacency, believers in general and pastors, in particular, must take a stand.

In the world today we see the makings of a perfect storm—willful, complacent (lukewarm) people and pastors not committed to earnest study the Word, or rightly teach the Word of truth. What is needed is a holy fire in our hearts—a hunger and thirst to learn all we can learn and be all we can be for the Lord. And, like the *watchmen*¹⁴ of old, there is a need for faithful followers to know the truth, identify false teaching, and lead the wayward and blind back to faith.

Responsibility

To believers, the Holy Spirit imparts wisdom¹⁵ and a calling to “*study*” His gift, His Word. This inescapable calling cannot be delegated away—not even to your dynamic pastor or small group leaders. Every believer must personally “*search*”¹⁶ *the Scriptures*,” and in this darkened world, be able to discern truth from error. The dispensational system or method for interpreting Scripture will prove beneficial to the believer in this endeavor. In fact, without a commitment to this system of interpretation,

¹³ Revelation 3:15-16

¹⁴ Ezekiel 33:1-9

¹⁵ James 1:5; Isaiah 11:2

¹⁶ Acts 17:11

error, even heresy, can find an open door into the church and quickly compromise doctrine. Indeed, this is what we see this happening in many “mainline” denominational churches across Europe and North America today.

Pastors bear a special responsibility for the apostasy sweeping across the globe—particularly the pastors who fail to teach the believers entrusted to them the effective methods for studying and interpreting the Word. There has been a falling away from time-honored disciplines, which sparked great revivals in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sadly, many Seminaries and Bible Colleges today fail to prepare men to pastor. In turn, many pastors fail to properly disciple their people. Ill-prepared believers are not only ineffective witnesses, they are vulnerable to false teaching and misinterpreting Scripture. Jesus noted that Satan will not kill the church¹⁷ but can and has worked to compromise its voice and impact in the world today.

Tragically, senior saints can remember how the world and the Church had a very different landscape not too many decades ago. Bible Study, Bible drills, and Bible conferences were common not too long ago. The world has gravitated toward adopting a kind of *church-lite* mindset. Believing in God is still the norm, but midweek or Sunday night services are not; Sunday School and personal daily Bible study is not. Witnessing is not,

¹⁷ Matthew 16:16

Scripture memory is not, prayer meetings are not, and not surprisingly, revivals are not. These things *were* foundational components of Church life less than 100 years ago, but now congregants have all but abandoned them.

Studying, discussing, testing, and even debating the interpretation of Scripture honors God. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 notes that believers should “*test all things and hold on to what is true.*” 2 Timothy 2:15 notes that we are to “*study to shew thyself approved.*” In the book of Acts,¹⁸ when there was a question about understanding the Spirit’s leading and the meaning of Jesus’ instructions, the Apostles called for what some today call a “congress of believers.” To discern the truth, those early church leaders were willing to prayerfully question, study, and debate the issues. They applied the Proverbs 27:17 principle (“*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend*”) and, utilizing an interpretation method dispensationalists use today, they rightly discerned that a new *age* had begun and God was beginning to deal with a new group of people in a new way.

Desiring the dive deep

Sadly, less than half of believers today have a good grasp of the fundamentals of the faith—and, based on polling regarding Bible reading,¹⁹ only about 15% of believers invest effort in diving deeper into

¹⁸ Acts 15:1-35

¹⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/299433/bible-readership-in-the-usa/>

the Word. Most believers are content with a superficial knowledge of Scripture—others see society drifting left, far away from the values and expectations expressed in Scripture and put on the coat of ignorance, hoping they will not be accountable for what they do not know. But deep in our hearts, we *do* know.

Yes, standing with God, with what is right and true, will cost you. In the name of *tolerance*, those who hold conservative values will be labeled a bigot. Those who advocate deep-dive studies of Scripture will likely be called a fanatic rather than faithful. This reality has profoundly negatively impacted the Church. Checkmate has not been called, but the fact that few teachers are, “worthy workmen,” illustrates why the church is in crisis today. The prophet Hosea expressed God’s concern over a similar state of affairs in Israel more than 2700 years ago, writing, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge...”²⁰

Despite Paul’s admonitions that believers must be filled with the “Spirit of Wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ”²¹ and have “full assurance of understanding,”²² many believers refuse to grow up and feed on what Paul referred to as spiritual *meat*.²³ Too often, even after spending

²⁰ Hosea 4:6

²¹ Ephesians 1:17

²² Colossians 2:2

²³ 1 Corinthians 3:2

years in the body of Christ, believers still prefer milk—many are unable to digest solid food, the meat of spiritual truth. In 2020, George Barna, Director of Research at Arizona Christian University, said “watered-down, feel-good, fake Christianity”²⁴ is “the most popular worldview in the United States today.” His statement is based on large-scale polling and profiled in an article²⁵ in Christianity Daily. The Apostle John prophesied there would be a complacent, slothful mindset in the Church of the last days. Indeed, the church of Laodicea foreshadows today's Church.²⁶ Those with a deep love for God will strive to know Him better through prayer, fasting, and earnestly studying His Word.

Ardent confidence in the Lord is a great beginning point for a walk of faith, but one's spiritual journey must not end there. Believers must learn how to study and make time to investigate what God has revealed in His Holy Word. Moses records God's invitation to “enquire and make search, and ask diligently.”²⁷ In Scripture, that invitation is tied to a reward: “*And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*”²⁸ But again, the requisite to the blessing is diligently seeking.

²⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/2p8hshz7>

²⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/4vevxdhz>

²⁶ Ray, Gary, *The Bible Prophecy Book* (I Am A Watchman Publications, Union City, CA, 2019) 130-137

²⁷ Deuteronomy 13:14

²⁸ Jeremiah 29:13

Assessment time

The truth is, most of us fall short in the area of working diligently to *rightly divide the Word of truth*. Some may say, “If it’s in the Bible, I believe it,” but find themselves cherry-picking preferred parts of the Bible to apply and embrace. Some gravitate to passages that warm the heart or somehow align with one’s preference or preconceived ideas, leaving the rest of Scripture unapplied. Many may not even realize *what* they are doing, or *why*. In contrast, the wise are willing to dig-deep, for they know that’s where the greatest treasures in God’s Word can be found. A superficial faith is a lukewarm faith—such faith is not pleasing to God.²⁹ Where are you on a scale of 1-10 regarding your love for and study of God’s Word? If 10 indicates one who is hungry for the Word, actively studies it, and prayerfully discerns how best to interpret it, what is your score? Do you believe God desires more from you?

Remember, you cannot remain a babe in Christ and be approved as a *worthy workman* for God. To be approved as a worthy workman, you must be skilled at correctly dividing the Word of truth and wielding the sword of the spirit.³⁰ Understanding the dispensational system for interpreting Scripture will help you be the worthy workman God has called you to be.

²⁹ Revelation 3:15-16

³⁰ Ephesians 6:17

A word of caution

It is normal to find it difficult to understand the Bible dispensationally. It requires time, thought, and focus—it is the work of a workman. Do not expect to grasp everything at once—take it a step at a time. The study of most everything of value is difficult at first, but as you progress in understanding, that which is cloudy will become clear.

It is also important to solicit the Holy Spirit’s assistance to help you grow in the faith. Prayerfully ask the Spirit to help you learn, retain important information, and know how to use it for the Glory of His Kingdom. Though difficult, the commitment to learn to interpret Scripture correctly is one of the best decisions you can make—nothing can compare to the satisfaction that comes from gaining a deep understanding of God’s Word.

Let God have the last word

In the book of Ezra, once the Law was read and expounded to the people of Israel, “...all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.”³¹ Everyone had an understanding of God’s Word—there was no Billy’s opinion or Sarah’s opinion. In the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, the people had recently returned to Israel after 70 years of exile for disobedience, complacency, and self-reliance. After

³¹ Nehemiah 8:12

much needless suffering, there was now repentance and a recommitment to understand the precepts and expectations of God.

When pursuing God’s opinion is paramount, there is unity among the brethren. Satan loves to divide and conquer—that’s why Jesus prayed³² that there would be *unity* in the body. Doctrinal divisions in the body of Christ occur when people usurp authority and interject personal opinion into the interpretation of Scripture. This countermands God’s directive: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the **same** thing, and that there be **no divisions** among you; but that ye be **perfectly joined** together in the **same** mind and in the **same** judgment.”*³³

The benefit of interpreting the Bible correctly

After the resurrection (but before Jesus appeared to the Twelve), two disciples with heavy hearts trekked toward Emmaus. Their faith had been tested just a few days before—their Master was crucified before their eyes. Though Jesus told His disciples what would happen, they didn’t realize, that according to multiple prophecies, the Messiah would suffer and die. So, when the Lord Jesus Himself approached, they did not recognize Him. Jesus withheld his identity as he spoke to the two men,

³² John 17:21

³³ 1 Corinthians 1:10

explaining how prophecies were fulfilled and how the crucifixion was part of God’s plan. Though slow to perceive, in the end, the men understood, believed, and delighted in the knowledge that they had received.

“And they said one to another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?’”³⁴

Here we see that it is not for man is to illuminate the Scripture to men—God Himself will accomplish that work. Humans can teach, share, and preach the Word, but God illuminates it. When rightly interpreted, the illuminated Word will touch your heart, just as Jesus’ words did for the disciples on the Emmaus Road. I share this to encourage an active, consistent, vibrant, study of God’s Word.

No small matter

Jesus rebuked the Jews for not understanding how God was working and communicating two thousand or so years ago—He noted that their rigid stubbornness kept them from perceiving what and how God was speaking to them. “You did not recognize the time of your visitation,”³⁵ Jesus said, just before the mantle of God’s blessing was removed³⁶ from the Jews and given to the Gentile world. Understanding the Bible

³⁴ Luke 24:32

³⁵ Luke 19:44

³⁶ Matthew 21:43

dispensationally may seem perplexing at first, but doing so positions you to receive all God desires to give. It can also mitigate many of the uncertainties often associated with Bible interpretation, clarify challenging passages, reconcile apparent inconsistencies, and provide confidence for witnessing, teaching, and preaching.

This introduction began by citing 2 Timothy 3:16, which states, “***All** Scripture is profitable.*” This is an everlasting truth. ALL Scripture is written *for* us, but not all is specifically directed *to* us (i.e., believers today can eat pork, but were forbidden to do so during the 1500 or so years between Moses and the birth of the New Testament Church). To best interpret and apply Scripture today, believers must be mindful of who is speaking to whom, about what, when, where, and why. These elements provide proper context for each passage—interpreting Scripture in light of its context is the crux of dispensationalism. My prayer is that the book will inspire and equip you to be the worthy workman God has called you to be.

DEFINING DISPENSATIONALISM

“It is doubtful if there has been any other circle of men [dispensationalists] who have done more by their influence in preaching, teaching and writing to promote a love for Bible study, a hunger for the deeper Christian life, a passion for evangelism and

zeal for missions in the history of American Christianity.”³⁷ —

Dispensationalist Critic, George E. Ladd

It is said that “*no single element of dispensational thought can be said to be the unique domain of dispensationalism alone.*”³⁸

Dispensationalism offers no new doctrine and is not a denomination—it is simply a system for interpreting and understanding the Bible in a way that earnest students of the Word have long embraced.

Dr. Timothy Jones writes that dispensation “translates from a Greek term that can be rendered *stewardship* or *administration*.”³⁹

What are the distinctives?

An essay titled, *Dispensational Theology* by Dr. Michael J. Vlach (professor of theology at Master’s Seminary), noted how two prominent theologians, Dr. Charles Ryrie and Dr. John Feinberg, identified key principles within the dispensational system.⁴⁰ Dr. Ryrie identified three

³⁷ Ladd, George Eldon, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), 178

³⁸ Ice, Thomas D., *A Short History of Dispensationalism* (2009). *Article Archives*.

³⁷ https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/37

³⁹ Jones, Timothy P., *Guide to End-Times Prophecy* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2011), 310

⁴⁰ ESSAY: Dispensational Theology, 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/2p897ncb>

key aspects, which he called, *sine qua non* (essential conditions). These include:

- 1) A distinction between Israel and the church
- 2) A hermeneutic of “literal interpretation” of Scripture
- 3) The glory of God as the underlying purpose of God in history

The five key aspects of dispensationalism identified by Dr. John Feinberg are:

- 1) A hermeneutic in which the New Testament affirms and does not reinterpret the Old Testament
- 2) Unconditional promises to national Israel in the Old Testament must be fulfilled by a national Israel
- 3) A distinctive future for Israel
- 4) A believe that the church is distinct from Israel
- 5) A philosophy of history in which history is the gradual implementation and outworking of the kingdom of God

Additional distinctives include a pre-tribulation view of the Rapture and a futurist interpretation of the book of Revelation.

Dispensational theological positions are held by many groups in many denominations. For example, Dispensationalists believe the Bible is true,

as do conservative Baptist groups. Dispensationalists hold a *futurist* view of the book of Revelation, as do Seventh Day Adventists. Dispensationalists make a distinction between the promises God extended to Israel and the promises extended to the Church, as notable Presbyterian premillennialists Nathaniel West and Dallas Theological Seminary anti-dispensationalist George Peters did. Dispensationalists believe in the Trinity, in a literal heaven and hell, that Jesus will return, that Jesus is the means and only way of salvation, and that salvation is by grace and through faith in Christ alone. These teaching are neither new nor radical.

Dispensationalists hold that Bible prophecy should be interpreted with a heavy bias on literalism, and that verses such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 refer to a pre-tribulation Rapture, but not all who hold those positions refer to themselves as dispensationalists.

In many ways, though general use of the term dispensationalism occurred within just the last 200 years, dispensationalists argue that their doctrinal positions and hermeneutic system align with the orthodox teachings of the historic Christian Church. More than the formation of a particular theology, dispensationalism represents a way to separate, organize, or divide Scripture to aid in understanding the full context of the passage.

The importance of context

Dispensationalists believe that the **context** of Genesis 17:10-14, which notes “*every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin...*” indicates that the primary and physical application of the verse was for Jews living under the Old Covenant before the birth of Christ. Dispensationalists also believe that the **context** of Romans 2:28-29, which speaks of a spiritual “*circumcision of the heart,*” indicates the primary and spiritual application of Genesis 17:10-14 is for New Testament believers in Christ, living in the *Church Age* or *dispensation of grace*.

Dispensationalism does not introduce a new catechism or creed but does advocate that students of the Word must interpret Scripture in the light of its full context. Specifically, this means one must consider in what time period the text was presented, to whom was the text was presented, what system of government or law was in place when the text was presented, the amount of divine revelation available to the people receiving the text or directive, and the literary style through which the divine message was communicated.

Genre

Consider: The Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write the book of Exodus. The writing is a straightforward historical (albeit amazing) account.

Moses wrote of God’s instructions before passing through the Red Sea in Exodus 14:

“But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.”⁴¹

Even though the directive seems like it may somehow be a metaphor—imagery for a more logical (from a human point of view) directive, the genre of writing indicates a more straightforward (and fantastic) interpretation of the text. In recent years, secular archeologists found evidence⁴² the biblical account is not figurative but literal, and absolutely true.

The same writer, Moses, wrote Psalm 91. The genre of the writing is poetry, which is rich in imagery and symbolism. The genre must be taken into consideration when interpreting Scripture. Consider verse 4:

“He shall cover thee with his feathers...”⁴³

Clearly, the verse is a word picture; understanding the meaning of the text requires one to view the words figuratively, not literally. Psalm 91:4 must be interpreted differently than Exodus 14:16, though they were both inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by the same author, Moses.

⁴¹ Exodus 14:16

⁴² <https://tinyurl.com/59cj8vxe>

⁴³ Psalm 91:4a

This familiar and basic tool for interpreting Scripture is one of the foundational principles of dispensationalism. What may, however, be unfamiliar to some, is that dispensationalism takes the principle one step further and, in addition to considering the genre, the student of the Word is encouraged to consider: *to what people and in which time period (age or dispensation) was the text presented?* These are the beginning steps on the road to evaluating the text in its complete context—something dispensationalists argue is key to fully understanding the meaning and proper application of the text.

Dispensations

Not surprisingly, there are various schools of thought and strong opinions under the umbrella of dispensationalism. However, generally speaking, dispensationalists believe that recognizing that God spoke in different ways in at least seven distinct time periods or dispensations is helpful in identifying the primary context of Scripture.

Does that mean that Christians today can glean nothing from reading the book of Leviticus? No, but it does mean that the context of that writing makes the primary application of the points of Law and dietary codes in that book, aimed at the Jews, living from the time of Moses to the time of Christ. Christians, then, look primarily to spiritual applications when reading the guiding principles presented in the book

of Leviticus (i.e., the dietary code pertaining to abstaining from pork point to the importance of spiritual purity).

Are there exceptions? Yes, many. However, dispensationalists argue that dividing, if you will, the Bible into seven sections (dispensations) aids in understanding and applying the text.

A high view of Scripture

Anti-dispensationalists argue that to hold the position that certain portions of Scripture primarily apply to particular people in particular times is akin to putting limits on God's Word, which is timeless, or stipulations on the way believers are to embrace God's precepts. This is not so. Dispensationalists maintain a very high view of Scripture and it was only out of a desire to understand His Word to the utmost that a dispensational system was developed.

Physical and spiritual applications

Christians today understand that salvation comes by grace through faith,⁴⁴ and that forgiveness comes by confessing sins to Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ Jews living in Old Testament times lived under a more works-based, God-ordained programme, perhaps best summarized by the phrase,

⁴⁴ Ephesians 2:8-10

⁴⁵ 1 John 1:9

living under the Law. The many traditions, sacrifice expectations, dietary codes, and worship regulations of the Old Testament stand in stark contrast to God's programme for believers today. The works, types, and shadows, of the Old Covenant point to and find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who offers what early reformers such as Heinrich Bullinger, Huldrych Zwingli, and Johannes Oecolampadius termed the *Covenant of Grace*.⁴⁶

Do Old Testament principles apply to New Testament believers? Yes. However, dispensationalists recognize that believers living in the current *church age* or dispensation, are not bound by the Law. This does not mean that the Law of Moses is to be ignored or forsaken—Scripture notes the Law was not abolished, but rather, fulfilled in Christ.⁴⁷

Believers in Christ are expected to bear fruit (produce works) as evidence of their faith in Christ,⁴⁸ but these *works* do not merit one's salvation. These truths represent a fundamental change in the relationship between God and humanity. Dispensationalists recognize that change between old and new covenants, moving from a focus on works to a focus on faith—from the physical to the spiritual, from the

⁴⁶ Ella, George M., *Henry Bullinger and the Covenant of Grace* (a publication of Martin Bucer Seminary, 2005), <https://tinyurl.com/5n8786de>, pages 3-4

⁴⁷ Matthew 5:17; Galatians 2:16

⁴⁸ James 2:14-26

Old Testament to the New Testament, impacts the interpretation of Scripture.

Consider: Most do not have difficulty seeing that for Jews living in the days of Moses, the Passover Festival had a *physical-level* meaning and application. Through Moses, God directed the Jews of old to put the blood of an unblemished lamb on the doorpost of their homes (a physical act). Those who obeyed were saved when the tenth plague fell on the firstborns across the land of Egypt. God ordered the Jews to leave Egypt the next day—another physical act.

Those who obeyed moved on toward the promised land. One year later, God instructed the Jews to commemorate the event by sacrificing a lamb and celebrating a meal (with particular foods) on the 15th day of the month of Nisan—physical acts. Those who obeyed remained in good fellowship with the community and received forgiveness of sins via the High Priests' sacrifice of a lamb. Later, the people were directed to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, and offer appropriate sacrifices via the Temple system. The physical-level meaning and application of Passover-related Scripture passages for those living under the Law are impossible to miss.

And most can see that Old Testament Passover-related directives have prophetic significance and a spiritual application for believers in the New Testament Church. The Old Testament Passover Festival points

prophetically to the sin-cleansing sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect Lamb. The physical-level Passover-related directives are not binding for Christians today.

Followers of Jesus do not need to sacrifice lambs, travel to the Temple in Jerusalem, or observe a Seder meal. Believers are, however, to perceive (and celebrate) the spiritual significance of Jesus' work at Calvary, and how, by the shedding of blood, Jesus made it possible for a sinful humanity to be restored into right relationship with our holy God.⁴⁹ Interpreting Scripture through the lens of *when* and *to whom* the passage was written, and understanding at oftentimes, this will indicate a physical-level (works) or spiritual-level (faith) application for believers today, is a key hermeneutic principle in dispensationalism.

Progressive revelation (fuller meaning)

Dispensationalism recognizes that God's working, directives, and messages can take on different (perhaps fuller) meaning to people living in different times or dispensations. Doctrines such as the *Trinity*, or schools of thought such as *eschatology*, are great teachings that originated with limited clarity. These teaching developed into strong points of faith as God provided spiritual insight to believers through

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:18; Romans 5:11

the ages. This process of illumination is called progressive revelation.

In general, dispensationalists hold that God has communicated His truth in successive stages. This progressive revelation of spiritual truth began in Genesis 2-3 with Adam and Eve, continued after humanity's fall from grace, was refined through the ages of the Patriarchs, developed through a written code (the Law) during the days of Moses, was clarified through the ministry of Jesus, crystallized in this current age, the age of the Church, and will find its completion during Tribulation period and Millennial Reign of Christ.

There is some variance in discussions regarding how many ages or dispensations there are, and by what names they should be known. Easton's Bible Dictionary lists the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations, but those are not common designations.⁵⁰ Most dispensationalist *rightly divide* Scripture into six to eight dispensations—the most common being seven.

The most common dispensations are commonly known as:

- The dispensation of innocence
- The dispensation of conscience

⁵⁰ M.G. Easton, *Easton Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 286

- The dispensation of human government
- The dispensation of promise
- The dispensation of Law
- The dispensation of grace
- The millennial kingdom of Christ.

These dispensations are profiled in detail in chapter four of this book. This chapter closes with a brief summary of the most common dispensation designations.

The Dispensation of Innocence

This dispensation covers the time from the creation of Adam and Eve to their fall from grace (Genesis 1:28—3:24). During this dispensation, there was peace between humanity and God, and between humanity and the animal kingdom. The corruption of sin was unknown. God's instructions to man were not written or complex: Humans were to procreate, rule over the animal kingdom, care for the earth, and above all, obey God's direction to refrain from eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁵¹ This dispensation ended when humans transgressed God's clear directive and ate the forbidden fruit.

The Dispensation of Conscience

⁵¹ Genesis 2:17

The second dispensation generally covers the period from Cain and Able to the flood in the days of Noah.⁵² During this time, there was no Law—and no daily intimate communion with God as was the case for Adam and Eve in the Garden.⁵³ To a large extent, especially relative to the spiritual insight believers have today, who have both the Word and the indwelling presence of the Spirit, humanity during this dispensation was left to rule themselves by their own will and conscience. It did not take long for the cancer of sin to take root and metastasize. God’s remedy was to purge the earth via a flood—but in the midst of great judgement, the Lord preserved a remnant, Noah and his family. The dispensational hermeneutic allows the student of the Word to see that though the story is filled with physical-directives for Noah and his family, the story is rich in spiritual truths and application for believers today. The Ark points to God’s desire to provide humans with a way of salvation amid divine and righteous judgment. In the days of Noah, the way of salvation was the Ark. For us, the way of salvation is Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

The Dispensation of Human Government

God inspired leaders to create laws that reflected His justice and desire for order and goodwill among men. After the flood, God directed Noah and his family to repopulate the earth. By Genesis 11, there is a mention

⁵² Genesis 3:8—8:10

⁵³ Genesis 3:8-10

⁵⁴ John 14:6

of the first city-state or proto-empire. The written Law of God would come later, but God's expectations shine through the lines of many Old Testament stories. For example, in the days of Cain and Able, the idea of worship and God's expectations regarding sacrifices were known. In the story of Abraham, a bookend for this dispensation, God communicates the directives to "Go," establish altars for worship, sacrifice, be circumcised, and honor the Lord with a tithe.

God communicated His expectations through human law, tradition, dreams, and inspiration during this dispensation.

The Dispensation of Promise

The Dispensation of Promise spans from most of the story of Abraham, through the life of Joseph, and beyond to the enslavement of their descendants in Egypt. This dispensation begins with God's promise to bring Abram to a new land,⁵⁵ and, against all odds, provide a son,⁵⁶ through whom would come a great nation. The age of the Patriarchs parallels this dispensation, which is marked by multiple promises of God to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. During this dispensation, the Hebrews were taught to trust God and be faithful. The Lord communicated His will and precepts through oral history, traditions, Covenants, dreams, visions, angelic visits, Christophanies, and perhaps

⁵⁵ Genesis 12:1, 15:18-21

⁵⁶ Genesis 17:15-17, 18:1-15

the book of Job, which could represent the first divinely inspired writing.

The Dispensation of Law

The dispensation of Law spans from the days of Moses to the days of Jesus—about 1500 years. Most argue that specifically, this dispensation takes place from the giving of the Law to Moses⁵⁷ to the birth of the New Testament Church.⁵⁸

God's delivery of the Ten Commandments, and later, the Law, brought structure and a new level of accountability to the baby nation of Israel. The Law (profiled in Exodus 19-23) and the various codes presented in the book of Leviticus raised the level of human awareness of God's expectations. During this dispensation, God communicated His desire for a formal system of worship and sacrifice. This led to establishing a Tabernacle, then a Temple, and religious and civil leadership offices to shepherd, teach, and impart justice. The Law also helped the people be mindful of their sinfulness and appreciate the mercy of God.⁵⁹

The requirement to keep the Law proved too difficult for humanity. In mercy, God codified a provision for covering sin by writing into the Law a sacrificial system centering on the sacrifice of a lamb on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan.⁶⁰ This system, like many elements in

⁵⁷ Exodus 19-23

⁵⁸ Acts 2

⁵⁹ Psalm 145:8-10

⁶⁰ Leviticus 23:4-5

Old Testament history, points to the need for a Savior. The perfect sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world,”⁶¹ remedied the limitations of the Old Testament Law,⁶² and closes this dispensation.⁶³

The Dispensation of Grace

The dispensation of grace began with the resurrection of Christ and will continue until the Rapture of the Church, thus ending what is sometimes referred to as *the age of the Gentiles*.⁶⁴ This dispensation is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and is marked by the offering of a new covenant by God to man—a covenant of grace. In reflecting on the limitations of the dispensation of Law (sometimes broadly referred to as the Old Covenant), the writer of Hebrews refers to the covenant of grace as a “*better*”⁶⁵ covenant.

The dispensation of grace spans the gap between the conclusion of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th week in Daniel’s 70-week prophecy.⁶⁶ The first 69 weeks of Daniel’s 70-week prophecy began

⁶¹ John 1:29

⁶² Romans 8:3, 3:23; Galatians 3:11

⁶³ Ephesians 2:15

⁶⁴ Romans 11:25; Luke 21:24

⁶⁵ Hebrews 7:22

⁶⁶ Daniel 9:24-27

with the order⁶⁷ to restore the city of Jerusalem. Historians note that the Persian King Artaxerxes gave this order on what we now call March 14, 445 B.C. The event is noted in secular literature⁶⁸ and referenced in the book of Nehemiah.⁶⁹ Scholars take Daniel's 69 weeks to indicate *weeks of years*, meaning, 7 x 69 years. Taking into account the ancient Jewish calendar followed a lunar cycle and a 360 day-year, one can determine the number of days in Daniel's 69-week prophecy, move forward in history from the day of Artaxerxes' proclamation on March 14, 445 B.C., and arrive at the Passion Week, the time of the Triumphal Entry, crucifixion and resurrection. At that point, the prophetic clock stopped.

The 70th week will begin when the Antichrist "*confirms a covenant with the many for one week*"⁷⁰ (signs a peace treaty that centers on Israel). This event will mark the beginning of the Antichrists' rise to power and will be preceded by the Rapture.⁷¹ The removal of the Church from the earth will bring an end to the dispensation of grace.

⁶⁷ Daniel 9:25

⁶⁸ Notation of the proclamation to rebuild Jerusalem are noted in Ezra and 1 Esdras 8. The Roman-Jewish historian Josephus also notes the order, but attributes the proclamation, and much of the account noted in the book of Nehemiah to King Xerxes I, the son of Darius I (*Antiquities*, XI, v, 1, 2). Most believe Josephus confused Artaxerxes I with Xerxes I.

⁶⁹ Nehemiah 2:1

⁷⁰ Daniel 9:27a

⁷¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The Tribulation

The Bible notes the Tribulation period will span seven years—it will begin when the Antichrist brokers a peace covenant with Israel, and end when Jesus returns to earth, defeats the enemies of God, and brings victory to the faithful at the Battle of Armageddon.⁷² The Tribulation period is Daniel’s 70th week.⁷³ During this time, the Church will be gone, raptured. God will shift His focus from the Church back to the Jews—prophets and wonders will return to the land. Many will come to faith in Jesus. But as the church-age and dispensation of grace is over, salvation will not be through faith in Christ alone. Many dispensationalists do not identify the Tribulation period as a separate or distinct dispensation, choosing rather to extend the *Age of Grace* through the end of the Tribulation.

The Millennial Kingdom of Christ

The Millennial Kingdom begins with the defeat of Satan and the conclusion of the Battle of Armageddon.⁷⁴ The earth will be cleansed and returned to Eden-like conditions. Jesus’ rule will complete the Isaiah 9 and Matthew 6 prophecies.⁷⁵ He will reign in righteousness on earth

⁷² Revelation 19

⁷³ Daniel 9:25-27, 12

⁷⁴ Revelation 20:1-3

⁷⁵ Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 6:10

and usher in 1,000 years of peace.⁷⁶

During this time:

- Satan will no longer oppress the earth: Rev. 20:1-3 notes that Satan will be bound and banished from the earth
- The earth will be restored and renewed (Isa. 65:17-25)
- Jesus will reign as King (Isa. 2:4; 42:1)
- There will be a new Temple in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16-21)
- Longevity for humans will be the norm (Isa. 65:20-22)
- Animals will be docile (Isa. 65:34-35)
- The topography/geography of the earth will change (Isa. 2:2, 65:17-19; Rev. 16:18-20)
- The world will be at peace (Isa. 2:4, 11:6-9; 32:18; Mic. 4:3)
- Israel's borders will expand to fulfill covenants of old (Gen. 15:18–20 and Num. 34:1-12; Deut. 30:1-10; Ezek. 47:13-17)
- The Dead Sea will come to life (Ezek. 47:8-11)

Who will be on the earth with Christ during the Millennium?

Believers who survive the tribulation period will live in renewed mortal bodies, on earth, during Christ's earthly reign.⁷⁷ These saved individuals

⁷⁶ Revelation 20:4

⁷⁷ Zechariah 14:16-21; Rev. 20:7-10

will honor Christ through acts of faith, such as worshipping the Lord and observing the Feasts in Jerusalem.⁷⁸ Believers who died during the Tribulation, and those Raptured, will return with Christ and reign with Him during the Millennium.⁷⁹ This group of believers will have glorified bodies, and will demonstrate their faith and commitment to God by serving with Christ as leaders, judges, and teachers.⁸⁰ The third group inhabiting the earth during the Millennium are the children born to believers who survived the Tribulation and enter into the Millennial age. These humans will have renewed but human bodies—longevity will be the norm.⁸¹ The working of the Holy Spirit on earth will be different than during the present *Church age*. Consequently, the salvation experience of millennium-born humans will likely be similar to that of the chosen people living during the time of Moses,

who dwelt in the presence of God and confirmed their faith through sacrificial obedience and worship.

After the 1,000-year Millennial Reign of Christ concludes, Satan will be released, and humans who chose not to yield to Christ will follow the enemy in one last desperate attempt to topple God. Jesus will defeat

⁷⁸ Zechariah 14:16-19

⁷⁹ Daniel 7:18-27; Job 26:7; Psalm 149; Isaiah 60:17

⁸⁰ Daniel 7:18-27; Job 36:7; Psalm 149; Isa. 60:17; Rev. 20:6; Isa. 37:29-31

⁸¹ Isaiah 65:20-22

Satan and his followers,⁸² and then will come the final judgment (the *Great White Throne Judgment*).⁸³

According to Dr. Criswell: The purpose of this age may be summarized as follows: “1) to fulfill the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments which prophesy such an era 2) to demonstrate the blessings of God when the conditions of His economy are met, and 3) to demonstrate that even under utopian conditions, some humans will sin and rebel against God.”⁸⁴

⁸² Revelation 20:7-10

⁸³ Revelation 20:11-15

⁸⁴ Criswell, W.A., *The Criswell Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN, 1979), 1500

Supporters of dispensationalism

Many notables in Christendom support dispensationalism. Modern-era supporters include Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer (theologian, first president of Dallas Theological Seminary), Dr Billy Graham (evangelist), Dr. John Walvoord (theologian, seminary president), Dr. Dwight Pentecost (theologian, professor, and author), D.L Moody (evangelist, pastor, author), Dr. John Whitcomb (professor, theologian), C.I. Scofield (author, pastor, theologian), Dr. Rolland McCune (professor, theologian), Dr. Charles Ryrie (author, pastor, professor, theologian), Dr. Myron Houghton (professor, theologian), Dr. Thomas Ice (theologian and Executive Director of the Pre-Trib. Research Center), Dr. Bruce Dunn (pastor and host of Grace Worship Hour), and Dr. Dave Breese (author and founder of the Christian Destiny ministry).

Dispensationalism has been taught for decades at Dallas Theological Seminary, the Moody Bible Institute, Liberty University, Shepherds Theological Seminary, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, The Master's Seminary, Brooks Bible College, Faith Bible College and Theological Seminary, and many other schools of theology.

THE HISTORY OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Most who disagree with the tenants of dispensationalism argue that the precepts are new. Many point to 19th century Rev. John Darby as the founder of the dispensational system for interpreting Scripture. In his book, *Dispensationalism in America*, Dr. Norman Kraus quotes Professor Charles Bass as declaring: “*No dispensational writer has ever been able to offer...a single point of continuity between what is today known as dispensationalism and the historic premillennial view.*”⁸⁵

However, there are notable scholars who disagree with Dr. Bass. In his book titled, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, Fulbright Senior Scholar Dr. William Watson writes that those who assert dispensational teaching is a new construct are misinformed.⁸⁶ Rev.

⁸⁵ Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America* (Richmond, VA., John Knox Press, 1958), 25

⁸⁶ Stephen Sector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13; David Brog, *Standing with Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2006), 13, 38; Ben Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005 – Part II) 215; Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), 182; W.H. Rutgers, *Premillennialism in America* (Holland: Oostervaan, 1930) 172; Yarbo Collins, *The Book of Revelation: The Continuum History of*

Darby may have been the first to formally systematize dispensationalism, but the practice of employing key aspects of the dispensational hermeneutic has ancient roots.

What is the truth? Is dispensationalism a new school of theology, developed in the last 200 years, and having no roots in the proven teachings and practices of the historic Christian Church? Or is it possible that dispensationalism represents a collection of best hermeneutic practices, embraced and taught in different ways, known by different terms through the ages, and refined into a comprehensive system for study in the 19th century?

Like the word Trinity, a key teaching that was embraced and taught for centuries before universally recognized by its current name, dispensationalism can be traced back to ancient times.

This chapter profiles significant historical and theological antecedents to the modern hermeneutic system now known as dispensationalism.

EARLY HISTORY OF DISPENSATIONALISM

The Essenes (c. 250 B.C. – c. 125 A.D.)

The Essenes are often associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls. In this sense, they are a group who lived in the Judean desert near Qumran. Most believe they were a well-established group of Jewish believers in the second-century B.C. through the first-century A.D.

The roots of the Essene community, however, goes back much farther in time. The Essenes are said to be the “sons of Zadok,” a priestly order established in the days of David and Solomon (Zadok was a co-lead priest in the days of David and the sole high priest in the days of Solomon). It is thought that in an attempt to maintain a pure faith, they separated from the orders of Pharisee and Sadducees that arose in the second century B.C.

It is thought that the ancestors and descendants of Zadok were prominent in the schools of the prophets that were active at different points in Old Testament history. As such, their faith, interest in prophecy, and keen understanding of what we would call *non-canonical sources* (such as the writings known as the *Testament of the Patriarch*), positioned them to be exceptional students of the Word—

particularly for their time.

They are mentioned here because their approach to study parallels several precepts embodied in the modern dispensational hermeneutic. They are as follows:

- The Essenes held Scripture in high regard. Their love for study and the care extended to sacred scrolls (Scripture) is evident from the quality of the voluminous library found more than 1800 years after they were gone.
- The Essenes valued the study of prophecy and believed in its literal fulfillment. Prophetic writings, likely from those who shared in the school of the prophets over the ages, were treasured. Today, these extra-biblical sources of prophecy reveal the Essenes believed the Messiah would come, would die in Jerusalem, would die at the behest of priests, would die “by the nail,” and would die to redeem humanity. They also believed His death would be followed by the veil in the Temple being “rent in two,” a resurrection, His story and teachings would be profiled by four key writers (the Gospels), His ministry would be followed by a “man of Benjamin” (the Apostle Paul), and the Pentecost Festival following His death would mark the beginning of a new age, which they called, the “Age of Grace.”

- The Essenes, following the example set by the *school of the prophets*, believed that God worked in different ways through the ages. In general, time was divided into four ages, through which God spoke to and interacted with humanity in different ways.
- The Old Testament was not formalized into a canon until 97 A.D. However, 250+ years before the canon was formalized, the Essenes recognized as divinely inspired, the 39 books Protestants accept today as the Old Testament canon. In addition, they valued other historical writings (such as the *Testimony of the Patriarchs*). They encouraged the study of all prophetic writings as they were thought to be useful for edification and helpful in providing context for interpreting certain sections of Scripture. The desire for proper or full context is a key dispensational precept today.
- The Essenes also believed a new canon of Scripture would follow the death and resurrection of the coming Messiah.

Papias (c. 60 – c. 130)

- Papias of Hierapolis is first-century believer noted for writing five books on the topic of interpreting Scripture. He was a disciple of the Apostle John, and associate of Polycarp— notable credentials.⁸⁷ Though portions of his writings are not

⁸⁷ Eusebius Of Caesarea, *An Ecclesiastical History to the 20th Year of the Reign*

available today, it is clear Papias held, taught, and wrote about a pretribulation rapture and a literal, “millennial reign of Christ” on earth.

As a disciple of John, the writer of Revelation, it is likely his theology and eschatological views were highly shaped by John. Interestingly, some of the best evidence of his theological positions come from those who wrote to demean his views. Regarding the millennial reign of Christ, someone wrote of him:

“...He [Papias] says there would be a certain millennium after the resurrection, and that there would be a corporeal reign of Christ on this very Earth; which things he appears to have imagined, as if they were authorized by apostolic narrations, not understanding correctly matters which they propounded mystically in their representations.”⁸⁸

In Papias’ writings we see the dispensational teachings of 1) the literal Millennial Reign of Christ and 2) the restoration of

of Constantine (London, UK: Samuel Bagster And Sons, 1847),142

⁸⁸ Eusebius, *An Ecclesiastical History to the 20th Year of the Reign of Constantine*, 142-143rd ed (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1847),144

Israel and rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.⁸⁹

Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 202)

- Irenaeus wrote several books, the most important surviving work is titled, [*Against Heresies*](#).⁹⁰
- Irenaeus taught that humanity's history can be divided into four ages or dispensations. They are: **1)** From the Creation to the Flood **2)** From the Flood to the Law **3)** From the Law to the Gospels and **4)** From the Gospel to the Eternal State. Irenaeus was one of the first New Testament-era writers to advance the idea that God worked in different ways in different dispensations. Modern-era dispensationalists have built on that fundamental precept.
- Irenaeus wrote: *"One should not seek among others the truth that can be easily gotten from the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the apostles have placed all that pertains to truth, so that everyone can drink this beverage of life. She is the door of life."*⁹¹ This statement helped to cast Scripture as the final authority in all matters. This statement guides dispensational teachings regarding the inerrancy of Scripture and a non-figurative interpretation of the Word of God.

⁸⁹ Yeatts John R., *Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 389

⁹⁰ Sometimes referred to by its Latin title, *Adversus haereses*

⁹¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3 Chapter 22

- Irenaeus acknowledged that the sovereign plan of God is both diverse and seamless—and that in different ways, in each phase or dispensation throughout history, God reveals his love and desire to save. He wrote:

*"Christ came not only for those who believed from the time of Tiberius Caesar, nor did the Father provide only for those who are now, but **for absolutely all men from the beginning, who, according to their ability, feared and loved God and lived justly...and desired to see Christ and to hear His voice.**"*⁹²

Statements like this helped shape the dispensational precept that God communicates His message of love, in different ways, in different dispensations, with increasing clarity (progressive revelation).

- In his work *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus refuted the Gnostic argument that the world was an “accidental creation of an evil god.” Irenaeus argued that though the fullness of God’s plan was not revealed in ancient times, the creative hand of God and beauty of creation has been witnessed by humanity from days of old. This thought became a backdrop for the following

⁹² Most, William G. (1991). *The Holy Spirit and the Church*. Notre Dame Institute Press. Pg. 76

views that dispensationalists hold: God is the creator; God desired (and initiated) a relationship with humanity through the ages (and spoke in different ways to humanity through the ages), and the Bible, particularly prophecy, should be interpreted through a literal, not figurative lens.

- Irenaeus wrote of an earthly, future, millennial kingdom (primarily as a defense against the gnostic view that God had no intention of redeeming the earth). This teaching was later forsaken by the Catholic Church but affirmed by the reformers and formally incorporated into dispensational teaching in the 19th century.
- Regarding Irenaeus and dispensationalism, Dr. Peter Enns writes:

*“Irenaeus refers in his writings to four principle covenants given to the human race, particularly drawing a distinction between three covenants of the Old Testament and the gospel. This distinction is typical of dispensationalism.”*⁹³

Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165)

- Justin taught that the Gospel text was an accurate, literal, fulfillment of prophecy. His teaching that prophecy is to be

⁹³ Enns, Paul, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 553

interpreted literally is a key hematinic principle within dispensationalism today.

- Justin wrote there would be a literal, 1000-year reign of Christ on earth in the future.⁹⁴ When asked if he believed Israel would be restored and Jerusalem rebuilt, he replied: *“I and many others are of this opinion...”*⁹⁵
- Justin, a philosopher, writer, and early church apologist, noted that God worked in different ways in different ages or dispensations, which he termed, “economies.”⁹⁶ He wrote of five dispensations, each being introduced by a key person or event: 1) Enoch/Noah 2) Abraham 3) Moses 4) Christ 5) the Millennium. This teaching is similar to the modern-era dispensational view.
- Justin also wrote of his expectation that there would be a Rapture of the Church. His dispensational premillennial eschatological view is evident in his Dialogue with Trypho:

“But if so great a power is shown...to be still following the dispensation of His suffering, how great shall that be which shall follow His glorious advent! For He shall come on the

⁹⁴ McNaughton, Ian, *Opening up 2 Thessalonians*: (Leominster, MA: Day One Publications, 2008), 78

⁹⁵ Martyr, Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chapter LXXX

⁹⁶ Enns, Paul, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 553-554

clouds as the Son of Man...and His angels shall come with Him.”⁹⁷

Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 220)

- Tertullian was a brilliant thinker and writer. Later in life he seems to have adopted several unorthodox views, however, his early writings document the practice of dividing human history into dispensations. In his famous work, *Against Marcion* (a heretic), Tertullian notes, with little explanation or introduction, that the Mosaic period was one of four dispensations of God—the others being associated with Adam, Abraham, and the final being the millennial reign of Christ. Just as the Gospel of John presents the baptism of Jesus⁹⁸ without any explanation or introduction (because the practice and meaning of baptism was already widely known), Tertullian writes of dispensations in the same way.

Tertullian also writes of how the millennial reign of Christ will be on earth, for a period of 1000 years, and will happen after the Rapture.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Martyr, Justin, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, (Buffalo, NY: 1885), 209.

⁹⁸ John 1:24-34

⁹⁹ Tertullian, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and

Augustine (c. 354 – c. 430)

- Augustine lived at a critical time in the history of the church—a time when the Trinity doctrine and Canon of Scripture were formalized. It was voices like Augustine’s that helped the body of Christ understand how to view the whole of Scripture to better grasp the deeper elements of faith. Regarding the Trinity, Augustine taught that God communicates the fullness of truth over time, a principle dispensationalists today refer to as *progressive revelation*. Augustine noted how, through the ages, God provided progressive insight regarding the Trinity via early references to “us” and “we”¹⁰⁰ when referring to Himself in Genesis and by identifying Himself by the plural term, Elohim. He noted how different levels of understanding were provided at different periods of history, and that even in the current age, mysteries abound. He noted the need to believe some mysteries by faith, and how in time, God provides grace to understand others. “*So it is with the Trinity,*” he allegedly said, “*If you deny the Trinity, you will lose your soul. If you try and explain it you will lose your mind.*”

A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 3, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 302

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7 (also Isaiah 6:8)

- In many ways, Augustine affirmed the importance of a literal interpretation of Scripture. A prolific writer, he influenced many to believe in a literal hell, heaven, the miracles of Jesus, the resurrection, and the ascension—all fiercely debated issues in his day. In the 4th century A.D, powerful voices advocated for allegorizing or spiritualizing the whole of Scripture. Augustine pushed-back against this growing heresy with writings and teachings that championed interpreting Scripture in light of their context, and in general, interpreting Scripture literally. On this point Augustine did a fine job defending the truth and affirming a process of interpretation that dispensationalists employ today.

Augustine wisely noted that God’s expectations or requirements for His people change at different points in history. He noted how under the Old Testament Covenant of Law, God’s people were required to offer animal sacrifices, but that in the current age (dispensation), this was no longer necessary because of Jesus’ death on the cross¹⁰¹ and believers now live under a “New Covenant.”¹⁰² Augustine wrote:

“Though in the former period...He enjoined one kind of

¹⁰¹ Hebrews 10:1-18

¹⁰² Galatians 4:24-26

*offerings, and in the latter period another, therein ordering the symbolic actions pertaining to the blessed doctrine of true religion in harmony with the changes of successive epochs without any change in Himself.”*¹⁰³

Though Augustine did not divide Scripture into distinct dispensations, he did recognize how God worked in different ways¹⁰⁴ and communicated different expectations at different times. Writing of the apparent paradox that the dispensations of God bring with them changes in God’s dealings with humanity, yet God Himself does not change, Augustine wrote:

“The divine institution of sacrifice was suitable in the former dispensation, but is not suitable now...[God] is the unchangeable Creator of mutable things...the dispensations adapted to each successive age...changes the successive epochs without and change in Himself. This exchange of the sacraments of the Old Testament for those of the New had been predicted by the voices of the prophets...all those things which He assigns according to their variety to the several ages...That which was for one

¹⁰³ Augustine, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 1, Letter 138, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 302

¹⁰⁴ Enns, Paul, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 555

*age rightly ordained may be in another age rightly changed, the alteration indicating a change in the worked, not in the plan, of Him who makes the change...The ages succeed each other.”*¹⁰⁵

Augustine’s thoughts on how God worked in different ways through the ages preceded Darby’s teaching on the topic by almost 1400 years.

It is true that Augustine held some curious and even non-biblical views. He also shifted opinions regarding an earthly millennial reign of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶ However, at this fairly early time in the history of the New Testament Church, Augustine made considerable contributions for the glory of God. He advocated for a literal interpretation of Scripture and taught that “there were various dispensations throughout sacred history.”¹⁰⁷ His practice of taking the aforementioned truths into consideration when interpreting Scripture continues to guide students of the Word today.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *Letter CXXXVIII, Letter CXX Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 1st Series, I, 482-483

¹⁰⁶ In Augustine affirms the belief in a literal Millennial Reign of Christ in his book, *City of God* (Book XX, chapter 7). However, he later taught that ‘recent reversals’ of Empire-wide prohibitions on Christianity indicated the Millennial Reign of Christ (represented by the rise of the Catholic Church) had come.

¹⁰⁷ Watson, William C., *Dispensationalism Before Darby* (Silverton, OR, Lampion Press, 2015), 7

THE INTERLUDE

- Unfortunately, Augustine changed his opinion on several key eschatological teaching points later in life and is now known as the *Father of Amillennialism*¹⁰⁸ and as a heavy influencer of early Catholic dogma. Augustine's influence on the church, the fall of the

Roman Empire, the rise of the Papacy, and the onset of the Dark Ages contributed to the cessation of deep thought and debate on spiritual subjects for centuries.

About 800 years after Augustine, 12th century Cistercian Monk Joachim Fiore picked-up the mantle and resumed study and discussion on topics that would later be folded into the dispensationalism.

Joachim of Fiore (the 12th - 13th centuries)

- Joachim (1135 – 1202) was a Monk and founder of the San Giovanni monastic order of in Fiore, Italy. He is also known as Joachim of Flora and Gioacchino da Fiore. His influence inspired a resurgence of deep exploration of Scripture. Professor Bernard McGinn judges Fiore as *"the most*

¹⁰⁸ A view or system of eschatology that holds there is no literal earthly millennium.

important apocalyptic thinker of the whole medieval period, and maybe after the prophet John, the most important apocalyptic thinker in the history of Christianity."¹⁰⁹

- According to Professor Crawford Gribben, Fiore divided history into different dispensations: **1) The Old Testament Period of The Father** **2) The New Testament Age** marked by the Son (through the year 1260), and the Millennial Age.¹¹⁰

The Apostolic Brethren (the 13th - 14th centuries)

- Notably, the Catholic Church did not sanction this group of monastic scholars. British Historian Dr. Marjorie Reeves notes the strong tie between Joachim of Fiore and the writings of the Apostolic Brethren. Committed to study and prayer, one surviving manuscript from this group notes a belief in the Rapture (a key teaching point in dispensationalism):

*“Antichrist [is] coming into this world...After he come[s] we would be transferred into Paradise, in which we are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way they will be preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist.”*¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ The statement was made on a PBS documentary and summarized here:

<https://tinyurl.com/22s9muwz>

¹¹⁰ Gribben, Crawford, *Evangelical Millennialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Chapters 11-12

¹¹¹ Anonymous, *The History of Brother Dolcino* in Francis X Gumerlock, *A*

The Carthusian Monks (the 15th century)

- Surviving writings from a group of disciples who lived in Holland, note an emphasis on understanding prophecy literally, holding a futurist¹¹² view of the book of Revelation, a belief in a future Tribulation period, and a belief in the Rapture—all tenants of modern-era dispensational thought. Dr. Watson includes the following (middle-English) writing from the Carthusian Monks in his book, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*:

*“In a moment in ye **twynklyng of an eye** in the sownyng of the **last trumpe** shal be the Iugement. That shal be the verray daye of **Wrath tribulacion**...The daye of our **lorde shal come**...O howe blessed and how happy shal he be...”¹¹³*

The Reformers (the 16th century)

- Martin Luther and John Calvin advocated a literal approach

Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century, Bibliotheca Sacra (v.159, no. 635; July-Sept. 2002), 344-355. See also Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study of Joachimism* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1969), 246

¹¹² This school of thought holds that the events profiled in Revelation Chapters 6-21 are actual events that will take place in the future.

¹¹³ Denys van Leewen, *Corden, Whiche treteth for the Four Last and Final Things that Ben to Come* (1479)

to interpreting Scripture in general and prophecy in particular.

- Anabaptist Melchoir Hoffman held some radical beliefs but taught that Christ would come in the future to establish a Millennial Reign.
- Dr. Watson notes that reformer John Bale wrote that *he “expected Gospell...last of all shall returne againe to the Iewes...for he that hath dispersed Israel, shall bringe him againe to his folde.”*¹¹⁴ Other leaders who taught that prophecies concerning the rebirth of Israel and the Millennial Reign were to be understood literally include Edmund Bunny (Sub-dean of York Cathedral), Cambridge Professor Frances Kett, Tomas Draxe (Bishop of Artifax in the Mercian Christian Church), theologian Hugh Broughton, author and clergyman Thomas Brightman, and Professor Joseph Mede.
- British member of Parliament, Sir Henry Finch, wrote of how the covenants and promises God extended to Israel are separate and distinct from those promised to the Church. This hermeneutic precept is a key tenant of the current dispensational system of interpreting Scripture. Writing against what is now called Covenant and Replacement Theology, Finch stated:

¹¹⁴ Bale, John, *The Image of Both Churches after the Most Wonderful and Heavenly Revelation of Saint John* (1545), 81

*“Where Israel, Iudah...Jerusalem, etc. are named in this argument, the Holy Ghost meaneth not the spirittall Israel, or Church of God collected of the Gentiles, no nor of the Iews and Gentiles both (for each of these haue their promises seuerally and apart), but Israel properly descended out of Iacob’s Ioynes...These and such like are not allegories, setting forth...deliuerance through Christ (whereof those were types and figures) but meant really and literllly of the Iewes...that one day they shall...be Kings and chiefe Monarches of the earth, sway and gouerne all.”*¹¹⁵

- The Catholic Church (and many European leaders) viewed the Millennial teaching a threat to the governments they wished to impose. This prompted the drafting of the Augsburg Confession of 1540,¹¹⁶ which “condemned” this “Jewish opinion.”
- Senior Fellow in Christianity and Culture at The King’s College, Dr. Jeffrey Jue, notes¹¹⁷ the Augsburg Confession prompted

¹¹⁵ Finch, Henry, *The World’s Great Restauration, or The Calling of the Iewes* (London, 1621) 6-7

¹¹⁶ Lutherans today view the revised Confession of 1540 as a foundational creedal document.

¹¹⁷ Jue, Jeffrey, *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586-1538) and The Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrech: Springer, 2006), 126

“many similar proclamations” by Anglican¹¹⁸ and Calvinist groups.¹¹⁹

- Peter Bulkeley, Pastor and founder of the city of Concord, New Hampshire, preached against the heresy of the preterist¹²⁰ view of Revelation and, in his book, *The Gospel-Covenant*, wrote of the coming restoration of Israel and Jerusalem.
- When the ban on printing certain Christian books was lifted, Pastor Robert Maton published several brief works¹²¹ that argued against an allegorical interpretation of prophecy. His literal approach to interpreting prophecy is embraced by dispensationalists today.
- Reformer Theodore Beze reversed the long-standing (Catholic Church held) position that promises God made to Israel should rightfully fall to the Church. His teaching on a future restored Israel and the millennial reign of Christ are noted in the Geneva Bible¹²² and are said to have had a profound impact on 16th–17th century eschatology in England, Scotland, and in the Colonies in America.¹²³

¹¹⁸ The Forty-two Articles of 1522

¹¹⁹ The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566.

¹²⁰ This view holds that most or all prophecies in Scripture have already been fulfilled.

¹²¹ Maton, Robert, *Israel's Redemption or the Propheticall History of our Saviour's Kingdome on Earth* (London, 1642), Readers Preface, 3-7.

¹²² The 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible shows Beza's influence in sidenotes referencing Romans 11:25

¹²³ Toon, Peter, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Lancashire, PA: Reiner, 1973) 24, cited

- In his book, *Dispensationalism before Darby*, Dr. Watson notes that the following men (who held dispensational views) were appointed to the largely Calvinistic (non-dispensational) Westminster Assembly. They were “chosen by the British Parliament to restructure the Church of England in 1643.”¹²⁴ The list includes *John Dury, Thomas Goodwin, William Gouge, William Twisse, Herbert Palmer, William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughs, Joseph Carly, Peter Sterry, James Ussher, and George Walker*.¹²⁵
- Pastor Dr. Nathaniel Homes’ book, known by its abbreviated title, *Apocalypsis Anastaseos, the Resurrection Revealed or Dawning of Daystar*, advocated a literal and futurist reading of the book of Revelation and urged Jews to return to their homeland.¹²⁶
- The same year Dr. Homes published his book, a Puritan writer in America, known only as J.J or “Philo-Judaeus” (lover of

in Edward E. Hindson, *The Puritan’s Use of Scripture in the Development of an Apocalyptic Hermeneutic*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of South Africa, 1984), 84

¹²⁴ Watson, William C., *Dispensationalism Before Darby* (Silverton, OR, Lampion Press, 2015), 23-24

¹²⁵ The striking number of men on the Assembly holding dispensational views is remarkable and shows the extent to which key dispensational views were known and embraced in the 17th century.

¹²⁶ Homes, Nathaniel, *Apocalypsis Anastaseos, the Resurrection Revealed or Dawning of Daystar, About to Rise and Radiate a Visible Incomparable Glory, Far Beyond Any Since the Creation, Upon the Universal Church on Earth, For a Thousand Yeers*, (London, 1653), preface

Jews) rejected preterism saying simply: *“To say that which was promised concerning Israel, is already happened, is false...Saint Paul saith, ‘It shall not come until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.’”*

Philo-Judaeus argued that there is a yet-future economy in which God will work with the Jews. Homes notes Philo-Judaeus’ view that God’s future working among the Hebrew people will include a reborn nation, a restored Temple, and the millennial reign of Christ. He wrote:

*“When Titus the Roman Generall carried them away captive...scattered even at this very day throughout the four corners of the earth: And thus cast off shall be, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; [but] Israel’s restauration cannot be far off... So necessary is it that Israel should be called before his coming to judge the world...according to humane cesure Israel is past recovery; but according to the supernatural promises of God, they were never so near their restauration as now...”*¹²⁷

- In the work, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, Dr. Watson notes the abundance of notable Reformation leaders who, as

¹²⁷ Phileo-Judaeus, J.J., *The Resurrection of Dead Bones, or The Conversion of the Jews* (London, 1654), Preface

dispensationalist today, disagreed with *Covenant* and *Replacement Theology*. Watson's list includes:

- Edmund Bunny: *Wrote that Christians should love Jews (1584)*
- Francis Kett: *Called for Jews to return to their homeland (1585)*
- Thomas Draxe: *Wrote that God's promises to the Jews will be realized (1608)*
- Hugh Broughton: *Wrote, 'Rome, not Jews, killed Christ' in 1610)*
- Thomas Brightman: *Wrote of the Millennial Reign of Christ (1615)*
- Henry Finch: *Wrote of the distinction between promises to Israel and promises to the Church (1621)*
- William Gouge also wrote of the distinction between promises to Israel and promises to the Church (1621)
- Robert Maton: *Wrote of how God's Covenant with the Jews is yet future (1642)*
- Peter Bulkeley: *Wrote of how God's promises to Israel will not fail (1646)*
- Elizabeth Avery: *Wrote that the return of the Jews to Israel will precede and announce the Tribulation period (1647)*

KEY TENANTS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Though dispensationalists have not adopted a formal creed, and dispensationalism is more a system to aid in interpretation rather than a catechism of beliefs, there *are* core doctrinal positions that most dispensationalist hold. This chapter will profile those positions.

Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

Dr. Waters writes:

*“Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Core Christianity need not involve agreement with the dispensational method of Bible interpretation. However, in-depth theological study and the correct interpretation of many Bible texts require agreement that God no longer works by the Law administration (dispensation) but has transitioned to the Church administration (dispensation). When Christ returns he will set up His Kingdom or millennial administration (dispensation).”*¹²⁸

Dispensationalists believe that the atoning work of Christ is sufficient, and that sincere faith in Christ is sufficient for salvation.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Waterhouse, Steven: *A Guide to the Doctrine of Dispensationalism* (Amarillo, Texas, Westcliff Press, 2012) Chapter 11

¹²⁹ 1 John 2:2; Titus 3:7; John 3:16; Revelation 1:5; 1 Peter 1:2-4

Dispensationalists believe God communicates His expectations and promises to humanity in different ways at different points (dispensations) in history

Most dispensationalist today believe there will be seven dispensations.¹³⁰

A brief outline of the seven dispensations follow:

1. **Innocence:** This age or dispensation covers the time from the creation of Adam and Eve to their fall from grace. During this time the earth was pure and humanity had but one law—*do not eat of the forbidden fruit*.¹³¹ Satan deceived the humans, who willfully disobeyed God and thus, the once right and pure relationship with God was broken.

2. **Conscience:** This age or dispensation covers the time between the Fall and the Flood. During this time, God allowed man's conscience to govern his behavior. However, because the sin nature was passed down from mankind's first parents, the result was that "*the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*."¹³² Again humanity failed. In time, God brought a

¹³⁰ These are also briefly outlined later in this book.

¹³¹ Genesis 3:11-13

¹³² Genesis 6:5

judgment upon the world in the form of a flood.¹³³ One family was preserved.

3. Human Government: This age or dispensation spans the time after the Flood to the time of Abraham. After the flood, God told and his sons to go forth and replenish the Earth.¹³⁴ In the days of Nimrod, Noah's descendants disobeyed God's commandment and set about to establish a great city and Tower, a monument to their greatness.¹³⁵ God judged them for their disobedience, confused man's language, and scattered humanity throughout the world

4. Promise: This age or dispensation covers the time from Abraham to Moses. During this time, God promised Abram a son and a homeland for his descendants.¹³⁶ However, after more than 20 years of waiting, Abram doubted and disobeyed God and chose to father a son through Hagar, rather than his wife, Sarai. Hagar conceived, bore a son, and named him Ishmael.¹³⁷ When God's promised son (Isaac) was born, there was enmity between Sarai and Hagar. Ishmael and Hagar were sent away with a promise of blessing. Dissension between the descendants of Ishmael and

¹³³ Genesis 6-8

¹³⁴ Genesis 9:7

¹³⁵ Genesis 11:4-9

¹³⁶ Genesis 12-17

¹³⁷ Genesis 16

Isaac continues to this day. This *age of promise* largely aligns with the *period of the Patriarchs*. During this time the descendants of Abraham followed oral traditions and commands expressed by God via dreams, Christophanies, and visions.

5. **The Law:** This age or dispensation covers the time from Moses to the birth of the New Testament Church. After many years of toil and pressed servitude in Egypt, God raised Moses to rescue a weary people. Through Moses, God gave the Hebrews the 10 Commandments, He brought the Jews to the border of the promised land, and promised the a life of peace and plenty, and a Kingdom of their own *if* they obeyed.¹³⁸ After repeated periods of disobedience which included a time of exile and rejecting their Messiah King, God expelled the Jews from their land.¹³⁹

6. **Grace:** This age or dispensation is sometimes called the *Church Age* and covers the time from Pentecost to the Rapture. During this age, the emphasis on works diminished and the emphasis on God's grace through faith in Christ is emphasized. A tree is still known by its fruit¹⁴⁰ and James writes that *faith without works is dead*.¹⁴¹ However, in this age, righteousness is acquired by grace through

¹³⁸ Exodus 19:5, Exodus 20:1-17

¹³⁹ Matthew 21:43, Luke 19:41-44

¹⁴⁰ Matthew 12:33

¹⁴¹ James 2:17-26

faith in the completed work of Christ. It is a free and gracious gift of God.¹⁴²

Most dispensationalists believe that Grace didn't replace Law, it interrupted it. After the Rapture, God's economy will return to the previous dispensation—the dispensation in place when Daniel was given a prophecy concerning 70-weeks of years.¹⁴³ The prophetic clock was stopped after 69-weeks of years, at the crucifixion of the Messiah.¹⁴⁴ The prophetic clock will resume when the Antichrist brokers a peace agreement with Israel and likely, a number of nations in the middle east.¹⁴⁵ This will usher in the Tribulation period, Daniel's 70th week, and a resumption of the focus on works over grace.

7. **The Millennial Kingdom:** The 1000-Year Reign of Christ will begin with the return of the Messiah as conquering King at the end of the seven-year tribulation period. Jesus will defeat enemies of God and conclude the Battle of Armageddon, see to the expulsion of Satan and the False Prophet, renew the earth, and usher in a period of unequalled peace and righteous leadership on earth.

¹⁴² Romans 3:21-24

¹⁴³ Daniel 9:24-27

¹⁴⁴ Daniel 9:26

¹⁴⁵ Daniel 9:27

A key purpose of the dispensations

One of the key purposes of the dispensations is to demonstrate there are no conditions under which humanity will choose to be faithful and meet God's expectations and thereby remain in right relationship with Him. Only by grace, only by the covering afforded by the blood of Christ, is humanity able to meet the mark.

If all Scripture is inspired and “profitable,” does that not require obedience to every precept, and if so, does that negate the idea of dispensations?

The dispensational view is that *all* Scripture is inspired, profitable, and though timeless, has special meaning for particular audiences. Interestingly, though this seeming paradox is not easy to understand, it *is* easy to see that God's expectations for those living during the dispensation of Law is markedly different than His expectation for those living under the dispensation of Grace. Interpreting Scripture in light of the dispensation in which it was given is akin to interpreting Scripture in light of its full context. Those who do not read and interpret Scripture through the lens of history and context can quickly lead to a woefully inaccurate understanding of the very Word God gave to enlighten the mind and heart. Again, Dr. Waters provides insight:

*“Scriptures clearly speak of the abrogation of the Law of Moses. It has been rescinded and is no longer binding upon believers unless a given point is repeated in Scripture pertaining to the Church. That is why we no longer have a temple, a priesthood, sacrifices or other rituals of Judaism....”*¹⁴⁶

“...To say that the Law of Moses has been set aside is not the same as affirming its destruction (Psalm 119:89; Matthew 5:17). While the Church is not under the Law, this does not mean the Law has been destroyed or that Christians disparage the Old Testament. Because God does not change in His attributes, everything that the Old Testament taught about God’s nature is still valid (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Old Testament verses and Old Testament stories may be used to either prove or apply truths that were carried over into (i.e., repeated in) the Scriptures for the Church (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:16). The Law of Moses still proves man’s guilt (Romans 3:19-20; 1 Timothy 1:8 ff.). The Law also contains many unfulfilled prophecies and teaches about God’s dealings with gentile nations. Furthermore, the Old Testament is rife with ideas that may not be strictly binding upon the whole Church but might serve as a source for developing personal convictions in areas of Christian liberty (e.g., not lending at interest to a poor believer). Dispensationalists do not disregard the Old Testament. They just use it properly. See 1 Timothy 1:8

¹⁴⁶ Watson, William, *Dispensationalism Before Darby* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2015), 34-37

Sola Scriptura

Sola scriptura is a Latin term meaning, Scripture alone. The term was adopted by the 16th century reformers who sought a return to a purer faith—one that differentiated between the traditions of man (or the church) and the divine decrees set forth in Scripture. Using Scripture alone to determine core doctrines of the faith is one of the

five *solae*,¹⁴⁷ or key doctrinal principles that drove the Protestant Reformation. Often (but not always) *Sola scriptura* is associated with the teaching is that Scripture is self-authenticating and clear (perspicuous) to the earnest seeker of truth. That is, the *mysteries of the faith* are not viewed as relegated to clergy or anchored to Latin (as was taught by the Catholic Church for centuries). The principle, "Scripture interprets Scripture," puts the burden and joy of rightly dividing the text into the hands of laity—with the final authority in all matters being the Word of God.

In contrast, the Catholic, Eastern, and some Methodist churches uphold the doctrine of *prima scriptura*,¹⁴⁸ meaning Scripture can be

¹⁴⁷ Maarten Wisse, (2017). *Sola Scriptura: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Scripture, Authority, and Hermeneutics. Studies in Reformed Theology. Vol. 32.* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2017), 19–37

¹⁴⁸ Humphrey, Edith M. *Scripture and Tradition: What the Bible Really Says* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, Baker Academic, 2013), 16

“illuminated by tradition and reason.” The Eastern Orthodox Church holds that to *“accept the books of the canon is also to accept the ongoing Spirit-led authority of the church's tradition, which...interprets...and corrects itself by the witness of Holy Scripture”*¹⁴⁹ In the sixteenth century,¹⁵⁰ the Roman Catholic Church formally adopted the position that *Tradition* and *Scripture* were “one common source... with two distinct modes of transmission...[and] equal in binding force.”¹⁵¹ Dispensationalist reject that view.

The distinctive of the *Sola Scripture* is held by many Protestant groups and viewed by dispensationalists as an essential faith principle. A few teaching that flow from this precept are:

- **The Sufficiency of Scripture:** This precept suggests that Scripture is sufficient for faith and practice—clergy are not required for forgiveness, to serve as intermediaries for forgiveness, or necessary to understand Scripture. For Protestants, “the Bible alone” means “the Bible only.” Commentaries and study books may provide insight, but the Bible is the final authority for our faith.

¹⁴⁹ Bradley, Nassif, *Are Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism Compatible? Yes: The Evangelical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 65

¹⁵⁰ At a series of Councils collectively called the Council of Trent (1545—1563)

¹⁵¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana: https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

- **The Authority of Scripture:** This tenant holds that not only is Scripture sufficient, it is the final authority in all matters. Pastors, evangelists, denominational leaders, and seminary professors may speak with authority, but again, Scripture, being pure and infallible, is the final authority.
- **The Clarity of Scripture:** This tenant holds that the Bible is *perspicuous* (clear). The perspicuity of Scripture does not mean that everything in the Bible is easy to understand, but rather, the essential teachings are plainly stated. It is said, “*In the Bible the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.*”¹⁵² Dispensationalists value spiritual traditions and believe deep studies produces rich insights. However, dispensationalists also believe the Bible is both deep and wide—too deep for the greatest minds to fully explore but wide (shallow) enough that one with childlike faith can find hope, forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life with the King.
- **The Interpretiveness of Scripture:** The phrase, *Scripture interprets Scripture* is well-known in dispensationalists circles. Dispensationalists believe answers should be sought in Scripture more than in the great libraries of man. Dispensationalists believe that important topics in Scripture are addressed more than once, insight can be gleaned by studying the whole of Scripture, and

¹⁵² Attributed to 20th century pastor Alistair Begg

that difficult passages can be interpreted in deference to parallel passages of Scripture that are clear.

- **The Five Solas**

The following interpretation guidelines were adopted by the 16th century reformers, and are embraced by dispensationalists today:

1. **Sola scriptura:** “Scripture alone.” Scripture is sufficient—“profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...”¹⁵³
2. **Sola fide:** “Faith alone.” Humanity is saved via a faith in Christ, not by works¹⁵⁴
3. **Sola gratia:** “Grace alone.” Salvation is made possible by what God through Christ has done for us—not because of our good works for God. Grace indicates we have received what we did not deserve.
4. **Solo Christo:** “Christ alone.” Salvation is found in Christ and in no other.¹⁵⁵
5. **Soli Deo gloria:** “To the glory of God alone.” The focus of our lives, no matter what our calling, gifting, or

¹⁵³ 2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁵⁴ Ephesians 2:8-10

¹⁵⁵ John 14:6; Hebrews 4:15

resources, is to live to give glory to God in all that we do.¹⁵⁶

The five *solas* of the Protestant Reformation provided structure and focus for the new Protestant Church, and a rebuke to Catholic Church for not forsaking unscriptural practices and heresies. The *five solas* remain relevant in Protestantism today, and are embraced by dispensationalists.

The distinction between the Church and Israel

Dispensationalists believe that the Church is distinct from Israel. The current *Church Age* or Dispensation does not indicate God's disfavor or eternal rejection of Israel. Dispensationalists recognize that God has chosen to work through the Church at this time, but in the future, God's programme will return to Israel and the prophetic events in the book of Revelation will unfold as they are presented.

A rejection of Replacement Theology (also known as *supersessionism*) teaches that the church has fully and completely replaced Israel in God's plan. All promises and covenants assigned to

¹⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:31

Israel have been given to (or will be fulfilled by) the church. Those who hold this view believe that God has no plan to work with or through the Jewish people or Israel in the future. The fact that Israel was restored as a sovereign and independent nation in 1948 is viewed as interesting but not prophetically significant. Dispensationalists reject this view.

Dispensationalists refute Replacement Theology by noting that Genesis 17:7-8 and Judges 2:1 present God's covenant with Israel and the Jewish people as being eternal.

A rejection of Covenant Theology. In some ways Covenant Theology is similar to Replacement theology, but rather than holding that the church *replaces* Israel, the church becomes an extension or expansion of God's relationship to Israel. Technically, most advocates of Covenant theology believe that at appointed times in history, the Covenants of God receive a *codicil*, an addendum or revised interpretation of the original Covenant. Accordingly, changes in understanding God's promises do not *replace* existing documents (Covenants), but rather, represent a revised or updated communique from God. This view allows for allegorizing passages pertaining to Covenants such that the church is often as one with Israel—that the church has Old Testament roots, and that Covenants related to Israel transition or naturally extend to the New Testament Church. Physical-realm promises to Israel (such as Genesis 15's notation of Israel's boundaries) are spiritualized or

allegorized. For example, Israel's footprint noted in Genesis 15 becomes the spiritual reach of the Church today.

Advocates of Covenant theology hold that requisites for salvation are the same across all epochs in history. The consensus teaching is that throughout all dispensations, salvation was obtained by Grace (not grace and works and certainly not only works). This assertion becomes particularly problematic which considering the dispensation of Law, in which the understanding of a works-based salvation was central in religion and culture.

Prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel are to be applied (spiritually or allegorically) to the Church. Major problems exist with this view, not the least of which is the continued existence of the Jewish people and the revival of the modern Jewish State. If Israel was condemned by God, and there is no future for the Jewish nation, how does one explain the supernatural survival of the Jewish people over the past 2,000 years despite the many attempts to destroy them? How does one explain why and how Israel reappeared as a nation in the 20th century after not existing for 1,900 years? Dispensationalists believe these unprecedented events indicate God has a yet future plan for the Jewish people and Israel, and that Covenants concerning Israel will be fulfilled.

Dispensationalists hold the terms **church** and **Israel** are not interchangeable in Scripture. The Bible presents the Church as a *new* construct—a gift made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ and new working of the Spirit after Pentecost.¹⁵⁷

Why nations and Christians should support Israel

Dispensationalist believe God has a yet future plan for the nation of Israel. As dispensationalist believe that the promises made to Israel are not inherited or transposed to the Church, the Church should strongly encourage government leaders to support Israel for it is said, “*The friend of Israel is the friend of God.*”

America has been the chief financial supporter of Israel in recent decades and since the 18th century, Jews from around the world have viewed America as a place of refuge. But today, many politicians and prominent business leaders argue that businesses and governments should punish and sanction Israel. America’s government leaders have attempted to thwart trade deals, undermine Israel’s security interests, and discouraged moving embassies to Jerusalem.

¹⁵⁷ Acts 2

Showing support to Israel is not the popular choice.

Israel has been condemned and reprimanded by the United Nations more than any nation in the last 70 years. Many accuse Israel of being a belligerent and argue the nation should be sanctioned rather than supported. As an American, I note that my country has given more than 100 billion dollars in various forms of aid to Israel in the last 40 years. A few applaud, but a growing number are aghast. Many shout “*enough is enough*,” alleging that Israel oppresses Palestinians and is guilty of crimes against humanity. Others, fearing a war with Iran (which could draw-in many nations) advocate economic sanctions for they want to see Israel weakened, not emboldened.

Most Arab States do not recognize Israel’s right to exist. Several countries call for the destruction of Israel in their Constitutions. The United Nations has refused to recognize Israel’s historic right to parts of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

American support for Israel has decreased in recent years.

In the last two decades, mainstream news sources have shifted *left* and generally present Israel as the *bully on the block*. This has led to a significant shift in public opinion. Further shifting public opinion away from supporting Israel was the remarkable souring of the relationship between Israel and America during the Obama administration. Some of the notable low-points include:

- America's government leaders leaked military information in a way that supported the enemies of Israel (Iran in particular).
- During the Obama administration, America's government worked to sway Israel's election (which Benjamin Netanyahu won despite our efforts to undermine him).
- More than 50 of America's congressional leaders boycotted Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to Congress in 2015. *The New Yorker* stated that Benjamin Netanyahu's speech before Congress was "a political stunt." *The Atlantic* publication characterized the speech as a "disaster."

Should Christians respect or rebuke Israel? A few considerations follow:

The historical right for Israel to exist

Though Hebrews were granted the land of Israel as part of a formal UN Charter in 1948, most Arab nations refuse to recognize Israel as a sovereign and independent nation. Just as Iran has denied the

Holocaust, some Arab States deny there was a nation of Israel in Palestine in ancient times. This assertion stands in stark contrast to the biblical record. However, archaeological finds validate the biblical narrative, and recent discoveries verify Israel's historical claim to the area known as the Temple Mount.

Does Israel actively provoke or instigate trouble in the region? It is true that Israel has gone to war in 1969 and 1973 and has coordinated many military engagements over the last 30 years. Some military aircraft *have* bombed targets in other countries. Further, at times Israel has cut-off power and water to the Palestinians, restricted travel the rights of Palestinians, and temporarily withheld payments to the Palestinian government. The question is: *Is there any justification for the above?*

The answer is ‘Yes.’ Israel did go to war in 1969 and 1973, but only because a coalition of nations attacked first—without warning or justification. Israel fought back to keep from being annihilated (which to this day is a stated goal of Iran and several other nations and groups). The West Bank was a former buffer zone—which Israel pledged to respect. But when that area was used multiple times as a staging area for attacks, Israel was obliged to seize control of it after the 1969 war. And yes, Israel *has* bombed targets in foreign countries, but only after warning nations not to set-up facilities that develop, sell, store, or transport weapons earmarked for use against Israel. When governments and terrorist groups choose to ignore Israel’s warnings and represent a clear and present danger, then Israel moves to eliminate the threat. Israel *does* authorize military engagements, but only when their existence is threatened or in response to an attack on her people. Israel is

not a belligerent. Israel exercises the right to defend itself—a right every sovereign country enjoys.

The compelling argument for supporting Israel

When considering if it is proper to support Israel, the most important consideration is: *What does the Bible say?* Though high-profile publications and politicians seek to move public opinion away from supporting Israel, it is important to remember that supporting Israel is a faith issue. Every believer from every nation should stand with Israel. The following Scriptures note why:

- **God will bless those who bless Israel (Genesis 12:3).** *“And I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee...in thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed.”*
- **Those who move against Israel will suffer harm (Zechariah 12:2-3).** *“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.”*

- **Israel is close to the heart of God (Zechariah 2:8).** *“For thus said the Lord of hosts...He who touches you [Israel] touches the apple of his eye...”*
- **God has pledged to protect Israel (Numbers 24:9).** *“He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.”*
- **God will bring judgment upon those who mistreat Israel (Joel 3:1-3).** *For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.*
- **God will prosper those who support Israel (Psalms 122:6).** *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee.”*
- **God has a love for Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).** *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than*

any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you...”

- **God has used Israel as a vessel to bless the world—and He will continue to do so** “*we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews*” (John 4:22b).
- **God has entered into a covenant with Israel and will move against any who try to put that covenant in jeopardy (Judges 2:1)**. “*An angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, ‘I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers;’ and I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you.’”*
- **Israel is ‘precious’ to God (Isaiah 43:1-7)**. “*But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee...Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south,*

Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

- **God has a special love and compassion for Israel (Hosea 11:8-9).** *“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee...”*
- **God has an ‘everlasting love’ for Israel (Jeremiah 31:3).** *“The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”*
- **Those who do not serve (or support) the interests of God will perish (Isaiah 60:12).** *“For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.”*
- **Those who move against Israel will be put to shame (Isaiah 41:11-12).** *“Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be... a thing of nought.”*

Summary:

The political climate in the last days will become increasingly turbulent. In the name of tolerance, Christian views will become marginalized. There will be penalties for those who are bold in their faith. What should the believer do? The call is not to fear, but to have faith. True peace comes when one accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior and puts their faith in Him. From that decision flows forgiveness, joy, hope, and the promise of eternity in heaven.

Dispensationalists believe God has a profound plan for Israel and the Jewish people in the last days, and that it is wise to pray for and support with those whom God calls, “the apple of His eye.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Zechariah 2:8

ADDITIONAL DISPENSATIONAL DISTINCTIVES

A rejection of *Old Testament Judaism*

Old Testament Judaism holds that God's dealings with humans in Old Testament times were strictly physical, devoid of any form of spirituality. Dispensationalists, however, note that even during *Age of Conscience*, there was a spiritual component in humanity's dealings with God. Genesis 15, for example, affirms how Abraham attained righteousness through faith:

*“And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. **And he believed in the LORD, and he counted it to him for righteousness.**”¹⁵⁹*

Classic dispensationalists reject hyper-dispensationalism

Hyper-dispensationalists differentiate themselves from classical dispensationalists in five ways:

1. Hyper-dispensationalist believes the four Gospels **have a Jewish focus and therefore** contain no direct application for the Church today. This premise is refuted by Hebrews 2:3-4, which notes that the salvation message preached by the Apostles was

¹⁵⁹ Genesis 15:3-4

also preached by Christ. Also, 1 Timothy 6:3 notes that the teachings of Christ are applicable to we who live in the Church Age.

2. Hyper-dispensationalist believe much of the book of Acts, like the Gospels, presents information that applies to Jews, not Christians. Some hold in a mid-Acts position, meaning, the material in the book of Acts becomes applicable to the Church mid-way through the book, when Paul begins his ministry in earnest.
3. Hyper-dispensationalist believe that as the Gospels focus on Jews, as does half of the book of Acts and most of the book of Revelation, Paul is the prominent teacher and source of instruction for those living in the Church Age.
4. Hyper-dispensationalists believe the Gospel preached by Paul is **materially different** than the one taught by Peter. However, Acts 15 notes that all the Apostles were in agreement regarding the tenants of the Gospel. In fact, a summary of the Gospel message is presented in an early creedal statement in 1 Corinthians 15:11-14.
5. Some hyper-dispensationalists believe the ordinances of Baptism and Communion were given before the mid-point of the book of Acts—before “Paul received the Church Age mysteries”

and therefore are not for believers today. Classic dispensationalists hold that while Baptism and receiving Communion are not requisites for salvation, they are nevertheless important acts of faith and steps of obedience.

A rejection of *Prosperity Gospel* teaching

Prosperity Gospel teaching ties the blessings and grace of God to human works. Adherents of the prosperity Gospel teaching believe that with sufficient faith, any material blessing can be received. This teaching does not have a biblical foundation.

A rejection of *Lordship Salvation*

This teaching has many definitions. For the purposes of this book, *Lordship Salvation* emphasizes works over faith. This position holds that salvation must be continually proven or testified by good works. It is possible that semantics obscure the dangers of this teaching. Are works important? Yes (James 2:17-26). Is a “tree known by its fruit?” Yes (Matthew 12:33). However, followers of Christ are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-10), not continued good works. Believers are not saved by what they have done, but because of what Christ has done. Good works evidence a dynamic and sincere faith. Good works will be commended by the Lord, our works do not serve as justifications for our salvation.

The Church is a New Testament entity

Contrary to the teachings in Covenant Theology, the Church is a New Testament entity. Its formation was facilitated by the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁶⁰ The Church was referenced by Jesus in Matthew¹⁶¹ as a *future* event (“I *will* build my church”). That promise was fulfilled in the Book of Acts.¹⁶²

Further differentiating the nation of Israel in the Old Testament with the Church of the New Testament is the new, specific gifts¹⁶³ and offices¹⁶⁴ extended to the Church. God initiated a new working of the Spirit so the new Church could effectively accomplish its new mission.¹⁶⁵ It is the post-resurrection, new dispensation, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that guides and empowers the Church today.

The belief in the literal fulfillment of prophecy

The Word of God is holy, living and divinely inspired; there is no other book like it in all of the world. 2 Peter 1:21 states that no prophetic

¹⁶⁰ John 16:12-18

¹⁶¹ Matthew 16:18-19

¹⁶² Acts 2

¹⁶³ 1 Corinthians 12

¹⁶⁴ Ephesians 4:11-13

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 28:18-20

message ever came from human will, but people under the control of the Holy Spirit spoke the message that came from God. One may ask, “How do you substantiate such a claim?” One of the best proofs for the unique and inspired nature of Scripture is Bible prophecy. The study of Bible prophecy provides proof that the biblical record is true, that God is Lord of the past, the present, and the future, and that unfulfilled prophecies will come about exactly as foretold.

To illustrate the precision of Bible prophecy, I would like to share two Old Testament prophecies that, against all odds, unfolded precisely as foretold. I do not share these because they are rare examples of perfect fulfillment, but because they are easily verifiable and associated with astounding mathematical probability statistics showing the Bible to be true and divinely inspired.

The first is a prophecy God gave to Ezekiel regarding the nation of Israel. Specifically, the prophecy concerns how Israel would fall because of their unfaithfulness, how they would cease to be an independent and sovereign nation, how God in the future would restore Israel, and how long it would be for these events to unfold.

The Ezekiel 4 prophecy

In accordance with the language of Bible prophecy, which is often rich

in imagery and word pictures, God told Ezekiel to lay on one side, bound, for a certain number of days, to represent the period of time Israel would be displaced and kept from being a sovereign and independent nation. When this prophecy was given, Israel was a divided nation—the southern kingdom was called Judah the northern kingdom was known as Israel. As both parts of the kingdom would be displaced, Ezekiel was given two-part instructions: first lay on his right side for 40 days then lay on his left side for 390 days.¹⁶⁶

It was no secret that Ezekiel was laying on a particular side, being bound in a particular way, for a specific number of days. It was not meant to be a secret—he was meant to be a living, prophetic message from God to a “stubborn and rebellions people.”¹⁶⁷ The number of days he lay bound represented the period of time that Israel would cease from being a sovereign and independent nation.

God instructed Ezekiel to lay on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days for total of 430 days. Biblical scholars understand that in the prophetic language of Hebrew culture, days often represented years, meaning, Israel would cease being a sovereign and independent nation for 430 years.

As foretold, the northern kingdom of Israel fell in 537 B.C., and the

¹⁶⁶ Ezekiel 4:1-10

¹⁶⁷ Ezekiel 2:4

Southern Kingdom was defeated by the armies of Babylon in 606 B.C. Many were taken away as captives to Babylon, just as the prophet Jeremiah and Isaiah had foretold.

Jeremiah prophesied that their time of captivity would be exactly 70 years.¹⁶⁸ Amazingly, exactly 70 years after the fall of Israel's government, a pagan king released a large group of Hebrews living in exile some 900 miles from Jerusalem.

Many are quick to point out that 70 years is not close to the 430 years communicated in Ezekiel's prophecy, but let the reader recall that when the exiles returned to Jerusalem, the city was in ruins, there was no Temple, they had no king, and Israel was not a sovereign nation—they were under the control of the Persian Empire.

But even if one subtracts 430 years from the 606 B.C. (the date when Israel's government fell), the landing date does not correlate with a period of freedom or independence. Israel was subjugated by Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, then Syria—and during the earthly ministry of Jesus, Israel was under the oppressive hand of the Roman Empire. In light of these facts, it might appear that Ezekiel's prophecy is far off the mark.

But consider: Ezekiel laid, bound for a total of 430 days, to represent the

¹⁶⁸ Jeremiah 25:11-12

number of years Israel would be punished and cease from being a sovereign and independent nation. Israel served 70 years in exile, thus leaving a period of 360 years ($430 - 70 = 360$) to be served.

Regarding the 360 years, students of the Word know that when the exiles returned to Israel, they were frequently unfaithful. Students of the Word also know that according to the Law,¹⁶⁹ if “stubborn rebellion” remains, then God would **add** to the punishment, “seven-fold.” When Israel returned from captivity after living in exile for 70 years, they came back with a stubborn and rebellious heart. Several good things happened in the 150 years following the first wave of exiles returning to Israel, but there was still rebellion. Because there was rebellion, according to Leviticus 26, the punishment upon Israel was multiplied seven-fold. This means, the 360 years of punishment (non-independence) Israel had to serve was multiplied by seven, equaling 2520 years.

In ancient times, the Hebrews followed a lunar cycle—this means the sentence Israel earned (regarding not fulfilling their dream of being an independent nation), was 2520 years, 2520 lunar years, which equals 2520, 360-day years.

To convert the lunar calendar year of 360 days to the precise solar calendar we use today (1 year = 365.25 days), one must multiply 2520 years by 360 days—this equals 907,200 days. Then one must divide that

¹⁶⁹ Leviticus 26:18

number by the length of our solar year (365.25 days). This equals 2483 solar years, 9 months and 21 days.

Scholars and historians know the day that Israel's captivity began (July 23, 537 B.C.). If one adds 2483 years 9 months and 21 days to July 23, 537 B.C., and make the appropriate adjustments for the changes in the calendar system,¹⁷⁰ and take into account there was no year zero (the calendar moves from 1 B.C. to 1 A.D.), one arrives at May 14, 1948, the exact day Israel was restored, under UN charter, as a sovereign and independent nation. God's prophecy is amazing and precise. It is always absolutely true.

Daniel 9 Prophecy

Chapter 9 begins with Daniel asking God for wisdom and insight. The prophet was uneasy. His people had been in captivity for 68 years and Daniel was mindful that Jeremiah, about 80 years before, had prophesied the duration of the captivity would be 70 years.¹⁷¹ He knew their freedom was just around the corner—he also knew that Jeremiah wrote about a coming King—the Messiah.¹⁷² Daniel was unsure if the Messiah's coming would correlate with their coming freedom, and so he

¹⁷⁰ There was a change from the Julian or Roman calendar system to the Gregorian calendar system in the early 16th century at that time 11 days were added to the calendar.

¹⁷¹ Jeremiah 25:8-12

¹⁷² See Jeremiah 11:19, 23:5-6, 30:9, 31:31-33, 33:15-16

sought the Lord in prayer.

It took some time for Daniel to receive an answer from the Lord, but that does not mean that God did not begin to answer as soon as Daniel asked. Verse 23 indicates that God is quick to hear and respond to the prayers of the faithful.

Verse 24 introduces a brief passage of Scripture that has been hotly debated and sorely misunderstood over the years. The verse begins with this phrase:

“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity... ”

The phrase, *to finish the transgression*, may sound like a reference to Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning exile, and a punishment pertaining to Israel not being allowed to reestablish as a sovereign and independent nation. However, the focus of Daniel 9:24 is revealed in the next section of the verse:

“and to make an end of sins”

This is certainly a reference to the mission of the Messiah, and a direct response to Daniel’s prayer: *When will the Messiah come?* The answer to Daniel’s question is revealed in a prophecy with three components:

1. **Seventy** weeks (V. 24a), but the next part of the verse reveals **69** weeks.
2. From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be **seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks...** [69]
3. And after threescore and two weeks [69 weeks] shall Messiah be cut off...

Examining the three clues

The word seven is *sugrue* in the Hebrew—it literally means a week or a set of sevens, so Daniel is referencing 70 weeks of years, or 70×7 years, or 490 years for **the complete fulfilment of his prophecy. However, the first part of the prophecy, pertaining to the coming of the Messiah, would be fulfilled in 69 weeks of years ($69 \times 7 = 483$ years).** That is, 483 years would pass before something incredible happens,¹⁷³ but when would the clock start ticking?

We also see that at the end of this 483-year period (according to verse 24), there will be an *end of [the power of] sin*, a provision for *reconciliation for iniquity*, and the hope of *everlasting righteousness*. Unbelievable promises! All, as we know, were fulfilled at Calvary

¹⁷³ Several disputed timing issues are addressed by this ministry site:

<https://beroeans.net/2020/05/27/the-messianic-prophecy-of-daniel-924-27-part-1/>

through the sacrifice and resurrection of the Messiah.

These are things for which the Hebrew people longed for and prayed. God assured Daniel that He heard the prayers of the weary and His plan was in motion. The vision revealed the fulfillment of God's plan would take 483 years, but again the question was, *starting when?*

Verse 25 provides insight:

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks...”

Here the Lord notes:

- **A proclamation regarding the restoration of Jerusalem will be made.** This will initiate the prophetic clock which leads to a special working of the Messiah. Note: The Persian Emperor Cyrus made a decree regarding the rebuilding of Jerusalem in 538 B.C.—this is noted in Ezra 1 and 5. Darius, the leader of the Mede-Persian Empire made a similar decree in 517 B.C. However, these decrees did not satisfy the prophecy because they specified rebuilding *part* of Jerusalem, and neither decree addressed the rebuilding of the Temple. When it comes to prophecy, close is not good enough—what God promises will happen,

will happen, to the letter. Later, the Persian Emperor Artaxerxes decreed (458 B.C.) that included providing supplies and permission to rebuild, but it was not until 445 B.C. that Artaxerxes issued a decree that addressed 1) rebuilding of the Temple 2) providing supplies 3) rebuilding the walls and 4) restoring Jerusalem. That proclamation is referenced in Nehemiah 2 and initiated the prophetic clock noted in Daniel 9. Scholars note that according to our calendar, Artaxerxes' proclamation was made on Mar. 14, 445 B.C.

- **The Messiah will come.** Note: Verse 26 indicates the prophecy does not correlate with the Messiah's birth, but rather, to his death (*The Messiah will be cut off...*)
- **The interval between the *proclamation* and the special *working of the Messiah* is “seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.”** This is 7 + 60 + 2 weeks of years or, 69 weeks of years, or 69 x 7 years, which is **483** years.

There may appear to be an error or inconsistency here as verse 24 indicated the timeline regarding the saving, rescuing, redeeming work of Messiah was associated with 490 years. However, let the reader remember that an apparent contradiction is not evidence of error. Proper study resolves the matter.

The unique phrasing regarding the timeline indicates the Lord's prophetic promise regarding the work of the Messiah will unfold in several phases:

- ***“Seven weeks.”*** This equals 7×7 weeks of years, or **49 years**. Historians note that the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt, the Temple was restored, and the walls were reconstructed exactly **49 years** after Artaxerxes made his notable proclamation.
- ***“Threescore and two weeks.”*** This equals 3 times 20 weeks + 2 weeks, or $60 + 2$ weeks, or 62 weeks of years, or 62×7 years, or **434 years**. Therefore, 49 + 434 years after the proclamation, the Messiah would accomplish a special work.

What happened?

We know that in the first phase of the prophecy, 49 years after the proclamation, the city, wall, and Temple projects were concluded. These events are profiled in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra.

Regarding the total 483 ($62 + 7 \times 7$) years: Scholars note this indicates 483 biblical (360-day) years. 483 biblical years equals 173,880 days. If one adds 173,800 days to the day

Artaxerxes made his proclamation, one arrives at the day of the Triumphal Entry. Note how this ties into verse 26:

“Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people.”

The prophecy notes that the Messiah will die—He will be “cut off,” not because of His sin, and not for personal gain—He would die for His people. The reason for the Messiah’s death is further detailed in verse 24:

“[The Messiah would come to] ...make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness...”

The Messiah’s perfect sacrifice would “make an end” to the power of death and sin.¹⁷⁴ By His death and resurrection we are reconciled to God,¹⁷⁵ and consequently, now have the hope of eternal life.¹⁷⁶

Daniel’s 69 (weeks of years) prophecy has proven perfect—
but remember, the prophecy concerning the coming and saving

¹⁷⁴ 1 John 3:8

¹⁷⁵ Colossians 1:19-20

¹⁷⁶ John 3:16

work of the Messiah has two primary components:

- 1) When will the Messiah come to save humanity from their sin? and
- 2) When will the Messiah come to save from the “abomination of desolation” mentioned in verse 27?

It is clear the 69-week (weeks of years) prophecy pertains to the first coming of the Messiah—specifically, to his saving work on the cross. At that point the prophetic clock paused. In accordance with verse 24 (“70 weeks are determined...”), the 70th *week of years* (7 years) begins when the Antichrist arises and establishes a peace-treaty or covenant, which likely will encompass the middle east and focus on Israel. The treaty will stop or prevent war (for a season) and will be hailed as a great triumph by the masses, thus further elevating the new charismatic world leader. He will appear to be benevolent but will usher in the most severe season of sorrow, hardship, death, and destruction the world has ever known. Daniel notes:

“Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Daniel 9:27

Daniel's 70th week is the tribulation period. It will be an unprecedented season of wrath, yet, Scripture notes believers will not share in a season of wrath. Consider:

- *“...it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.”*¹⁷⁸
- *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus...*¹⁷⁹
- *Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world...*¹⁸⁰

As the 70th week is associated with *wrath*, and Scripture notes that faithful believers will be saved from wrath, and Daniel's 69 + 1 (70) week prophecy pertains to the saving work of the Messiah, many scholars conclude the Messiah will return before the onset of Daniel's 70th week to *save* (rapture) faithful believers from the coming wrath and horrors of the Antichrist. 2000 years ago (in accordance with Daniel's 69-week prophecy), Jesus saved people from the power of sin. Dispensationalists believe that Jesus will come again, “in the clouds,”¹⁸¹ in accordance with Daniel's 70th

¹⁷⁸ Jeremiah 30:7

¹⁷⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:9

¹⁸⁰ Revelation 3:10

¹⁸¹ See 1 Thessalonians 4:17

week prophecy, and save believers from the wrath associated with the 7-year tribulation.

Charles Larkin (1850-1923), one of the founders of the modern system of dispensationalism, wrote of the significance of Daniel's 70th week. Larkin observed the following:

- There cannot be everlasting righteousness on earth until the Millennium Kingdom of Christ is established.
- The Millennial Kingdom cannot be established until the transgression of Israel comes to an end, and their sins have been sealed up (Daniel 9:24-27).
- After this event has taken place, which will be at the end of the tribulation period, God will make a new covenant with the children of Israel.
- Speaking of this covenant, Jeremiah wrote:

*“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*¹⁸²

The Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah 2000 years ago (and to this

¹⁸² Jeremiah 31:34

day). Thus, it is ordained that Jews will pass through the fires of the tribulation period in the hope that all will be drawn to repentance and revival. Supporting God's goal will be the 2 powerful witnesses, the 144,000 sealed Jews, and the "Gospel Angel" inviting all to come to faith in Christ.

Summary

Almost 100 years after Daniel received his prophecy, a pagan king made a particular proclamation, and, in accordance with the prophecy, 173,880 days after that, the Messiah entered Jerusalem and then was "cut off." By this act of supreme sacrifice, Jesus made it possible for humanity to be reconciled with God. It is the specific nature of Bible prophecy that sets it apart from all other attempts at forecasting the future. The Farmer's Almanac is good, sports experts can make educated guesses about the outcome of games, but Bible prophecy has proved itself 100% accurate. There are no errors and no parallels in other forecasting methods or "sacred writings." Therefore, dispensationalists hold that Bible prophecy should be interpreted through a literal lens, and though sometimes improbable, every prophecy will be fulfilled as indicated in Scripture.

FOUR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT REGARDING INTERPRETING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Interpreting the book of Revelation generally follows one of four views. This article profiles these four views. Let me begin by sharing that I enjoy astronomy. I have a quality scope and an assortment of eyepieces and colored filters/lenses. Though the scope does not change, the eyepiece and colored filter/lens I choose to look through determines whether I see Jupiter as a small white ball (like a small moon), or as a large, majestic yellowish banded planet with a famous storm spot and multiple moons. In the same way, the approach (lens) one takes to reading the book of Revelation will determine what they see in the book (and how that applies to their life). This section profiles the four primary ways to interpret the book of Revelation.

1. The Idealist view

The first view or approach to interpreting the book of Revelation is the idealist view. This approach prioritizes using an allegorical method for interpretation. The second-century church father, Origen (185-254 A.D.) introduced this method. It was later made more prominent by the notable Bishop, Augustine (354-420 A.D.). According to this method of interpretation, the events in the book of Revelation are NOT referring to (or linked to) particular historical

happenings. The writing is viewed as poetic—symbolically representing the epic struggle of good versus evil (God versus Satan). In this battle, the followers of God are oppressed and persecuted, but will one day receive their reward. In this struggle good will triumph. Robert Mounce summarizes the idealist view stating,

“Revelation is a theological poem presenting the ageless struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It is a philosophy of history wherein Christian forces are continuously meeting and conquering the demonic forces of evil.”

The concerns with interpreting the book of Revelation via the idealist view include:

- 1) It puts the book of Revelation in a unique category as the canon of Scripture includes no other books written in that format.
- 2) It minimizes a call to action and the need to prepare for future tribulation events as the references in Revelation that pertain to the rise of evil, tribulations and oppression are thought to be symbolic or allegorical.
- 3) Though at times endorsed by prominent church leaders, this view has never been widely accepted.

2. Two Preterist views

The second approach to interpreting the book of Revelation is the

Preterist view. ***Preter*** is a Latin term meaning “past.” There are two primary views within the Preterist approach to interpretation (full Preterism and partial Preterism). In general, both Preterist views hold that the book of Revelation profiles **past** events, and that the predictions presented by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) are prophecies fulfilled primarily by the fall of Jerusalem (which took place in 70 A.D.). According to this view, Revelation 1-3 profiles the conditions in seven first-century churches in Asia Minor before the Jewish war (66-70 A.D.), and chapters 4-22 (and Matthew 24-25) profiles the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple. A brief summary of these two views follow:

- **Full Preterists** believe that the fulfillment of **all** prophecies recorded in the book of Revelation took place by 71 A.D. (this includes prophecies in the Olivet Discourse [Matthew 24-25] and all prophecies in the book of Revelation). Further, full Preterists hold that humans are now living in a redeemed state, **referenced in Revelation as the new heavens and the new earth.**
- **Partial Preterists** believe that the fulfillment of **most** of the prophecies recorded in the book of Revelation took place between 66—70 A.D. (during the Jewish-Roman war and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem). However, partial

Preterists hold that the final three chapters in the book of Revelation allude to future events. Partial Preterists await the return of Jesus Christ (a view rejected by full Preterists). The partial Preterist method of interpretation is the more widely accepted of the two Preterist views. Concerns with the Preterist positions include:

- 1) The Bible notes that future tribulations will be markedly different than any other time in history (which was not the case with 66-70 A.D. happenings).
- 2) The full Preterist position does not anticipate the glorious return/appearing of Jesus Christ (though it is indicated in Scripture).
- 3) Preterist views do not adequately address references to the global power and systems the Antichrist will control.

3. The Historicist view

The third approach to interpreting the book of Revelation is the Historicist view. This approach holds that the material in the book of Revelation is symbolic—representing historical events that will take place in the future. These events include the rise of popes, future empires, and rulers, the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution,

etc. This position holds that references to the Beast and Antichrist are not to be understood literally.

Many who hold this view believe chapters 1-3 represent seven periods in church history (beginning with the first-century church and ending with the tribulation period). Further, this position holds that:

- The Seals in chapters 4-7 symbolize the fall of the Roman Empire.
- The Trumpet judgments in chapters 8-10 represent various Roman invasions
- The Antichrist represents the Pope
- Chapters 11-13 point to the struggle between the Protestant Church and Catholicism.
- Chapters 14-16 depict divine judgment on the Catholic Church.
- Chapters 17-19 represent the future demise of Catholicism.

This view rose to popularity during the Protestant Reformation because it was widely held that Popes advanced apostate teaching and facilitated the persecution of Protestants (particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries). However, since the beginning of the twentieth century, this view has declined in prominence and is no longer the primary approach to interpreting the book of Revelation.

4. The Futurist view

The fourth approach to interpreting the book of Revelation is the *Futurist* view. This position holds that the prophetic events profiled in the Olivet Discourse and book of Revelation (particularly chapters 4-22) will occur in the future. In general, Futurists use Revelation 1:19 as a guide to divide the book of Revelation into three sections:

- 1) “What you have seen”
- 2) “What is now (present), and
- 3) “What will take place later.”

According to this school of thought, chapter 1 is a presentation of the past (“what you have seen”), chapters 2-3 are a presentation of the present (“what is now”), and the remaining chapters profile future events (“what will take place later”).

Futurists apply a literal approach to interpreting the book of Revelation. The tribulation period (as profiled in chapters 4-19) is 2520 days or 7 (Hebrew) years. The seven-year tribulation period is viewed as Daniel’s 70th week.¹⁸³ During the tribulation, the earth will experience 21 particular judgments of God (divided into three sets of seven and depicted as seals, trumpets, and bowls). The Antichrist and the future global system that he leads (see chapter 13) are to be understood literally, as are the Battle of Armageddon, the return of Christ, and the

¹⁸³ Daniel 9:24, 27

Millennial Kingdom. This view, and perhaps the incorporation of some aspects of the Historists view—**such as thinking that the seven churches in the book of Revelation reference actual first-century churches and seven future periods of church history**, is the primary approach to interpreting the book of Revelation for dispensationalists today.

One of the key arguments in support of the Futurist view is the date of the writing of the book of Revelation. Preterists argue for a pre-70 A.D. date while futurists hold to a date of approximately 95 A.D. There are good reasons to argue for a later date. For example, Irenaeus, in his work *Against Heresies*, states that John wrote Revelation at the end of Emperor Domitian's reign, which ended in 96 A.D. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. He thus had a connection with a contemporary of the Apostle.

Another argument for the Futurist view is that the conditions of the seven churches in Revelation appear to describe a second-generation church, rather than a first-generation church. For example, John charged the Church of Ephesus¹⁸⁴ with abandoning their first love and warned against embracing the Nicolaitan heresy. If John had written the book of Revelation in 65 A.D. (as Preterists allege), the book would have overlapped the timeline of Paul's letters to the Ephesians and

¹⁸⁴ Revelation 2:1-7

Timothy. However, in the Apostle Paul's writing, there is no mention of either the loss of a first love or the threat of the Nicolaitans. Ephesus was Paul's base of ministry for three years—surely, such grave issues would have been noticed and mentioned by him.

Also, the church of Smyrna did not exist during Paul's ministry (60-64 A.D.). Polycarp, the first Bishop of that city, documents this. It is also important to note that Jesus rebuked the Laodicean Church in Revelation 3 for being "lukewarm." However, when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians (near Laodicea), he commends the church three times (2:2, 4:13, 16). It is true that Paul wrote the book of Colossians a few years earlier than the early date Preterists suggest for the book of Revelation. However, it would likely take more than three years for the Laodicean Church to decline such that there were no commendable attributes to mention in Revelation 3. Also, an earthquake in 61 A.D. left the region in ruins for years. Thus, it is unlikely John would describe a recently recovering community as rich.

Preterists who argue for the 70 A.D. date for the writing of the book of Revelation pose the questions, "*Why doesn't John mention the fall of the Temple in the book of Revelation?*" **and**, "*Why does John reference the temple in Revelation 11 if the temple was destroyed 25 years earlier?*" Futurists respond to these questions by noting that John's focus is future, not past events. Also, John was writing to a Gentile audience in Asia Minor, which probably was not overly distressed

about happening concerning Hebrews in Jerusalem, 25 years in the past. Concerning the Temple reference in chapter 11—Futurists argue that a reference to the Temple does not imply that it existed at the time of his writing, but rather, it is a reference to a prophesied third temple.¹⁸⁵

Summary

As the structure of the Bible is much more transformational rather than informational, most scholars today encourage a futurist approach to interpreting the book of Revelation. The Bible is not simply a record of what was—it is a living¹⁸⁶ Word that calls believers to action today and provides insight into how God will work in the future. Dispensationalists favor the *futurist* approach to interpreting the book of Revelation because that system aligns with the structure and spirit of the whole of Scripture and facilitates an interpretation of the text that exhorts, engages, and encourages those who study the book.

¹⁸⁵ Daniel 9:26-27; Ezekiel 40-48

¹⁸⁶ Hebrews 4:12

THE RAPTURE

The term Rapture¹⁸⁷ indicates a swift catching up or rescuing of God's people before the outpouring of wrath during the Tribulation. The English term Rapture comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The Greek text of the New Testament uses the word *harpazo*, meaning to seize upon or to catch or snatch up. The Latin translators of the Greek New Testament Bible translated the word *harpazo*, *rapturo*. The Latin, *rapturo*, is root word for the term *Rapture*.

Through the Rapture, God will *catch up* his Church so faithful followers will not have to experience the tribulations and wrath noted in the book of Revelation. John, the writer of the book of Revelation, said it this way: the Church will be *“kept from the hour of testing that shall come upon the world.”*¹⁸⁸ Paul, writing of the quick and sudden nature of the Rapture wrote:

*“Behold I show you a mystery we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye...for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised...and we shall be changed”*¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Sections of this are drawn from *Next on the Prophetic Horizon* (I Am A Watchman Publication, Union City, CA): 2020), 20-31

¹⁸⁸ Revelation 3:10

¹⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Writing to the Thessalonian Church, Paul wrote:

*“For the Lord...will descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”*¹⁹⁰

This is what Jesus said about the Rapture in Matthew 24.

*“There will be two in the field, and then suddenly one will be left. There will be two women grinding at the mill. One will be taken, and one will be left.”*¹⁹¹

In Luke 12, Jesus spoke of the importance of expecting His return. In Matthew 24, Jesus spoke of the need to be watching, waiting, and ready for his return.

Implicit in the Rapture teaching is the thought that the Church (Gentile believers) will be ***caught up*** by Christ and thereby escape the fullness of God’s wrath on the earth. This strongly-held dispensational view is tied to the teaching that God is not finished dealing with the Jews or Israel. Dispensationalists believe the recent fulfillment of prophecies concerning Israel (*Israel was restored as a nation in 1948, the Hebrew language returned to the land, the land of Israel has “blossomed”,*

¹⁹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

¹⁹¹ Matthew 24:40-41

Israel has been attacked by superior forces but prevailed, Israel has prospered, Israel is a “stumbling stone” to many nations in the region, etc.) indicate that God has a yet unfulfilled distinct and glorious plan for Israel. This view separates dispensationalists from advocates of Replacement and Covenant theology. Dispensationalists believe God will bless, use, and magnify Himself through the nation of Israel and the Jewish people in the days to come.

Further supporting the view that the Church is separate from God’s working among the Jewish people in the last days is 2 Thessalonian’s reference that at some point in the future, God will remove the “restrainer” (the Holy Spirit) from the earth.¹⁹²

Dispensationalists believe that event closes the current Church Age, or, as Paul referred to it, the “time of the Gentiles.”¹⁹³ Dispensationalists believe the removal of the Holy Spirit, which currently dwells in the hearts of believers and “restrains” the work of Satan, is linked to the Rapture, for how can the Holy Spirit be removed without the body of Christ being removed? These future happenings support the dispensational view that the Church Age (this current dispensation) will soon come to a close and be followed by God doing a mighty work for and through the Jewish people during the Tribulation period.

¹⁹² 2 Thessalonians 2:5

¹⁹³ Romans 11:25

Primary Rapture Views

There are three prominent schools of thought regarding *when* a Rapture will take place. Most dispensationalists hold the pre-millennial view. An outline of the three views follows:

- **Pre-wrath view:** The Pre-wrath position distinguishes between the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation—noting that in Scripture, the term, *Great Tribulation* refers to the last three and a half years of the seven-year tribulation period. Advocates of this position therefore hold that a Rapture of the true Church will take place near the midpoint of the tribulation (hence, this view is also known as the mid-trib. view).

Those who hold a mid-trib or pre-wrath position believe that *wrath* will come, and that the *Church* will be saved from the worst of it, but not all of it.¹⁹⁴

- **Post-tribulation view:** There are several schools of thought in the post-tribulation camp. The two most prominent are 1) the seven-year tribulation period is not future and should be understood figuratively. This view holds that the term

¹⁹⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:9

tribulation references the hardships Christians experience in their spiritual walk—past, present and future. The Church, it is believed, will be received by Christ when the Lord returns at the end of time

2) The second (and dominant) view in this school of thought is that the seven-year tribulation period is yet future. Post-tribulationists hold that the Church will exist during the tribulation period, but believers will be sheltered by God’s protective hand in the midst of the greatest tribulations the earth has ever known. This view rejects the idea of a Rapture and holds that the return of Jesus in Revelation 19 is the same as his coming *in the clouds* in 1 Thessalonians 4.

- **Pre-tribulation view:** This view holds that the church will be raptured (caught up to be with Christ) at some point before the commencement of the seven-year tribulation period. This is the view most dispensationalists hold. The following material supports the dispensational pre-tribulation Rapture view.

The timing of some key future events may be unknown, but believers can know that Jesus will return and in the end, in the epic struggle of good versus evil, God will prevail. Until that time there will be unrest. There will be wars and rumors of wars and “troubles.” Are you ready? Will you commit to being *all in* for Him?¹⁹⁵ Remember, a great reward awaits

¹⁹⁵ A brief article and video on this topic can be accessed here:

<https://tinyurl.com/2s6dn27e>

those found doing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, in the right place, and with the right heart when the Lord returns.

*“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”*¹⁹⁶

The Rapture in the Old Testament

There are many allusions and references to the Rapture in the Old Testament. The Fall Festival *the Feast of Trumpets*, for example, foreshadows the Rapture. The phrases, *no one knows the day or the hour* and *the thief in the night* are associated with that ancient Festival, as is the blowing of the trumpet, the days of awe, and a new beginning for all humanity. These associations have Rapture and tribulation connotations.

The Old Testament book, *The Songs of Solomon*, is about an unworthy bride being told to wait for the promised return of her wonderful Groom. However, she’s unfaithful, and when the Groom returns, she is not ready. He comes like a thief in the night, and she is left behind. The Lord’s parable of the ten virgins and His teaching

¹⁹⁶ Matthew 24:44-46

on the wedding banquet also reference the Rapture. Enoch and Elijah were both suddenly *caught up* into heaven by God. These stories, phrases, and book themes point to, and lay a foundation for the Rapture.

Scriptural support for the pre-tribulation Rapture view

Historically, there have been three prominent views regarding the timing of the Rapture. The dispensationalist view is that the church will be raptured (caught up to be with Christ) at some point before the commencement of the seven-year tribulation period. Noted below is the Biblical foundation for that position.

The Tribulation describes a period of suffering unsurpassed, “such as was not since there was a nation, no, nor shall be”¹⁹⁷ The Tribulation period will be a time of intense wrath (Rev. 6:16-17, 11:18; 14:19; Zeph. 1:15, 18). However, Scripture notes believers are **not** *appointed to wrath*¹⁹⁸ and will be *kept from the hour of testing that is coming upon the world.*”¹⁹⁹ The Rapture represents the Lord fulfilling His promise to rescue faithful followers from a future time of ‘wrath.’

¹⁹⁷ Daniel 12:1

¹⁹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:9

¹⁹⁹ Revelation 3:10

Scripture also notes that the Holy Spirit

- 1) dwells in the hearts of believers
- 2) holds back or restrains Satan and
- 3) will one day will be taken away. The taking away of the Spirit/Restraint points to the Rapture, as removing the Spirit will require removing committed Christians from the earth.

This taking away of the Spirit is linked to the removal of the Church and the Rapture.²⁰⁰

“And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. ...”²⁰¹

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 supports the pre-tribulation view:

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

²⁰⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

²⁰¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 (NIV)

1 Cor. 15:51-55 also supports the pre-tribulation view:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’”

Many Scriptures note the “Jewishness” of the Tribulation events profiled in the book of Revelation. It is said to be the time of Jacob’s trouble,” it concerns “Daniel’s people,” a “false Messiah,” the city of Jerusalem, the twelve tribes of Israel, the “Temple” and a “flight on the Sabbath.” The Church is not mentioned in the book of Revelation after the judgments begin.

Jesus’ teaching on the end times indicates that the timing of the Rapture is immediately *after* the ‘birth pains,’ and before the seven-year Tribulation begins and the Antichrist rises to power. Matthew 24 reads:

*“Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days [(the birth pains”)] shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give*

her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven...and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away, But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come...if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, ... Therefore be...ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. ” ²⁰²

²⁰² Matthew 24:29-44

When will the Rapture take place?

Scripture stresses that “no one knows the day or the hour” of the Lord’s return.²⁰³ However, Scripture notes that believers can (and should) recognize the season of His return:

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.⁴ But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”²⁰⁴

Scripture also stresses the importance of readiness—and that servants who are found doing the right thing, the right way, at the right time, when the Lord returns will be blessed.²⁰⁵

Some have taught that certain prophecies need to be fulfilled before the Rapture takes place. Among the suggestions are the Gog-Magog war noted in Ezekiel 38-39, the rise of the Antichrist, the destruction of Damascus, and the building of the third Temple. However, the requisite prophecies that were to precede the Rapture (as outlined in Matthew 24) have already been fulfilled. There are NO remaining

²⁰³ Matthew 24:36

²⁰⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:3-4

²⁰⁵ Luke 12:40; 21:36

prophetic requisites to the Rapture—the Lord may tarry, but there are no prophecies keeping the Rapture from taking place at any time.. Affirming this truth, Theologians have coined the phrase, “the doctrine of imminence.” This means the Rapture can happen at any time and therefore, Christians should maintain a sense of expectancy regarding the return of Christ.

In referencing the Rapture, Jesus emphasized expectancy and readiness. This is clear in the following parables: the thief and homeowner (Matthew 24:42-44), the servant, the Master and the wedding banquet (Luke 12:35-37), the wise manager (Luke 12:41-46), and the 10 bridesmaids or virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). The Old Testament book, Song of Solomon also alludes to this truth as the unlikely bride (who represents Gentile believers) is told the Groom will depart for a time (this represents the Church Age) but will return (this is the Rapture). *In the story the bride is not ready and is left behind when the Master does return.*

The “terminal generation”

In the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), Jesus spoke of events leading up to the commencement of the 7-year Tribulation (a season termed as *birth pains or pangs*), and the events associated with the reign of the Antichrist during the period termed, *the Great Tribulation*. The Olivet Discourse began in response to questions

pertaining to the destruction of the Temple and the rebirth of Israel. Matthew 24:34 reads:

“This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”

Many Bible scholars believe that the *this generation* noted in Matthew 24:34 is this generation—the generation that saw Israel become a sovereign and independent nation—an event that happened on May, 1948. Psalm 90:10 presents a generation as being 70-80 years. This puts the world on borrowed-time. The Lord may tarry, but the wise will be ready for the return of the Lord—the Rapture.

Questions and answers regarding the Rapture

Will Jesus return once or twice? This can be confusing. Many have used the phrase, the *Second Coming* as a general term focusing on *that* Jesus will return, but not, *when* He will return. Some have linked the phrase to the Rapture and some to the *Glorious Appearing* (a phrase linked to Titus 2:13 and Revelation 19-20, where Jesus returns to earth, vanquishes the enemy, then sets-up the Millennial Kingdom). Will there be a Second Coming? YES, at the end of the Tribulation period. Will there be a Rapture? YES, before the beginning of the Tribulation. Is Jesus returning twice? Yes, in a manner of speaking. Jesus will return “in the clouds” to “catch up” faithful followers “in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16-17). That event is known as the Rapture. At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will return and build His Millennial Kingdom on earth (Rev. 19-20). A few additional distinctions follow:

- At the Rapture, Jesus’ return is marked by joy and celebration.²⁰⁶
- At the ‘Glorious Appearing’ Jesus’ return is marked by war, wrath, and judgment.²⁰⁷
- At the Rapture, Jesus returns *for* His people. At the ‘Glorious Appearing,’ Jesus returns *with* His people.

²⁰⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

²⁰⁷ Revelation 19

- Verses that reference the Rapture focus what will happen ***to*** believers (they are ‘*caught up*’ to be with the Lord). Verses that reference the ‘Glorious Appearing’ focus on what will happen ***to the enemies*** of God (particularly the Antichrist and False Prophet).

Note: The Rapture event will happen suddenly—No prophecies need to be fulfilled before Jesus returns to rescue His Church. The Second Coming (the ‘Glorious Appearing’) can only happen after many prophecies are fulfilled. These prophecies are outlined in the book of Revelation and include: the rise of the Antichrist, the Mark of the Beast, the sealing of 144,000 witnesses, the institution of the mark of the Beast, and the rebuilding of the third Temple.

Why do some speak of the lateness of the hour?

Many dispensationalists use phrases indicating a belief that the day of the return of the Lord is near. Prophecy teachers note this truth by stating the hour is *late*, or, the prophetic clock indicates the *hour is late*. The following verses indicate that believers should maintain a state of readiness for the Lord can return at any time:

- “*The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind...*”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ 1 Peter 4:7a

- *“Be patient...because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”*²⁰⁹
- *“Remember, I am coming soon!...”*²¹⁰

Do Old Testament stories foreshadow the Rapture?

In general, a rapture is God’s plan to save the faithful from judgment. We see throughout Scripture that it is God’s nature to provide a way of escape in the midst of coming judgment. In the story of the Exodus, God saved His people from the plague of death that swept across Egypt.²¹¹ God saved Noah and his family from the flood.²¹² God saved Lot and his daughters from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.²¹³ The idea of God saving faithful followers from the terrible tribulations of the last days is in perfect harmony with how God has worked through the ages.

Do Old Testament weddings point to the Rapture?

Noted below are four parallels between ancient Jewish weddings

²⁰⁹ James 5:8-9

²¹⁰ Revelation 22:7a

²¹¹ Exodus 11

²¹² Genesis 6-8

²¹³ Genesis 19

and the Rapture of the Church:

1. In Hebrew culture, the Father determined the day and hour of the wedding banquet. Often, *only the Father knew* the day and the hour (see Mark 13:32).
2. In Hebrew culture, there was a waiting period between the betrothal and the wedding banquet. Many argue this represents the current Church Age—the period from Pentecost to the Rapture. When Jesus returns the Church Age will cease,²¹⁴ raptured believers will rejoice, and the 7-year Tribulation will begin.
3. During this waiting period, the Groom would prepare a home for his bride.²¹⁵ At the time chosen by the father, the groom was sent to receive his bride (who was to remain in a state of readiness)
4. As the groom approached her home the shofar would sound. The sound of the trumpet is associated with the return of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4. Note that Luke 12:35 states that the Bride of Christ (the Church) must be ready for the groom's arrival. In fact, when the world

²¹⁴ Romans 11:25

²¹⁵ John 14:1-3

hears the trumpet sound,²¹⁶ it will be too late to prepare for the return of the Lord.

5. The disciples were either from the region of Galilee or familiar with Jewish and Galilean wedding customs. The disciples clearly understood Jesus' meaning and His comparisons between wedding customs and His return.

Is today's 'Church' mentioned in the book of Revelation?

Dispensationalists hold the book of Revelation speaks of future events, is written in chronological order, and that the last mention of the Church is in Revelation 4 (before a great crowd is seen in heaven—which is a reference to the Rapture).

Is the Rapture mentioned in the Olivet Discourse?

The Olivet Discourse²¹⁷ is the longest recorded teaching by Jesus on the end times. This great teaching, however, can be difficult to follow as Jesus references the destruction of the second Temple, the Rapture, the woes of the days leading up to the Tribulation (birth pangs), and the Second Coming, without clear introductions to these topics. However, it is believed that references to the Rapture are found in Matt. 24:36-44, 25:1-13.

²¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:16

²¹⁷ Matthew 24-25

Is the word *rapture* in English Bibles?

No, however, there are several well-embraced doctrines surrounding terms that are not in the English Bible (such as: missions and Trinity). Key church doctrines are not built on single words (as the Bible is now available in hundreds of languages), but on teachings that have strong Scriptural foundations. The word *rapture* is not in the original text, but in the first language translation of the text (Latin) the word *rapturo* is used, and, according to Tommy Ice, director of the Pre-Trib Study Center, the first seven English translations of the Bible (prepared between 1384-1608) all translated the Greek word *harpazo* in 1 Thess. 4:17, departure, meaning, the sudden departure of believers. Dispensationalists hold that though the term rapture is not found in English Bible translations, it has a strong biblical foundation.

Is the Rapture a teaching less than 200 years old?

It is true that some trace the beginning of the Rapture teaching to John Darby's ministry in the early 1800's. However, Bible scholars note that there are formal teachings on the Rapture in the writings of the early church fathers in the second century A.D. Of primary importance, however, is the abundance of first century Scripture verses that reference a rapture (some are noted earlier in this section). A few quotes and substantiating facts (drawn from the book, Dispensationalism before Darby by William C Watson) follow:

- Writings from The Apostolic Brethren, an unofficial and persecuted monastic order, wrote in 1316:

*“The brethren will be transferred into Paradise, in which are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way they will be preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist.”*²¹⁸

- From Denys ‘van Leeuwen, a 15th century Dutch Carthusian monk:

*“In a moment in ye twinkling of an ey...in the sownyng of the last trumpe shal be the Iugement...The daye of our lorde shal come...O howe blessed and how happy shal he be that now entendeth to the poure langwysshying nedy people....for our Lorde wil delivere them therefore from alle daungler...”*²¹⁹

- Early 17th century preacher Thomas Draxe (d. 1618) wrote that just as God saved Noah from the judgment of the flood, the Lord will save those before the wrath of the last days.

“If wee beleeeue the doctrine of the resurrection, wee must not immoderately weepe, or mourne for our friends departed...for they die not but sleep awhile in the earth,

²¹⁸ Anon., *The History of Brother Dolcino in Francis X. Gumerlock, ‘A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century,’ Bibliotheca Sacra* Iv. 159, no. 635; July-Sept. 2002), 354-355

²¹⁹ Leewen, Denys van, *Corden, Whiche treteth of the four last and final things that ben to come* (1479)

and afterwards the bodie shall awake and ascend to glorie; they are nor perished but...one day meete together in the Place and parliament of heauen...[we shall] be raosed ...accounted worth to escape al those things that shall come upon the world... ”²²⁰

- Joseph Mede (1586-1639) wrote that the “*saints would be translated into the air...[so that] they may be preserved during the conflagration of the earth... ”²²¹*

“The resurrection of those which slept in Christ, and the rapture of those which shall be left alive....shall translate them into heaven...”

- Joseph Hall (1574-1656), Bishop of Exeter, wrote of how the taking of Moses, Enoch, and Elijah portend a rapture of believers in the future.

“The saints of God are not lost...but as...Elias...was rapt into Heaven...[so] shall we...when Christ...shall appear. Then shall we also appear with him in glory... We shall not all sleep, we shall be changed...[Nothing] shall keep us

²²⁰ Draxe, Thomas, *An Alarm to the Last Judgment. Or An exact discourse of the second coming of Christ* (London, 1615), 126,128. Ibid., 58-59

²²¹ Mede, *Works*, III, 611. (Cited in H. Orton Wiley; *Christian Theology*, Chapter 34: The Second Advent (Nazarene Publishing House, 1940)

from appearing with him...when the fiery Chariot shall come and sweep thee from this Vale of Mortality.”²²²

- In his book, *History of the Christian Church*, the eminent Church Historian Peter Shift notes that the following early (pre fourth century) church fathers believed in the Millennium, the rise of Israel. and the Rapture: Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius and Lactantius.
- The second-century works, *The Shepherd of Hermas* and *The Apocalypse of Elijah* reference the rapture.

Dispensationalists reject the notion that the Rapture teaching is a new doctrine, but rather, ties the teaching to the ministry of Christ. Dispensationalists hold the Old Testament references the Rapture, Jesus spoke of the Rapture, and Paul and the Apostles urged believers to anticipate and prepare spiritually for the Rapture.

²²² Hall, Joseph, *The Contemplations upon the History of the New Testament, now complete* (London, 1708), 96

The Millennial Reign of Christ

The Millennium and the Millennial Reign of Christ are referenced more than 2000 times in Scripture, yet this subject is seldom addressed in churches today.

Many view Revelation 20 as the principle (if not the sole) reference to the Millennium in the Bible. However, there are more references to the Millennium in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. Scholars note more than 1800 references to the Millennium in the Old Testament and more than 300 in the New Testament. 85% of the books in the New Testament reference the Millennium. The Millennium and Millennial Reign of Christ are subjects that concern the future of the earth and believers in Christ. This section will provide a biblical overview of this prominent Bible subject.

Familiar references: Many do not realize that several familiar Scripture passages reference the Millennial Kingdom.

- Jesus referenced the Millennium in the Lord's Prayer when He stated: *"Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*²²³

²²³ Matthew 6:9-13

- The prophet Isaiah referenced the Millennium in his Messianic prophecy: *“For to us a child is born, to us, a son is given, **and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness.**”*²²⁴
- In his vision of future kingdoms, the prophet Daniel foresaw the Millennial Kingdom and writes: *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”*²²⁵

Three Millennial Views

References to the Millennial Kingdom flow through the Old and New Testaments. A profile of various prominent Millennial views, and a listing of Millennial Kingdom references arranged in categories, follows:

²²⁴ Isaiah 9:6-9

²²⁵ Daniel 2:1-44

- **Amillennialism:** This view holds there will NOT be a Millennial Reign of Christ. A general summary of the amillennial view is that the Kingdom began with Jesus' first coming (his birth) and will continue until His Second Coming (the glorious appearing at the end of the tribulation period). This view does not believe there will be a 1000-year Millennial Kingdom on earth and favors an allegorical system of interpreting prophetic events. For example, the material in the Olivet Discourse and the greater part of the book of Revelation is thought to point to past historical events. This position does not anticipate a Rapture but does expect the second coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation. This position holds that conditions in this world will continue to deteriorate up until the second coming of Christ. This view is generally traced back to Augustine (354-430 A.D.).

- **Post-millennialism:** This view holds that there will be a Millennium, Jesus will return at the end of the Millennium, and conditions on earth will improve until the coming of Christ. This minor view originated in England and was advanced by Unitarian minister Daniel Whitby (1638-1726). This position does not support a literal interpretation of the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom noted in Revelation 20 and suggests the Millennial Kingdom will last an unspecified but extended

period. In his book, *The Millennium*, Loraine Boettner (a post-millennialist) states: “*The millennium to which the post-millennialist looks forward is thus a golden age of spiritual prosperity during this present dispensation, that is, the Church Age.*”²²⁶

This Millennial view does not suggest there will be a time on earth when every person will be a Christian or that sin will be no more, but does imply that evil in all its forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be embraced and be the rule in culture, and that “Christ will return to a truly Christianized world.” In general, this view holds that conditions on earth will continually improve and that we are currently experiencing the Millennial Kingdom. This view is very different from the reality of the world we live in today.

- **Pre-millennialism:** This view holds that Jesus will return at the end of Daniel’s 70th week (the tribulation period) and reign for 1000 years. This is the view dispensationalists embrace. The 1000-year period during which Jesus rules on earth is known as the Millennial Reign of Christ. The primary subjects

²²⁶ Boettner, Loraine *The Millennium* (Philadelphia, PA: Reformed Publishing, 1964), 111

of this Kingdom will be the surviving remnant of the world that comes to faith during the tribulation. The pre-millennialists position does not fix the timing of the Rapture to a particular timetable but does place that momentous event before the 1000-year reign of Christ.

WHAT THE MILLENNIUM WILL BE LIKE

(according to the pre-millennial dispensational view)

Satan will no longer oppress the earth or God's beloved

- *“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things, he must be released for a little while.”²²⁷*

The earth will be restored and renewed

- *“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”²²⁸*

Jesus will rule, on earth, as Lord and King

- Jesus will reign as King²²⁹
- Jesus will serve as King and righteous judge: *“He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning*

²²⁷ Revelation 20:1-3

²²⁸ Isaiah 65:17-25

²²⁹ Isaiah 2:4; 42:1

hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”²³⁰

The world will be at peace

- There will be peace on earth²³¹
- Satan will be bound.²³² All inhabitants will freely worship God.²³³
- The earth will be blessed with a season of justice and peace

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, ‘The Lord our righteousness.’”²³⁴

Believers who survive the tribulation will inhabit the new earth. Joining them will be tribulation period martyrs and believers who are currently in heaven.

- Jesus will rule in love and with a “rod of iron.”²³⁵

²³⁰ Micah 4:3

²³¹ Isaiah 11:6-9; 32:18

²³² Revelation 20:1–3

²³³ Isaiah 2:2-3

²³⁴ Jeremiah 23:5-6

²³⁵ Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27, 12:5, 19:15

- Tribulation period believers will receive special honor²³⁶
- Surviving believers from the tribulation will live in renewed mortal bodies during Christ's earthly reign.²³⁷
- Longevity will be the norm.²³⁸
- Believers who are currently in heaven with Christ will reign with Him in this Kingdom.²³⁹

*"...For You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."*²⁴⁰

- These believers will possess the Kingdom.²⁴¹
- These believers will lead with Christ as their King.²⁴²
- These believers will serve as judges, officers, and leaders.²⁴³
- These believers will teach truth.²⁴⁴

²³⁶ Matthew 25:23; Luke 19:16-19

²³⁷ Zechariah 14:16-21; Revelation 20:7-10

²³⁸ Isaiah 65:20

²³⁹ Daniel 7:18

²⁴⁰ Revelation 5:9-10

²⁴¹ Daniel 7:18-27

²⁴² Job 36:7

²⁴³ Psalm 149; Isaiah 60:17

²⁴⁴ Psalm 37:29-31; Jeremiah 3:15

- These believers “...shall be priests of God and Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”²⁴⁵

Israel’s borders will expand

- God will fulfill the Land Covenants expressed to Abraham²⁴⁶ and Moses.²⁴⁷
 - God promised: “To your descendants, I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates...”²⁴⁸
 - The prophet Ezekiel reminded Israel: “Thus says the Lord God: These are the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions. You shall inherit it equally with one another; for I raised My hand in an oath to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance. This shall be the border of the land on the north: from the Great Sea, by the road to Hethlon, as one goes to Zedad, Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim (which is between the border of Damascus and

²⁴⁵ Genesis 15:18-21

²⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 30:1-10

²⁴⁷ Numbers 34:1-12

²⁴⁸ Genesis 15:18-21

the border of Hamath), to Hazar Hatticon (which is on the border of Hauran). Thus, the boundary shall be from the Sea to Hazar Enan, the border of Damascus; and as for the north, northward, it is the border of Hamath. This is the north side.”²⁴⁹

- Through the prophet Ezekiel God also promised: *“On the east side you shall mark out the border from between Hauran and Damascus, and between Gilead and the land of Israel, along the Jordan, and along the eastern side of the sea. This is the east side. The south side, toward the South, shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribah by Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea. This is the south side, toward the South. “The west side shall be the Great Sea, from the southern boundary until one comes to a point opposite Hamath. This is the west side. “Thus, you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel.”²⁵⁰*
- Through Moses God promised: *“If any of you are driven to the farthest parts...from there the LORD your God will gather you...Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it...”²⁵¹*

²⁴⁹ Ezekiel 47:13-17

²⁵⁰ Ezekiel 47:18-21

²⁵¹ Deuteronomy 30:4-6

There will be a new temple in Jerusalem

- *“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.”²⁵²*

Other Covenants will be fulfilled

- God’s covenant with David centered on how his heir would sit on the throne and rule in truth and righteousness.²⁵³ Jesus is the fulfillment of that covenant (which accounts for the recording of his genealogy via both His step-father²⁵⁴ and His mother.²⁵⁵ The Jews acknowledged the covenant when they laid down palm branches and their cloaks as Jesus rode into Jerusalem.²⁵⁶ However, many wrongly expected Jesus to be a military and political leader who would liberate Israel from the Romans. They did not understand that 2000 years ago, Jesus was preparing to establish a New Covenant, not fulfill the

²⁵² Zechariah 14:16-21

²⁵³ 2 Samuel 7:16

²⁵⁴ Matthew 1:1-17

²⁵⁵ Luke 3:23-38

²⁵⁶ Matthew 21:1-17

Davidic Covenant. The Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled during the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ.²⁵⁷

God's covenant as profiled through Jeremiah and Ezekiel

- The prophet Jeremiah wrote: *“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel...declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*²⁵⁸
- The prophet Ezekiel provides additional details: *“You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”*²⁵⁹

Life on earth will be different

- Longevity will be the norm: *“No more shall an infant live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old...they shall build houses and...plant vineyards and eat their fruit...”*²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Revelation 20:4-6

²⁵⁸ Jeremiah 31:33

²⁵⁹ Ezekiel 36:28

²⁶⁰ Isaiah 65:20-22

- Docile animals: “...*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox...They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain...*”²⁶¹
- Peaceful coexistence: “*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*”²⁶²
- There will be no war: “...*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks...nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*”²⁶³

The geography and geology of the earth will be different

- “...*I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice*

²⁶¹ Isaiah 65:34-35

²⁶² Isaiah 11:6-9

²⁶³ Micah 4:3

forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing...the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying."²⁶⁴

- A great earthquake will divide Jerusalem into three parts.²⁶⁵ The earthquake will occur when Jesus touches His foot on the Mount of Olives. Water will flow out from the city after the great earthquake.²⁶⁶ The millennial temple will stand over this river.²⁶⁷
- Jerusalem will be a prominent high point on Earth during the Millennium.²⁶⁸ The great earthquake at the Second Coming of Jesus will level mountains.²⁶⁹
- There will be a new fountain of living water: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness."²⁷⁰
- Zechariah 14:8 notes where the waters from the new fountain will flow: "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former (eastern) sea, and half of them toward the hinder (western) sea: in summer and in winter shall it be." The living waters will

²⁶⁴ Isaiah 65:17-19

²⁶⁵ Revelation 16:18-19

²⁶⁶ Zechariah 14:4-8

²⁶⁷ Ezekiel 47:1-12

²⁶⁸ Isaiah 2:2

²⁶⁹ Revelation 16:20; Isaiah 40:4-5

²⁷⁰ Zechariah 13:1

flow out of Jerusalem in two directions, to the west to the great sea (Mediterranean Sea) and to the east to the Dead Sea.²⁷¹

- This new fountain will impact the Dead Sea: The Dead Sea has no outlet and is seven times saltier than the oceans. There are no fish in the Dead Sea at this time. However, Ezekiel 47:8-11 notes that the waters of the Dead Sea will be healed: *“Then said he unto me, these waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that...there shall be a very great multitude of fish...”*

Worship during the Millennial Reign of Christ

- Jerusalem will be a center for worship: *“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship...on them there will be no rain...”*²⁷²
- Ezekiel chapters 40-48 note that God will re-institute temple worship and sacrifices in the Millennium. Many believe the purpose for these sacrifices is to commemorate the sacrificial

²⁷¹ Or Salt Sea. Also see Ezekiel 47:1-7

²⁷² Zechariah 14:16-19

work of Christ. This will serve as a stark picture and solemn reminder of the penalty Christ paid in dying for our sins on the cross.

- Gentiles will keep the Feast of Tabernacles (which was formerly a feast just for Israel). To do so, individuals will travel to Jerusalem each fall to “worship the King.” Ezekiel 43:7 notes: “And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne...[is] where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel...”
- It may be that the Feast of Tabernacles takes on a slightly different meaning during the Millennial Reign of Christ as the focus will no longer be Israel’s rescue from Egypt, but rather, how Christ has saved sinners across the globe. The prophet Jeremiah notes:

“Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.”²⁷³

²⁷³ Jeremiah 16:14-15

What happens after the Millennial Reign of Christ?

- **War and final judgment:** *“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”²⁷⁴*

- **The great judgment and reward of the saints:**
“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away...And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged...and Death...delivered up the dead...And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Revelation 20:7-10

²⁷⁵ Revelation 20:11-15

Summary: Knowing the timing and scope of all future events may not be possible, but we can know that in the end good will vanquish evil and Jesus will reign triumphant. Those who commit their lives to Him will share in His victory.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:57

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” (Revelation 1:3)

The Lord’s message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation may seem dated and mysterious. None of the churches mentioned are in existence today, the names and places are unfamiliar, and the writing is rich in imagery and symbolism. Nevertheless, the Lord’s message to the seven churches is timeless and relevant. The Lord’s message was important for believers 2000 years ago and essential for believers today.

Many Bible scholars believe that embodied in Lord’s message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, is an application for an actual ancient church, an application for the Church today, an application for the individual, and there is a prophetic application. This chapter will briefly profile each application for each church.

Profound symbolism and structure are embodied in the Lord's message to the churches. The book's structure centers on the number seven, which in ancient Hebrew culture, points to the divine. Interestingly, the writer of the masterpiece that is the book

of Revelation is not the learned Paul, but the humble fisherman, John, whose grammar and vocabulary puts his writings at an elementary-school-age level.

The structure of the book of Revelation

The numerical structure of the Holy Bible has been studied many times over the centuries.

However, perhaps, never more provocatively than the works of Dr. Ivan Panin.²⁷⁷ Ivan Panin was born in Russia on December 12, 1855. He grew up in Germany and later migrated to the United States—graduating from Harvard University in 1882.

As an adult he converted from agnosticism to Christianity, and in 1890, discovered the phenomenal mathematical designs underlying both the Greek and Hebrew testaments.

Ivan Panin committed the next 50 years to exploring the numerical structure of the Scriptures, generating over 43,000 detailed hand-penned pages of analysis. He found in the book of Revelation (and throughout the Bible) a particular and beautiful system of sevens

²⁷⁷ Panin, Ivan, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures Scientifically Demonstrated: A Letter to the New York Sun Newspaper* (Nov. 19, 1899):

<https://tinyurl.com/bdh5whdc>

woven throughout the text. This has come to be known as the **Heptadic Structure**. The number seven, being linked to perfection and the divine in Hebrew culture, makes the Lord's message to the seven churches in the book of Revelation exceptionally marvelous and meaningful. A few of the sevens Mr. Panin saw in the book of Revelation follow:

The heptadic structure in the book of Revelation

- Chapters 2-3 presents messages to **seven** churches.
- The messages are given by the one who 'holds the **seven** spirits' and 'walks among the '**seven** lampstands.'
- **Seven** Messianic titles are presented to the churches.
- The phrase: "He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" is repeated **seven** times to the churches in the book of Revelation and appears **seven** times in the Gospels.
- The **seven** churches prophetically point to **seven** church ages.
- There may be a tie between the message to each of the **seven** churches in the book of Revelation and the **seven** parables in Matthew 13.

Additional sevens in the book of Revelation

- Promises to the overcomer
- Years of judgment
- Seals
- Spirits
- Horns
- Trumpets
- Stars
- Eyes
- Bowls
- Lamps
- Angels
- Thunders
- Mountains
- Kings
- Heads
- Plagues
- Crowns
- Doxologies
- “I Am’s” of Christ

Seven Beatitudes

- “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear and keep those things...” (Revelation 1:3)
- “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” (Rev.14:13)
-
- “Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments.”
(Revelation 16:15)
- “Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” (Revelation 19:9)
- “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:6)
- “Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.” (Revelation 22:7)
- “Blessed are they that wash their robes” (Rev. 22:14)

Seven elements in Jesus' message to the churches

- Seven church names are presented
- Seven titles of Christ are presented
- Seven commendations are presented
- Seven expressions of concern are presented
- Seven exhortations are presented
- Seven promises to the overcomer are presented
- The statement: "*He that hath an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches*" is presented seven times

A summary of the seven churches (and their symbolic ties)

- **Ephesus** struggled with priorities. They had 'forgotten their first love' which is to say, they had neglected to demonstrate proper affection and devotion to their foremost love—Jesus.
- **Smyrna** faced great persecution and oppression. The name of the city has a tie to the word, myrrh, which is a perfume associated with suffering and death. Note that the pleasant fragrance of myrrh is only released when it is 'crushed,' and that this correlates to the ministry of the 'suffering servant' as presented in Isaiah 53.
- **Pergamum** slipped into compromise. Pergamum is a

compound word meaning mixed (in a negative sense) and union. Located in a great pagan center known as ‘The City of Temples,’ this church struggled to remain pure. The Altar of Pergamos, infamous in history, was located there. In time, this church embraced elements of paganism.

- **Thyatira** represents a falling away from truth and profound apostasy. This city had ties to ancient Babylonian mythology, which was marked by violence and sensuality, and had a particular ability to pervert spiritual principles. For example, in Babylonian mythology, snake symbols are good (not evil). There is a chief god, but often this deity is presented as feminine. The son of the king is associated with light and glory, but he, known as Tammuz or later, Baal, comes to power through murder and requires violence from his followers. The ancient Babylonian religion was not just simply another faith—it was an anti-faith—a religious system built on distorted truths.
- **Sardis** was a divided city that perceived itself as better than it was. The word ‘Sardis’ is plural—the city had upper and lower sections. Both sections referred to themselves as Sardis. The upper portion of the city sat atop a 1500’ cliff. This rather strong strategic position led city leaders to boast of their invincibility. However, their great wealth (King Midas and gold are said to have come from there) and

location did not save them from military conquest (multiple times).

- **Philadelphia** was the youngest of the seven cities noted in the book of Revelation. To this church, Jesus offered only words of commendation and promise. This church was strong, loving, and faithful. In the 14th century, Philadelphia stood alone as the last Christian city in the entire region.
- **Laodicea**, like Pergamum and Sardis, was associated with apostasy. This church did not think itself significant as the church at Sardis did—but was comfortable and complacent. This ‘lukewarm’ church was an offense to Jesus and received a stern rebuke from the Lord in Revelation 3:16.

The application for the believer and Church today

- The message to the Church at **Ephesus** reminds believers of the importance of demonstrating proper affection and devotion to their first love—Jesus Christ.
- The Lord’s word to the Church at **Smyrna** reminds believers that God can use suffering and opposition to bring about spiritual growth and an increased witness. It is important to note that though the church of Smyrna suffered terribly under Roman persecution, it was the most vibrant and Great-Commission oriented of the seven churches.

- The message to the Church at **Pergamum** warns believers not to embrace (become in union with) the things of the world.²⁷⁸
- The message to the Church at **Thyatira** reminds believers that the enemy often slyly manipulates, twists, and distorts the truth. Believers are urged to *“Prove all things; Hold fast that which is good [and true].”*²⁷⁹
- The message to the Church at **Sardis** reminds believers that a divided city is not a great city, that false pretensions lead to disaster, and that having a reputation for good is not the same as actually being good. It is the united and faithful church that will be blessed. In evaluating our effectiveness and spirituality, believers must not seek man’s assessment but God’s. It is God’s expectations and standards that believers must strive to meet.
- The message to the Church at **Philadelphia** reminds believers of the importance of love, endurance, truth, and being a witness. To the faithful, Jesus promises a great reward and an escape (the Rapture²⁸⁰) from the tribulations that are to come.

²⁷⁸ See 2 Corinthians 6:14

²⁷⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:21

²⁸⁰ See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

- The message to the Church at **Laodicea** is somber and reminds believers that the ‘lukewarm’ church (and a ‘lukewarm’ faith) is not acceptable in the sight of Jesus. Believers must trust in the Lord and remember, complacency is detestable to God.²⁸¹

The prophetic message to the seven churches

Many scholars believe that the messages to the seven churches in Revelation prophetically point forward to future periods in the history of the Church. Though there is some dispute on this supposition, one can see that if the message to these churches were different, or if there was a change in the order of the messages to these churches, the supposition would have no support. The unique order, city history, and individual elements of each church’s history make the supposition compelling. Noted below is a brief presentation of the prophetic application of the messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation:

- The Church at **Ephesus** is said to represent the age of the Apostles and early expansion of the New Testament Church. There was a mighty beginning, quickly followed by a tendency to neglect to demonstrate proper affection

²⁸¹ Psalm 62:1-2; James 2-3

and devotion to their first love—Jesus Christ. This church is said to represent the period from 33—100 A.D.

- The Church at **Smyrna** represents the age of persecution, roughly the period from 100—313 A.D. Persecution came primarily by the hands of ten notorious Roman Caesars. However, the Hebrew culture views the number ten as being linked to particular and divine structure (i.e., the Ten Commandments) or a God-ordained plan (such as how the book of Genesis is divided by the ten generations between Adam and Noah, and the ten generations between Noah and Abraham).
- The Church at **Pergamum** represents the age of compromise. The first ‘Christian’ Emperor was Constantine. There are questions about the genuine nature of his faith, but his coming to power early in the fourth century does coincide with the reversal of many terrible laws designed to persecute and oppress Christians. This relaxing of prohibitions appears to be a great positive, but the relaxing of these prohibitions coincides with a reduction of passion regarding living out the faith. As pressure on Christians diminished, Christians slid into compromise and complacency. The church significantly weakened between 313 – 600 A.D.

- The Church at **Thyatira** is said to represent a period of grave apostasy. It points to a period of history (roughly 600—1517 A.D.) when various aspects of doctrine, practice, and motive became corrupt. The Inquisitions, the Crusades, the development of the political/military arm of 'the church,' the sale of indulgences, the elevation of the clergy, and the embracing of false doctrine took place during this dark time.
- The Church at **Sardis** is said to represent the age of division, false pretention and near death (1517—1648 A.D.). The Holy Roman Empire fades during this age and the Protestant Reformation begins. It also represents a time of false pretension as the 16th century Catholic Church saw no need to reform. Though some positive happenings are noted during this age, it is known as a dark period in church history.
- The Church at **Philadelphia** is said to represent a time of love, spiritual growth, and championing the name of Christ. Between 1648–1900 A.D., revival broke out in many places across the globe. There was a hunger for Bible study and a heart to plant churches and establish Bible Colleges, seminaries, and missionary training/sending centers. This period of history marks one of the high points of the Christian Church.

- The Church at **Laodicea** is said to represent the last era for the current form of the Christian Church. Sadly, prophecy notes that there will be complacency, compromise, and egregious apostasy during this period. Two thousand years ago, the Lord sternly rebuked the church at Laodicea for manifesting these characteristics. The church of the last age will suffer the discipline of the Lord as well.

HOW HAPPENINGS IN THE 16TH CENTURY IMPACT DISPENSATIONAL THOUGHT TODAY

Few centuries can rival the magnitude of the happenings of the 16th century. Profound happenings, like the invention of the light bulb or computer chip centuries later, shook the world and set in motion the winds of change that brought about a new understanding of ancient texts, fundamental changes in the availability and readability of Scripture, far-reaching missionary enterprises, the refinement of doctrine, the adoption of creedal statements to put the Church back on a sure foundation, and the development of systems that still profoundly impact Christendom today. This section will briefly profile some of the key happenings of the 16th century which directly and indirectly impact dispensational thought today.

The Protestant Reformation

Said to have begun with the posting of a list of grievance (the '95 Thesis') in October of 1517, the Protestant reformation brought to a head the tension over various church teachings that had been simmering for centuries. Primarily, issues centered on how the 'Church,' at that time led by the Pope, had allowed, embraced, and enforced apostate teachings. Grievances included (but are not limited to) the sale of indulgences, the celibacy of the priesthood, the idea of the infallibility of the Pope, the "sacrament" of confession, the veneration of Mary, the

baptism of infants, purgatory, Transubstantiation vs Consubstantiation, praying to saints, and the idea that the Scripture text and liturgy should not be in the language of the people.

The strong desire of the faithful to worship in spirit and truth, and the utter blindness and inflexibility of Catholic Church leadership to admit error and repent, proved an irreconcilable difference, resulting in a split in the Catholic (meaning universal and united) Church. Those who protested apostate church doctrines and abuses were labeled *the protestants*, initially a pejorative term but ultimately adopted as a badge of honor.

Over the next 500 years, the Protestant Reformation would change the world. Affirming biblical doctrines (based on the sola scriptura principle),²⁸² making Bible translations available in English, and putting the joy and responsibility of deep study into the hands of laity are some of the great gifts reformation leaders gave us.

Before I note specific ways, the Reformation shaped or made possible dispensational teaching today, let us pause to consider the great cost reformers paid to ensure a better way for believers in the future. Between the launch of the Reformation (1517) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the following religion-based skirmishes and wars

²⁸² See the section, *The tenants of dispensationalism* in this book

were fought across Europe. In all, more than 7,000,000 died in the quest of establishing, or reestablishing a faith that was true to the teachings of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Conflicts directly connected to the Reformation

- The Knights' Revolt (1522–1523) in the Holy Roman Empire
- The First Dalecarlian Rebellion (1524–1525) in Sweden.
- The German Peasants' War (1524–1526) in the Holy Roman Empire
- The Second Dalecarlian Rebellion (1527–1528) in Sweden.
- The Wars of Kappel (1529–1531) in the Old Swiss Confederacy
- The Tudor conquest of Ireland (1529–1603) on the Catholic population of Ireland by the Tudor kings of England and their Protestant allies
 - The Kildare Rebellion (1534–1535)
 - The First Desmond Rebellion (1569–1573)
 - The Second Desmond Rebellion (1579–1583)
 - The Nine Years' War (1593–1603)
- The Third Dalecarlian Rebellion (1531–1533) (Sweden)
- The War of Two Kings (1531–1532) in the Kalmar Union (Denmark and Norway)

- The Count's Feud (1534–1536) in the Kalmar Union (Denmark and Norway)
- The Münster rebellion (1534–1535) in the Prince-Bishopric of Münster
- The Anabaptist riot (1535) (Amsterdam)
- Olav Engelbrektsson's rebellion (1536–1537) (Norway)
- Bigod's rebellion (1537) (England)
- The Dacke War (1542–1543) (Sweden)

Conflicts after the death of Martin Luther:

- The Schmalkaldic War (1546–1547) throughout the Holy Roman Empire
- The Prayer Book Rebellion (1549) (England)
- The Battle of Sauðafell (1550) (Iceland)
- The Second Schmalkaldic War or Princes' Revolt (1552–1555)
- The French Wars of Religion (1562–1598) (France)
- The Eighty Years' War (1566/68–1648) in the Low Countries
- The Cologne War (1583–1588) in the Electorate of Cologne
- The Strasbourg Bishops' War (1592–1604) in the Prince-Bishopric of Strasbourg

- The War against Sigismund (1598–1599) in the Polish–Swedish union
- The Bocskai uprising (1604–1606) (Hungary and Transylvania)
- The War of the Jülich Succession (1609–10, 1614)
- The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), affecting the Holy Roman Empire including the Habsburg Monarchy, Bohemia and Moravia, France, Denmark-Norway and Sweden
 - Bohemian Revolt (1618–1620) between the Protestant nobility of the Bohemian Crown and their Catholic Habsburg king.
 - Hessian War (1567–1648) between the Lutheran Landgraviate of Hesse-Darmstadt and the Calvinist Landgraviate of Hesse-Kassel (member of the Protestant Union)
- The Huguenot rebellions (1621–1629) (France)

And lest we forget, approximately 25,000 were martyred for the faith in the first century A.D., 80,000 were martyred for their faith by 200 A.D., 410,000 were martyred for the faith by 300 A.D., and 1,950,000 Christians were martyred by 400 A.D.

To worship freely, to have access to a Study Bible in English, and to be able to study and rightly divide the Word of God without the

oversite of clergy—these are hard-fought privileges. Without the sacrifices and courage of 16th and 17th century believers, and those who preceded them in the early days of the Church, the world would be a very different place today.

Creedal Statements

The 16th century was a time of reaffirming the core doctrines of the faith. For centuries the Church (the Catholic Church) allowed apostate traditions to impact key teachings, and in time these traditions were affirmed as doctrinal positions. Indeed, at the Lateran Council (1512-1517) and the Council of Trent (1545 and 1563), the Church decreed that *the traditions of the Church were equal in binding force as the Scripture*. Such decrees formalized what had been taught for centuries—the Apocrypha is equal in authority to the other 66 books in the Canon of Scripture, infant baptism is necessary for salvation, the offering of money (indulgences) directly correlates with God’s forgiveness and reward, priests are the intermediary on earth between God and man and therefore forgiveness must be sought through them, Mary is to be venerated, praying to church-appointed “saints” will secure God’s favor, salvation comes via works and participation in the sacraments, and more.

Early Reformation leaders formed a number of creedal statements to

delineate what teachings have a biblical foundation and which do not. Between 40-50 creedal statements were established in the 100 years following the beginning of the Reformation. Not all are without issues, but at a time in history when Bibles were not readily available to the common man and the illiteracy rate was high, these creedal statements helped move the pendulum back toward a true faith. Many of the doctrinal points affirmed in the 400–500-year-old creedal statements developed by Reformation leaders serve as part of the foundation upon which dispensationalism stands today. A brief profile of some of the notable creeds associated with the early Reformation follow:

- **Sixty-Seven Articles:** In 1523, almost immediately as the Reformed tradition began, Huldrych Zwingli drew up the ***Sixty-Seven Articles***, which affirms core Christian beliefs such as the Bible is the sole authority for the Christian faith, salvation is in Christ alone, and Christ (not man) is the head of the Church.
- **The Ten Theses of Berne** (1528) affirmed reformation principles such as, the Church of Christ makes no laws or commandments without God's Word, Christ alone died for and redeems humanity, Christ alone forgives and is to be worshiped, Christ alone is the Mediator and Advocate between God the Father and humanity.

- **The Augsburg Confession** (1530) was drafted by Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon. It was an apologetic designed to identify and rebuke error, and defend spiritual teachings based on the Word of God.
- **First Confession of Basel** (1534), has notable issues, particularly pertaining to the eucharist, however, the twelve articles of the Confession presents orthodox evangelical doctrines concerning God, the fall of man, divine providence, the humanity of Christ, the Church, and faith and works. The Confession concludes: *“We submit this our Confession to the judgment of the divine Scriptures, and hold ourselves ready always thankfully to obey God and his Word if we should be corrected out of said holy Scriptures.”*
- **The forty-point French Confession of Faith** (1559) was adopted by “common agreement by the French who desire to live according to the purity of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This Confession acknowledges God as Creator, Christ as the head of the Church, and details the biblical structure for church leadership (pastors, elders, deacons, and teachers).
- **The Scots Confession** (1560). This lengthy Confession reads like an apologetic, noting the Scriptural foundation for the resurrection, the deity of Christ, Christ as Mediator, works vs. faith, the final judgment, heaven, divine revelation, the nature of God, sin, and the absolute authority of Scripture.

- **The Belgic Confession** (1561) outlines the central beliefs of the Christian faith. It was written by Guido de Bres, a pastor who served in what is today Belgium, and was a one-time student of John Calvin. In this Confession, de Bres sought to persuade the Spanish king, Philip II—whose forces occupied the Low Countries—that Protestants should not be persecuted for their faith, given that what they believe is thoroughly biblical. Within a few years of writing this Confession, de Bres was martyred. The thirty-seven articles of the Belgic Confession begin with the doctrine of God and notes the sufficiency of the Scriptures, affirms the biblical canon (66 books), the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and sin.
- **The Anglican Articles of Religion** (1571) has several points conservative evangelicals today would take issue with, but for its time, it was a powerful document noting why the teachings concerning purgatory, pardons (indulgences), worshipping (praying to) saints, the “adoration” or veneration of Mary, and emphasis on “images” or “relics” were apostate and “rather repugnant to the Word of God.”
- **The Canons of Dort** (1618-1619) clarifies the Reformed teaching of salvation and God’s grace. Though strongly Calvinistic in some points, the document presents a generally well-balanced view of man’s sinful state, salvation, the power of the Gospel, the Great Commission mandate, and the eternal

ramifications of accepting or rejecting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The creedal statements of the 16th century cost many believers their lives. They mark a turning point in the errant Church—an attempt to tether it to the precepts presented in the Bible. The creedal statements emphasize the authority of Scripture, advocate a literal interpretation of Scripture, and noted the responsibility of the common man to know, share and study Scripture. These radical guiding principles, which many died for, are embraced by dispensationalists today.

The development of the printing press and the printing of the Bible in English.

Though forms of a printing press were known in China in 8th and 9th centuries, the printing press was not introduced in Europe until 1440, and it took decades for presses to be generally available beyond Germany. The first great work to be printed was famously known as the Gutenberg Bible, it was printed in Latin in 1445.

William Tyndale completed a translation of the New Testament in English in 1525. The work was outlawed by the Church and banned by royal proclamation in 1530. William was burned at the stake by Catholic

Church officials before his translation of the Old Testament could be completed. His work was monumental, but, as it drew more on middle than modern English, it was not well suited to be the translation that would take Europe through the Reformation period and into the modern age.

With the onset of the Protestant Reformation and more freedom to create Bible translations in English, a number of translations were developed (such as the Matthew Bible, the Geneva Bible, and Bishop's Bible), but perhaps the most notable of the 16th century English Bibles was the Great Bible project, which was authorized in 1538 by King Henry VIII. Largely funded by Thomas Cromwell, the Great Bible drew heavily on the Tyndale Bible, and Latin and German manuscripts (rather than Greek and Hebrew texts, which were not readily available at that time). The Great Bible was a tremendous and landmark work—the first *printed* English version Bible that was (relatively) widely distributed. Its value is illustrated by the fact that it was sometimes called the “Chained Bible” as it was often chained to the podiums of great cathedrals.

The Great Bible was the first legal English translation of the Bible in Europe—a great step forward in religious freedom. But for the most part, the Bible was only available to cathedrals. The Reformers' dream of putting the Word of God in every person's hand was still yet to be realized.

Textually, the Great Bible had a number of issues as it drew from the Latin Vulgate rather than Greek and Hebrew sources. Further, the language still had *middle* rather than a more *modern* English feel, thus requiring extensive revisions over the next 80 years. Noted below is a sampling of a few verses from Acts 23:

“And delyver them beastes, that they maye sett Paul on, and brynge hym safe unto Felix the hye debyte (*For he dyd feare lest happlye the Jewes shulde take hym awaye and kyll hym, and he hym selfe shulde be afterwarde blamed, as though he wolde take money,*)²⁵ and he wrote a letter after thys maner.”²⁸³

Some of The Great Bible’s notable revisions and republications are noted below:

1. 1539, April – Printed in Paris and London by Richard Grafton & Edward Whitchurch.
2. 1540, April – Printed in London by Richard Grafton & Edward Whitchurch, includes Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's preface, and the Apocryphal Books were interspersed among the Canonical Books of the Old Testament.

²⁸³ Acts 23:24–25, Great Bible (The New Testament Octapla)

3. 1540, July – Printed in London by Richard Grafton & Edward Whitchurch, includes Archbishop Cranmer's preface with Cromwell's shield defaced on the title page
4. 1540, November — Printed in London by Richard Grafton & Edward Whitchurch, with the title page of 1541, and includes Archbishop Cranmer's preface..
5. 1541, May – Printed in London by Edward Whitchurch, includes Archbishop Cranmer's preface.
6. 1541, November – Printed in London by Edward Whitchurch, includes Archbishop Cranmer's preface.
7. 1541, December – Printed in London by Edward Whitchurch, includes Archbishop Cranmer's preface.
8. In 1568, the Great Bible was superseded as the authorized version of the Anglican Church by the Bishops' Bible. The last of over 30 editions of the Great Bible appeared in 1569.

The Geneva Bible of 1560 was the first mass-produced Bible printed on a mechanical printed press and made available to the general population. It was popular in Switzerland and England, and was taken to America by the Pilgrims in 1620.

The Geneva Bible was a proto-study Bible, having commentary and cross-reference notes. However, the notes were Calvinist in tone and

became an impediment to wide acceptance of the translation. Progress was made regarding putting the Word into the hands of the masses, but the important balance of common English phrasing and spelling, a commitment to translate the text from the best Greek and Hebrew sources, and minimal editorializing in commentary notes had not yet been achieved.

The King James Bible Translation

The United Kingdom had a tumultuous 16th century. King Henry VIII came to power in 1509 and reigned until 1547. Though not all of his motives were pure, he led England to break with the Catholic Church, and in so doing opened the door for the translation of the Bible into English. His son, Edward VI succeeded him as King when he was only 9 years old. Edward fell ill and died at age 15. When it was determined his sickness was terminal, Edward and his council drew up a "Devise for the Succession" to prevent the country's return to Catholicism. This is perhaps his greatest legacy. His wishes were disputed, however, when his appointee to the throne, Lady Jane Grey, was deposed by her half-sister Mary I in 1553. Mary, as a staunch Catholic, would become known as "Bloody Mary" for her persecution of Protestants. Mary fell ill and died in 1558. She was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth I, who restored Edward's reforms in the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of 1559. Queen Elizabeth was supported many Reformation principles

which her successor, King James I largely embraced when he came to the throne in 1603.

Several English Bibles translations were available to the elite and notable churches by the time King James I came to power. However, King James desired to create a Bible that was easy for the common man to understand (the Bishop's Bible was not), more readily available, and he wanted a translation without commentary—thus guarding against the Calvinist impact the Geneva Bible was having via their study and commentary notes.

King James charged 50 scholars to create a new translation, in his name, using the Bishop and Geneva Bibles as a guide. The Authorized King James Version was completed and published in 1611. The original publication included the 14 books of the Apocrypha.

Concerned by reports that the new translation was not at first well-received, King James banned the printing of the Geneva Bible in England. Later the archbishop banned the Geneva Bible from being imported to England. The King James translation became the translation of choice in Europe by the 1650's.

The KJV translation has had more impact on the world for Christ than any other translation of Scripture. Some today argue that the English language has changed such that some verses in the text are no longer clear. For example:

- The idiom, “her hap was to light on” in Ruth 2:3 is no longer a part of western language.
- Several words in the KJV have changed meaning over the centuries. For example, *conversation*, which meant *behavior* in 1611, means *discussion* today.
- Words such as *chambering*, *concupiscence*, *outwent* and *doth* are not part of western language today.

Though these issues are present in the KJV text, they are rare. The more important issue when evaluating the integrity of the text, I believe, centers on the families of manuscripts upon which the translation is based. This leads us to the next section: *A review of the 16th century Greek manuscript used as a foundational source for the creation of the 17th century King James Bible.*

Foundational texts from which the King James translation was translated

The Old Testament

The Old Testament of the King James text was translated from the *Second Hebrew Rabbinic Bible*, published in 1516–17 by Daniel Bomberg in Venice. The translation, commonly referred to as the *Mikraot Gedolot* was edited by Felix Pratensis (a Messianic Jew) in 1525. Translators of the KJV translation also drew on the Latin (*Vulgate*) text. Note: At this time in history, reformer-minded individuals in the Catholic Church requested Scriptures not only be translated and printed in the language of the people at large, they should also be translated from the best sources of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. This was resisted by Catholic hierarchy.

The mid-16th century [Catholic] Council of Trent advanced the position that the Latin *Vulgate* was the “authentic” text, and could not be rejected under any pretext whatsoever. This was understood to mean that if the Vulgate translation was at variance from Greek manuscripts, the Greek text was to be considered subordinate to the authority of the Vulgate. Protestants asserted that Roman Catholic leadership did not have the authority to dismiss original Greek readings in favor of non-original readings supported by the Latin text. Catholic

scholars responded, in turn, charging that the Greek text cannot be trusted because – as the Preface to the 1582 Rheims New Testament asserted, “*The Protestants’ compilations of the Greek text contained poorly attested readings, occasion retro-translations based on versional evidence, and even the compilers’ conjectures, and were infinitely corrupted.*” This pushed the reformers to move forward with their own Bible translation work, despite the condemnation of Catholic hierarchy, though often at great costs.

Foundational texts for the Old Testament

The first publication of the Hebrew Rabbinic Bible was by Daniel Bomberg in Venice. The second edition was edited by the Masoretic scholar Yaakov ben Hayyim in 1525. The Mikraot Gedolot was largely translated from contemporary families of Hebrew manuscripts available to the transcribers, which, at that tumultuous point in history, did not include the two older Ben Asher translators draw on today.²⁸⁴ Critics today often cite that fact as a severe limitation of the text. However, The Mikraot Gedolot or Second Rabbinic Bible compares well with the Leningrad Codex (1009 A.D.), the Aleppo Codex (930 A.D.), and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1st-2nd century B.C). Comparisons of these three texts show the Hebrew Bible has been preserved faithfully down through the centuries. Any differences are very minor, generally

²⁸⁴ The two primary manuscripts following the particular transcription practices of the Masorites are the Leningrad Codex and the Aleppo Codex.

affecting the teamim (cantillation marks) rather than the Hebrew letters themselves.

The *Mikraot Gedolot* of Ben Hayyim was published in two phases. The first phase, published in 1516-1517, was hailed as an extraordinary achievement. However, it was also notable for having more than a thousand technical errors. Most of these were addressed in the second printing in the 1520's by Menahem Lonzano and Shlomo Yedidiah Norzi. The so-called *second Rabbinic Bible* served as the textual model for nearly all later editions until modern times.

The New Testament

The text that King James translators used to create the New Testament was the *Textus Receptus*, Theodore Beza's 1588 Greek translation, and the Latin *Vulgate*. The 14 books of the Apocrypha, which was included in early publications of the King James Bible, was translated from both the *Septuagint* (a Greek translation) and the *Vulgate* (a Latin translation).

The *Textus Receptus*, went through several revisions in the 16th century. In its early development, the text was revised in 1516, 1519, 1522, 1527, and 1535. Later revisions drew heavily on the work of Robert Estienne (a.k.a. Robertus Stephanus), whose Greek text was revised in 1546, 1549, 1550, 1551, and Greek texts prepared by Theodore de Beza, which were revised 9 times between 1565 and 1604.

Revisions made to the King James text

A well-known Oxford study of the King James text noted that there were three main categories of revisions made to the King James text between 1611 and 1769. An overview of revisions follow:

- Corrections of printing errors and spelling updates. Revisions were made in 1613, 1639, 1639, 1701, 1762-69. A few examples follow
 - *Feare was changed to fear, blinde was changed to blind, sinne was changed to sin, and borne was changed to born.*
 - *The old English use of a “long s” was discontinued. For example, the word “also” looked like “alfo” in the early editions of the King James Bible.*
 - *The old English use of a “u” for a “v” was discontinued. For example, “euil” became “evil.”*
- A few passages were revised in 1639. For example, the 1611 translation of Matthew 13:6, which read, “*had not root,*” was changed to “*had no root.*” A few other examples of revisions include:
 - [*Psalm 69:32*](#) -- “*seek good*” was a printing error in the 1611 that was corrected to “*seek God*” in 1617

- *The word “might” in Matthew 26:34 was changed to “night”*
- [Ecclesiastes 1:5](#) -- *“the place” was a printing error in the 1611 that was corrected to “his place” in 1638.*
- [Matthew 6:3](#) -- *“thy right doeth” was a printing error in the 1611 that was corrected to “thy right hand doeth” in 1613.*
 - *The printing of the so-called *Wicked Bible KJV* translation (1631) omitted “not” in “Thou shalt not commit adultery” in [Exodus 20:14](#).*
 - *The printing of the so-called *Printer’s Bible* (1702) read “printers have persecuted me” instead of “princes” in [Psalms 119:161](#)*
 - *The printing of the so-called *Vinegar Bible* (1717) read “*The Parable of the Vinegar*” instead of *The Parable of the Vineyard*.*
 - *The printing of the so-called *Ears to Ear Bible* (1810) read “who hath ears to ear let him hear” in [Matthew 14:43](#).*
- *Punctuation revisions were made to proper nouns (for example, “holy Ghost” was changed to “Holy Ghost*

Dr. Waite’s exhaustive study of the revisions made to the King

James text led him to identify 1095 variances between the 1611 and 1769 translation—none of which materially impact the meaning of the passage.

Summary

It is important to recognize, as critics are quick to point out, that human constructs are not perfect. It is therefore not intellectually honest to assert, as some have, that the *King James translation is perfect, or the only perfect translation available today*. Consider:

- The motivations for creating the translation are not without issue.
- The methods and motives of promoting the King James translation and ensuring its acceptance throughout Europe are not without issue.
- The Old Testament was not based on the oldest manuscripts available today.
- The Old Testament was not based on the oldest manuscripts available at that time.
- The text the Old Testament was based on had more than a thousand textual issues in its first publication.
- The text was in part, translated from the Vulgate (Latin) text, which introduces another level in the transliteration process, which is not preferred.

- The Greek families of manuscripts the King James translators drew on to create the New Testament were revised 18 times between 1516 and 1604.
- The KJV translation contained the Apocrypha until 1644.
- The King James text was revised in 1629, 1638, 1750, and 1769. Dr. Donald Waite compared the 1611 KJV text with the 1917 Scofield KJV text and recorded 1095 variations.
- And even if the Textus Receptus translation was perfect, one must ask, which version is perfect, for there are no less than 27 different versions²⁸⁵ of the Textus Receptus. They include:
 - The Complutensian Polygot (1514)
 - The Desiderius Erasmus – of these there are five:
 - 1516 (Erasmus 1st Novum Instrumentum omne)
 - 1519 (Erasmus 2nd)
 - 1522 (Erasmus 3rd Novum Testamentum omne)
 - 1527 (Erasmus 4th)
 - 1535 (Erasmus 5th)
 - Colinaeus (1534, Simon de Colines)
 - Stephanus (Rbt. Estienne) –of which there are four:
 - 1546 (Robert Estienne (Stephanus) 1st)
 - 1549 (Robert Estienne (Stephanus) 2nd)
 - 1550 (Robert Estienne (Stephanus) 3rd – Editio Regia

²⁸⁵ <http://textusreceptusbibles.com/Editions>

- 1551 (Robert Estienne (Stephanus) 4th)
- Theodore Beza – of which there are nine
 - 1565 (Beza 1st) * 1565 (Beza Octavo 1st) *
1567 (Beza Octavo 2nd)
 - 1580 (Beza Octavo 3rd) * 1582 (Beza 2nd) *
1589 (Beza 3rd)
 - 1590 (Beza Octavo 4th) * 1598 (Beza 4th) *
1604 (Beza Octavo 5th)
- Elzevir – of which there are four:
 - 1624 (Elzevir)
 - 1633 (Elzevir) edited by Jeremias Hoelzlin,
Professor of Greek at Leiden.
 - 1641 (Elzevir) * 1679 (Elzevir)
- Oxford Press (1825)
- Scholz (1841)
- Scrivener (1884)

God speaks through His Word—He is not limited by man’s ability to perfectly copy or print it. Like in the days of Moses, when tabernacle craftsmen were specially empowered to complete a God-honoring task, just as God used pagan king Cyrus to fulfil prophecy and bless the Hebrew people, so God works through the ages, in mysterious ways. God can and has worked through unworthy humans, corrupt governments and even spoken through animals to accomplish is

purpose. The King James translation, and the texts they were transcribed from, may not be perfect, but they perfectly communicate God’s message. The Bible is, as one Baptist Confessional statement reads, is a book of “truth without any mixture of error, for its matter.”

Have there been revisions? Yes. Are there slight variations between the translations and families of manuscripts? Yes. However, slight variations do not compromise God’s message or truth—God is above that—bigger than that. Note how the so-called *grievous discrepancies* between the 1599 of the Geneva Bible and the 1769 edition of the King James Bible do not impact the meaning of the text:

- **Micah 6:8**

Geneva: “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee: surely to do justly, and to love mercy, and to humble thyself, to walk with thy God.

KJV: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

- **Romans 12:1**

Geneva: “...brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye give up your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable serving of God.”

KJV: "...brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

- **1 John 4:16**

Geneva: "And we have known, and believed the love that God hath in us, God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

KJV: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

- **1 Timothy 2:5**

Geneva: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, which is the man Christ Jesus."

KJV: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, *which is* the man Christ Jesus."

The earth-shaking happenings of the 16th century changed history. The creedal statements established by the reformers properly anchored doctrine to Scripture. The revision of the Greek and Hebrew families of manuscripts, the production of the printing press and the development of the Geneva and King James Bibles made English translations of the Scripture available.

The Great Awakening in America in the 18th century stood on the foundation established by the reformers of the 16th century. The gains made because of the revivals in the 18th century spurred the establishment of Sunday School ministries and Bible Colleges of the 19th century. Ministry leaders of the 19th century, such as Darby, Larkin, Moody, and Scofield flourished because of the opportunities afforded them by their spiritual great, great, great, great grandfathers. The freedom to learn and the study resources available helped these men frame the dispensational system of interpretation we enjoy today.

The next section profiles the development of the Greek text in the 19th and 20th centuries, and how advances in archeology, technology, and sociology impacted the development of modern-era Bible translations.

Can we trust the texts we have today? What are textual variants and how do they impact the integrity of the text?

Textual variants arise when comparing the four families of manuscripts from which English Bibles are translated from—these can be broadly classified into two categories:

- **Meaningful Variants:** These are textual variants that impact the meaning of the text. For example, if one manuscript reads “Jesus was *happy*” and another reads “Jesus was *sad*,” that would be

considered a meaningful variant as it changes the meaning of the text.

- **Viable Variants:** These textual variants often appear only in a single (*late*) manuscript and are often attributed to a scribal error. Viable can change the meaning of the text.

From these two categories, scholars have observed four options for textual variants:

1. **Neither meaningful nor viable:** The variant does not change the meaning and has no chance of being original.
2. **Viable but not meaningful:** The variant does not change the meaning but may be reflected in the original text.
3. **Meaningful but not viable:** The variant does *change the meaning but is not in the original text*.
4. **Both Viable and meaningful:** The variant does *change the meaning and* may be reflected in the original text.

A brief profile of three primary options follows:

1. **Textual variants that are NOT meaningful, even if viable.** These are textual variants do not impact the rendering of the text in any way. This category represents more than 75% of all variants—most are simple spelling issues. In English the spelling of theatre or theater is appropriate. The preferred

spelling is generally based on geography, but both renderings are correct, and neither spelling impacts the meaning.

Sometimes, key words in a sentence are transposed. For example, one manuscript may read “Jesus Christ,” and another reads “Christ Jesus.”

* These variants do not impact the meaning of the text.

2. Textual variants that are meaningful but not viable

These are variants that are extremely unlikely to be original. These variants are rare, are typically found only in a single manuscript, and are generally attributed to scribal errors.

Here is an example:

“But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.” (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

There is a textual variant on the word “gentle.” Most manuscripts read “gentle,” some read “little children,” and one manuscript reads “horses.” Note the similar spelling:

- Alla Egenēthēmen **ēpioi** (*gentle*)
- Alla Egenēthēmen **nēpioi** (*little children*)
- Alla Egenēthēmen **hippioi** (*horses*)

Context tells us that **τ**ῆπιοι (*little children*) can't be intended, and since the previous word begins with “n,” one can imagine how a mistake was made (*doubling the “n”*). This form of textual variants *are* meaningful, but as it's nearly impossible for them to be original, they are not viable.

These two types of textual variants make up ~99% of all textual variants.

3. Textual variants that are meaningful and viable

These textual variants may be original (*viable*) and can change the meaning of the text (*meaningful*). They comprise less than 1% of all Textual Variants. Examples would be the ending to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 and the last 12 verses in Mark's Gospel. Whether or not these variances reflect the original text is disputed—these passages are generally included as a footnote in most modern translations. Debate regarding the inclusion or exclusion of these few passages is often spirited; however, it is important to note that these anomalies do not impact points of doctrine or any foundational teaching of the historic Christian Church.

A review of textual developments in the 19th—20th Centuries

The development of the Textus Receptus Greek text in the 16th century, and elevation of the more available 16th century Hebrew text led to the creation of the King James translation of the Bible in 1611—the first English Bible mass produced and widely circulated.

The King James translation was the primary English translation in Europe and America for more than three hundred years—a notable distinction.

The Textus Receptus Greek text that was used to transcribe the King James New Testament is primarily based on two 7th—10th century families of manuscripts (Byzantine texts), and, as noted above, a 16th-century Hebrew manuscript.

By the late 19th century, older families of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts became available. Scholars began to discuss the need to develop a new Greek New Testament, and then a new Bible based on these older Hebrew and Greek foundational documents.

The 19th-century work of creating a new Greek source for future Bible translations was fostered by 18th century German textual scholars, Johann Griesbach and Johann Bengel, who laid the foundation for the modern system of textual criticism.

In 1880, English Churchmen Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort built

on the work of Griesbach and Bengel and established a method or system for developing a new Greek New Testament. The criteria for examining and prioritizing old families of manuscripts is noted in their 1882 book titled, *The New Testament in the Original Greek, the Text Revised by B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort* (Cambridge: MacMillan & Co.). Their system for examining ancient manuscripts differed from 16th century transcribers in the three notable ways:

- There is a stronger presumption that the earlier date of a manuscript implies "greater purity of text" (p. 59)
- A Scripture passage that appears to be a clarification of "improvement" of the text is less likely to be authentic (p. 27)
- More difficult readings are preferred as the scribes tended to "smooth away difficulties" (p. 28)

Many argue that Westcott and Hort's "scientific" criteria for textual criticism compromised the spiritual dynamic associated with pure interpretation work and relegated the work to secular science. It is generally accepted that with older Hebrew and Greek manuscripts available to transcribers in the 1880's, it was time to reexamine and perhaps strengthen foundational documents that would be used to develop future Bible translations. However, it was feared the work started by Westcott and Hort was not bathed in prayer, and the faith and liberal perspective of the interpreters left open the door for issues in the final work.

The major distinctions in the work of interpreting early families of manuscripts into foundational documents from which English translations were developed are as follows:

- The Textus Receptus Greek New Testament was translated from 5th—9th century manuscripts, often collectively referred to as *Byzantine manuscripts*.
- The King James New Testament was translated from the Textus Receptus text, and the Old Testament was translated from the *Second Hebrew Rabbinic Bible*, published in 1516–17 by Daniel Bomberg and revised by Felix Pratensis (a Messianic Jew) in 1525.
- The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament was translated (primarily) from 4th century documents often collectively referred to as the *Vaticanus Codex*.
- Modern (20th century) Bible translations are generally translated from the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament and the 9th—10th century **Masoretic Text** Hebrew Bible (which aligns with famed 1st—2nd century B.C. *Dead Sea Scrolls*).
- Though there are a greater number of Byzantine documents, and greater alignment among those documents, translators of the Nestle Aland Greek New Testament primarily favored *older* documents. Though wise as a general rule, this practice can prove detrimental when used with little consideration to other sources (simply because they are not as old).

Bible translation work in the late 19th and 20th centuries

In the 20th century, textual critics Kurt Aland, Bruce Metzger, Cardinal Carlo Martini and others used the systems and material put in place by Westcott and Hort and produced the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (sometimes referred to the United Bible Society Greek [NA/UBS] text).

Noting what guided the development of their work, Metzger wrote:

*"The international committee that produced the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament, not only adopted the Westcott and Hort edition as its basic text, but followed their methodology in giving attention to both external and internal consideration"*²⁸⁶

Eberhard Nestle published a first edition of the new Greek New Testament in 1898. He combined the readings of the editions of Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and Weymouth. The text was revised in 1901 when Weymouth's writings were replaced with Bernhard Weiss's text.

Many revisions and reprints of the text were made in the early 1900's. Eberhard Nestle's son Erwin continued the revision process after his father's death and introduced the 13th edition in 1927.

Kurt Aland became the associate editor of the 21st edition in 1952. At

²⁸⁶ Brooks, James, *Bible Interpreters of the 20th century*, p. 264).

Erwin Nestle's request, he reviewed and expanded the critical apparatus, which included reviewing many more ancient manuscripts. This prompted a 25th edition to be published in 1963.

Some argue that no revisions would be required if the original work was pure. Though that reasoning sounds true, none of the foundational works after the year 200 A.D. used as source documents to create Bible translations met that requirement.

Others argue that the several dozen-plus revisions in the Nestle-Aland make it a living document that can reflect the latest scholarship and archeological finds.

In any event, the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament quickly became the new standard Greek New Testament text for study in evangelical seminaries and translation source for Bible translators. In fact, all almost major evangelical Bible translations printed today are translated from the Nestle-Aland text (the King James Version and New King James Bibles are notable exceptions).

CRITICISM OF THE NESTLE-ALAND TEXT

In considering the validity of criticisms of the Nestle-Aland text, it is important to distinguish between true problems and profound preferences. The King James text enjoys a notable history, being firmly established as *the* text for Sunday Schools, Churches, Bible Colleges and Seminaries for about three hundred years.

However, many are of the opinion that because 19th/20th-century scholars had access to older families of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts than 16th-century scholars did, work to develop a new Greek New Testament and new Bible translations were warranted.

What is in question, however, is the approach and spiritual condition of the key players involved in the translation process. On these points there is sufficient cause to question the reliability of the end result. I share this because, in general, dispensationalists favor the King James text and many argue that the great shift toward apostasy in the Church correlates with the introduction of progressive or liberal views advanced in Universities and Seminaries. These views were prominent among key figures who led the work to translate what we now call the NA/UBS or Nestle-Aland text, which spurred the advancement of the many modern Bible translations in use today. Consider the following:

- Kurt Aland, lead architect of the latest edition of the Nestle-Aland text, was a self-described *liberal* who doubted the authenticity of the canon of Scripture.

- Those who consider the New Revised Standard Bible translation to be marked by liberal perspectives fault general editor Bruce Metzger, who embraced liberal views and served as the lead architect of the original publication of the new Greek text.
- Cardinal Carlo Martini, who played a lead role in the development of the original Nestle-Aland Greek text, was a Roman Catholic Jesuit.

The secular approach to interpreting the text and the liberal views of the translators have put the integrity of their monumental work (a new Greek New Testament that became the foundational document for most modern translations today) in doubt. Adding fuel to this fire is the apparent correlation between the secular and liberal earmarks of the Nestle-Aland translators and the growth of liberal elements in Christendom—something that in just a few decades has severely crippled the Lord’s Church.

Differences in the texts

Not surprisingly, though there are indisputable and multiple issues with the development of the 16th century Greek text (Textus Receptus), the English King James translation of the Bible, and the 19th/20th century Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, the Lord, mysteriously and mightily, has maintained the integrity of His Word. Are there differences

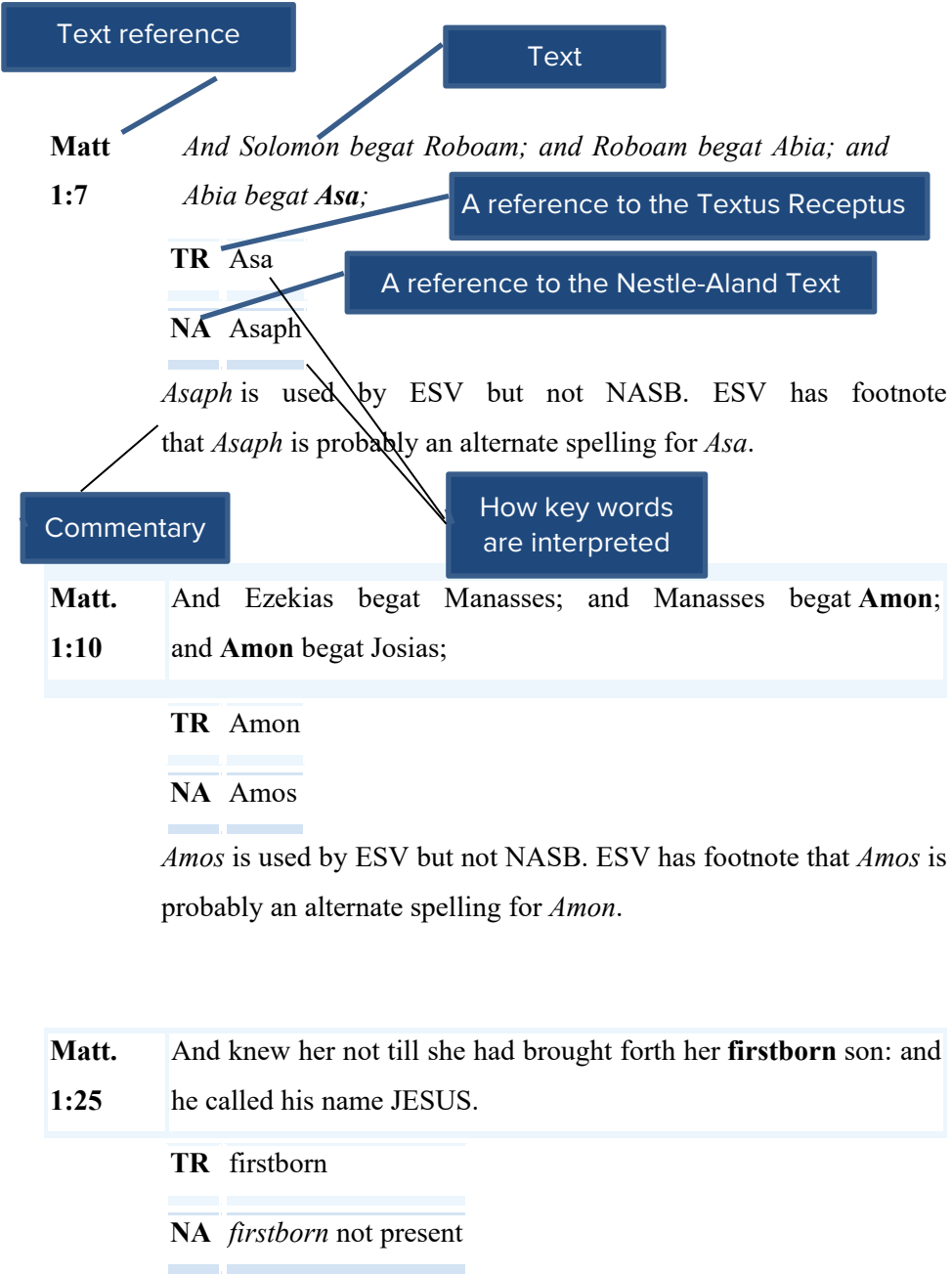
in the texts? Yes, but the differences are minor and, for the most part, do not impact the meaning of the passage, and never do the variances impede the understanding of a key point of doctrine. A few examples follow:

- The English reading of the Textus Receptus text of 1 Corinthians 5:5 is, *“To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord **Jesus**.”*
 - The English reading of the Nestle Aland Greek text of the same passage does not include the word *“**Jesus**.”*
 - There *is* a variance, but it does not materially change the meaning of the text.
- The 1611 King James Bible translated Esther 1:8, *“For the king.”* That reading was later revised and now reads, *“For **so** the king...”* Similarly, the 1611 King James Bible references the word “God” in Isaiah 49:13, but later versions of the King James Bible will reference the word “Lord,”
 - These variances do not materially change the meaning of the text.

Comparing the two primary Greek families of manuscripts

This section will show two things: 1) God is able to preserve the integrity of His Word despite human imperfections 2) For the most part, though the Nestle-Aland text may claim better scholarship (as it draws from older and a greater number of sources), it is not materially different in the Textus Receptus text. Rather than directly impacting the translated English text, the different Greek texts seem to be associated with philosophies and approaches to ministry and interpreting church doctrine. Though there are notable exceptions, the Nestle-Aland text can be associated with translations that bridge to liberal perspectives and compromised teaching. Certainly, the steps were incremental and circumspect, but little by little, in less than 125 years, the Church has weakened to the point today, mainline ‘evangelical’ denominations wrestle with understanding and defending the most basic points of doctrine.

What follows is a side-by-side comparison of key passages from the book of Matthew, interpreted from the two primary Greek families of manuscripts. The analysis shows the Textus Receptus and Nestle-Aland texts are materially the same. The call-out boxes (at the top of the next page) note the format of this section.



Matt. 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother **without a cause** shall be in danger of the judgment:

TR without a cause

NA *without a cause* not present

Matt. 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, **bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you,** and pray for them which **deſpitefully uſe you, and** persecute you;

TR bold text included

NA bold text not present

Matt. 6:4 That thine alms may be in ſecret: and thy Father which ſeeth in ſecret himſelf ſhall reward thee **openly**.

TR openly

NA *openly* not present

Matt. 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: **For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

TR bold text included

NA bold text not present

NASB brackets the missing text; ESV provides the missing text in a footnote.

**Matt.
8:29**

And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, **Jesus**, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

TR Jesus

NA Word *Jesus* not present

**Matt.
17:4**

Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, **let us** make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

TR let us

NA I will

**Matt.
17:21**

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

TR Whole verse

NA Whole verse not present.

NASB places verse in brackets, ESV in a footnote.

Matt. 18:11	For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.
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TR	Whole verse
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NA	Whole verse not present.
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NASB places verse in brackets, ESV in a footnote.

Matt. 19:9	And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.
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TR	bold text included
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NA	bold text not present
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NASB places the content in brackets, ESV in a footnote.

Matt. 19:17	And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? <i>there is none good but one, that is, God...</i>
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TR	<i>there is none good but one, that is, God:</i>
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NA	There is <i>only</i> One who is good; (NASB)
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Matt.	So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but
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20:16	few chosen.
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TR bold text included

NA bold text not present

Matt. 20:22	But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.
------------------------	--

TR bold text included

NA bold text not present

The portion not present is found in Mark 10:38.

Matt. 22:23	And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with...
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TR bold text included

NA bold text not present

The portion not present is found in Mark 10:39.

Matt. 23:8	But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, <i>even</i> Christ ; and all ye are brethren.
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TR	bold text included
NA	bold text not present

Matt. 23:14	Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
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TR	Whole verse
NA	Whole verse not present.

The thought is present in the NA in Mark 12:40.

Matt. 24:36	But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.
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TR	Bold text below not present.
NA	But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son , but the Father alone. (NASB)

Matt. 26:28	For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.
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TR	bold text included
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NA	bold text not present
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The words *new covenant* are found in 1 Corinthians 11:25 in both TR and NA.

Matt. 27:24	When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but <i>that</i> rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed <i>his</i> hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye <i>to it</i> .
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TR	bold text included
-----------	--------------------

NA	bold text not present
-----------	-----------------------

Matt. 27:34	They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.
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TR	sour wine
-----------	-----------

NA	wine
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Matt.	And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that
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27:35	it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.
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TR	bold text included
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NA	bold text not present
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Comparing the *Byzantine* and *Vaticanus* families of manuscripts—A partial listing of inclusions and exclusions.

Again, the Byzantine families of manuscripts were used to develop the Textus Receptus Greek New Testament.—the Vaticanus family of manuscripts were used to develop the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament.

- Matthew 3:11 – the Byzantine text excludes the phrase και πυρι (“and fire”)
- Mark 3:5 – the Byzantine text includes ὅλης ὡς ἡ ἄλλη (“as whole as the other”),
- Mark 9:3 – the Byzantine text includes ὡς χιῶν (“like snow”)
- Mark 9:16 – the Byzantine text includes τοὺς γραμματεῖς (“the scribes,” rather than αὐτοὺς, “them”).
- Mark 9:24 – the Byzantine text includes Κύριε (“Lord”)
- Mark 9:33 – the Byzantine text includes πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς (“among yourselves”)
- Luke 3:4 – The Byzantine text includes λέγοντος (“saying”)
- Acts 3:26 – The Byzantine text includes Ἰησοῦν (“Jesus”)

Conclusion: The variances noted above do not impact the meaning of the text. God has preserved the integrity of His Word through various translation processes. Despite imperfect systems and humans, there is a

remarkable unity and purity among the more than 5000 early Greek copies of the New Testament, there is an unexplainable unity among the three oldest Hebrew families of manuscripts, there is no material difference between the Textus Receptus and Nestle-Aland Greek texts even though they were translated from different families of manuscripts separated in time by hundreds of years. Are there variances? Yes, but the true and divinely inspired message has been preserved—not because of our wisdom, but despite our shortcomings. God is good. The wise disciple today will study the Word, knows the history, can articulate why the Bible is different than all other books, and recognize Satan’s attempts to lead the church offtrack via the introduction of liberal teachings.

Dispensational developments in the 19th century

The nineteenth century was a time of significant development for the Christian Church. Missionary societies were formed, Sunday School ministries were established, many Bible Colleges and Seminaries were built, and the United States Congress funded the distribution of the King James Bible in every school in the land. The combination of freedom and access to discipleship resources produced great writing, great preaching, and the crystallization of beneficial study techniques and practices into formal hermeneutic systems—enter John Darby.

John Darby was born in Ireland in 1800. A scholar, he graduated from Trinity College in Dublin and was accredited to be an attorney by age 21. Shortly thereafter, he became a Christian, entered the ministry, and began serving as Pastor of a parish in Ireland in 1825. Though his ministry bore great fruit, he was grieved by a decree from his bishop that all needed to swear allegiance to the King of England. In 1829, after his attempts to reform the Church of England failed, he resigned his parish and became an independent minister, but aligned with a Brethren fellowship, with whom he had been in relationship for several years.

In the years that followed, Darby spent considerable time formalizing some of the approaches to studying and interpreting the Word he learned as a student at Trinity College. Among his mentors was

Professor Richard Graves, a futurist postmillennialist who taught that prophecy must be interpreted literally. Graves also taught that the covenants and promises extended to Israel are distinct from promises and covenants assigned to the Church, and that future prophesies, however unlikely (such as the rebirth of Israel) will unfold exactly as they are presented in Scripture. Grouping these beneficial interpretation precepts, and maintaining a flexible but literal interpretation of Scripture (allowing for some Scripture to be allegorical or symbolic), became foundation stones for the modern system of dispensationalism we have today. In this sense, though the precepts noted above were not new to Darby or the 18th century, Darby is known as the founder of the modern system of interpretation known as dispensationalism.

Unlike most in his day, Darby believed in the literal restoration of Israel and a time in the future when Jews would return to the Lord. Darby's distinction between God's plan for Israel and the Church formed the basis for what many critics today assert was his most controversial contribution to Evangelical Christianity—the idea of a pretribulation Rapture of the Church. However, as earlier chapters in this book documents, the idea of a pretribulation rapture of the Church was not a new teaching in Darby's day.

Darby also advanced the idea of progressive revelation—that God communicates the fullness of His perfect will and plan in different

ways at different points in history, referred to as dispensations. Darby noted that God's expectations of humanity (and His covenants with humanity) are subject to change with each dispensation. That is, God's expectation of those who lived in the days of Moses, during the *dispensation of law*, were different than the expectation God has for we who live under a covenant of grace (during the dispensation of the Church). This perspective was considered radical by leaders in the Anglican and Catholic Churches.

Darby migrated to the United States and found a receptivity to his teaching. By 1875, dispensational teaching was advanced in schools and churches throughout America and Canada. By 1900, dispensationalism was arguably the most popular evangelical system of theology in North America.

James Hall Brookes

One of the key leaders in dispensationalism in the later part of the 19th century was James H. Brookes. A graduate of Princeton Seminary, he was one of the first American Pastors to host John Darby (who spent much of his time in Canada).

Brookes wrote the book *Maranatha*, which was widely distributed and popularized the dispensational view of prophecy. Brookes also served as editor of *The Truth* magazine and coordinated the annual

Niagara Bible Conference—both played vital roles in seeding dispensational precepts among Christian leaders across America.

In time, Brookes became an influential leader of a large group of pastors, evangelists, and Christian workers, which further impacted the spread of dispensational principles. However, one of Brookes' greatest contributions to Christendom is that he introduced dispensationalism to C.I. Scofield shortly after his conversion.

Adoniram Judson Gordon

Adoniram was born in 1836. He was an excellent student, a Baptist Pastor, and the founder of Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Gordon was an important leader in Prophecy Conferences and advanced dispensational thought—namely, that prophecy is to be interpreted literally, that there will be a pre-tribulation Rapture, and that the Lord will restore Israel and work among the Jewish people in the last days (as profiled in the books of Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Joel, and Zechariah).

Gordon powerfully advanced dispensational precepts as editor of the prophecy circular, *The Watchword*. It is said that Gordon had the privilege of playing a key role in D. L. Moody's acceptance of dispensationalism.

Between 1875 and 1925, the Moody Bible Institute, Gordon College, Gordon-Conwell Seminary, and Dallas Theological Seminary introduced dispensational precepts to thousands of ministry leaders.

D.L. Moody

Dwight Lyman Moody, also known as D. L. Moody, was born in 1837. His father died when he was 4-years old, leaving his mother to raise 9 children, all under 13, on her own. Life was hard for young Moody—he, and his siblings, worked tirelessly. The need to work prohibited Moody from progressing beyond the fifth grade. About age 18, Moody moved to Chicago with aspirations to excel in business. However, God had other plans. Soon he began a Sunday School ministry targeting the less fortunate, uneducated children in the inner city of Chicago. This work grew and eventually became a strong, outreach-focused church.

The early part of Moody's evangelistic career was characterized by powerful preaching and innovative social work. All was going well until the *Great Chicago Fire* in 1871, which destroyed Moody's home, work, and the YMCA center in which much of his ministry work was based.

Within 2 years, Moody was a full-time traveling evangelist. By 1875, Moody was a world-renowned revivalist. It is estimated that

Moody personally spoke to 100 million people—an amazing statistic given the travel restrictions and technology of his time.

In the latter part of his life, Moody established a number of education and publishing centers designed to make available the Word, teach the Word, and train people for ministry. His dispensational views were prominent in his ministry centers, which included the Northfield Seminary for girls, the Mount Herman School for Boys, the Bible-Work Institute of the Chicago Evangelization Society (which, after his death, was renamed Moody Bible Institute), Moody Press, and Moody Church in Chicago.

C I Scofield

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield was born in 1843. His early life was notable but not honorable. He was a good student, served with distinction as a confederate officer during the Civil War, served in the Kansas House of Representatives, and the U.S. District Attorney of Kansas. This was before he was saved.

But he was prone to drink, was involved in scandal, possibly served some jail time, had to resign his government positions, and he abandoned his wife. But there is always grace, and though he, like many, struggled in his Christian walk for a time after his conversion, his later life was marked by a vibrant Christian faith.

Scofield became a minister, produced an outstanding Bible translation (one of the first, true, study Bibles), he advanced Dispensational teaching, and wrote *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, a book that powerfully expresses the principles of dispensational hermeneutics.

Scofield's writings and ministry impacted Lewis Sperry Chafer, whom the Lord used to found Dallas Theological Seminary. In time, Dallas Theological Seminary would become the most prominent dispensational seminary in the world—shaping the minds and ministries of notables such as Chuck Swindoll, Tony Evans, Dr. Ryrie, David Jeremiah, J. Vernon McGee, Hal Lindsey, and Bruce Wilkinson.

Dispensational developments in the 20th century

The 20th century was, in many ways, a carry-over from the 1800s. Scofield's ministry was strong until his death in 1921. Chafer founded Dallas Seminary in 1924 and produced an eight-volume dispensational systematic theology library which became a standard resource for future Seminary students. *His dispensational work strongly impacted the ministries of E.F. Harrison, A.T. Pierson, H.A. Ironside, Henry Thiessen, J. Vernon McGee, Merrill Unger, Charles Feinberg, Lewis Johnson, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Dwight Pentecost, Howard Hendricks, and Norman Geisler.*

Arno C. Gaebelein

Arno Gaebelein was born in Germany in 1861. He migrated to the U.S. when he was a teen, became a pastor and a notable scholar and writer. His dispensational views led him to write and preach on the coming rebirth of Israel and a return of God's working with the Jewish people in the last days. He died in 1945, three years before Israel was miraculously reborn as a sovereign and independent nation (in fulfilment of the Ezekiel 4 prophecy).

His dispensational views were expressed through his writing, preaching, and service as *Our Hope* magazine editor. Also, his son Frank took up the torch after his death, pastored a church, and produced an outstanding commentary set that embodies dispensational views.

William E. Blackstone

William was born in 1841 and was an ardent supporter of the dispensational eschatological views (the rebirth of Israel, a pre-tribulation Rapture, God's working among the Jews in the last days, etc.). Some have called him the *Hal Lindsey* of his day as in 1878, he wrote a best-selling book titled *Jesus is Coming*.

Believing God has a plan for the Jews in the last days, he lobbied tirelessly for the return of Jews to Israel. He met with politicians, coordinated conferences, and raised funds for the cause. At a 1918 Zionist Conference in Philadelphia, Blackstone was bestowed the title, "Father of Zionism." He died in 1935. In 1956, Israel dedicated a forest in his honor.

Henry Allan (Harry) Ironside

Henry Ironside was born in 1876 and enjoyed a long and fruitful ministry. He began teaching (children) at age 11 and died in 1951 during an overseas preaching tour.

Ironside was a Canadian-American teacher/professor, evangelist, pastor, and author. Notably, he pastored Moody Church in Chicago from 1929 to 1948.

His story is a testimony to the grace of God. He was thought dead at

birth, his father died when he was young, he never progressed past the 8th grade, at age 18, he had a kind of physical breakdown—requiring him to resign his teaching/preaching responsibilities. Yet God used Ironside to lead ministries, impact thousands of lives, and write deep theological books which shaped the thinking of many up-and-coming ministers and students of the Word. By 1929 it is estimated he preached to 1.5 million people.

Ironside was a zealous dispensationalist and premillennialist. His views were evident in his powerful teaching and preaching, and his prolific writing (he published more than 100 books, tracts, and pamphlets).

Charles C. Ryrie

Dr. Ryrie is considered one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Born in 1925, he lived through the difficult years of the Great Depression and WWII.

A brilliant student, he completed doctoral programs at Dallas Theological Seminary and at the University of Edinburgh. He spent many years teaching in Bible Colleges and Seminaries, impacting hundreds of new pastors along the way.

Dr. Ryrie was also a prolific writer. He wrote more than fifty books, including the notable books: *Dispensationalism Today*, *Basic*

Theology, and *The Holy Spirit*. He is probably best known for *The Ryrie Study Bible*, which has sold more than 2.6 million copies. Though Dr. Ryrie had a brilliant mind, he communicated deep spiritual truths—particularly dispensational precepts, in a way that all could grasp.

Dr. Ryrie died in 2016—his powerful ministry stood in stark contrast to the apostasy that crept into many churches and seminaries in the latter part of the 20th century. His insistence that the Bible is true and should be interpreted literally, and the need to be spiritually prepared for the Rapture, is a message too few preach today.

Dispensational Camps / Schools of Thought

Lamorak DesGalis of Christian Forums,²⁸⁷ notes that dispensationalists often identify with one of seven dispensational camps. Though there is much common ground, a brief listing of the seven schools of thought and their distinctions follows.

The seven different dispensational camps are:

- Traditional dispensationalist
- Progressive dispensationalist
- Classical dispensationalist
- Mid-Acts dispensationalist
- Acts 28 dispensationalist
- Hyper-dispensationalist
- Ultra-dispensationalist

Traditional dispensationalism

This is the majority view for dispensationalists today. Notable ministry leaders who held this view are Walvoord and Ryrie. The Revised Scofield Bible of the 1960s also reflects a traditional dispensational view, *which is why traditional dispensationalists are also called "Revised" dispensationalists.*

²⁸⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/zezp3tv3>

Progressive dispensationalism

The *progressive* view is a recent development, becoming popular after then 1990's. Though there is much agreement with those who hold a *traditional* view, *progressive* dispensationalists allow for less defined markers between dispensations. This transition period that has come to be known as a *progressive movement* into successive dispensations. The writers Bock, Blaising, and Saucy are notable *Progressive* dispensational authors.

Classical dispensationalism

Earlier dispensational writers such as Darby and Chafer are referred to as classical dispensationalists. The early Scofield Bible (but not the Revised Scofield Bible) reflects a classical dispensational view. Classical dispensationalists have somewhat ridged markers separating dispensations and often categorize the teachings of Jesus and the directives in the book of Hebrews as not fully applicable to the church today.

Mid-Acts dispensationalism

The Mid-Acts view holds that the beginning of the Church began somewhere between Acts 8-13 (there are several positions). This means that material before this point in Scripture applies to people under the Law, not to the Church. Most dispensationalists, however, hold that the Church began in Acts 2.

Acts 28 dispensationalists

As the name implies, Acts 28 dispensationalists hold that the Church was birthed at the end of Acts, and as noted above, all material before this point in the Bible does not apply to the Church today. This view is held by a small minority today.

Hyper-dispensationalist

This label often applies to those who take a very narrow view regarding what portions of Scripture applies to believers today.

Ultra-dispensationalist

This term applies to those who believe that Paul's message was unique from the other apostles, and that the Church did not begin until Acts 28 (or later).

Most dispensationalists fall into one of the first three categories. There are some differences in perspective and emphasis, and varied preferences regarding terminology, the specifics of the dispensations, and even Bible translations, but on the core issues, there is complete agreement:

- *The Bible is true*
- *Prophecy should be interpreted literally.*
- *There is a distinction between covenants and promises assigned to Israel and covenants and promises assigned to the Church.*
- *There will be a pre-tribulation Rapture.*

- *There is a futurist view of the Book of Revelation.*
- *God works in different ways through the ages (dispensations). In these dispensations, God communicates (often in profound and unique ways) His expectations for humanity and the means to remain in right relationship before the Lord.*
- *Israel and the Jewish people will play a key role in God's economy in the last days.*

DISPENSATIONALISM

— *Rightly dividing the Word of truth* —

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF DISPENSATIONAL PRECEPTS

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth / Hermeneutics

What is hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is a Greek term meaning “to interpret.” Hermeneutics is an interpretation system that considers many factors when interpreting Scripture passages, including changes in the meaning of terms that often result over time. Without proper context, human preconceptions can lead to a skewed interpretation of the text.

Culture and language change over time (new dictionaries are created annually), leading to variant interpretations of terms and phrases. Consider: If you are reading a 18th-century book and read, *“Look at little Billy, he has a good voice to beg bacon.”* You may ask, *Is the phrase a compliment or an insult?* An understanding of the cultural context is required to interpret the phrase correctly. The historical context identifies the phrase as an insult—a statement demeaning one’s lack of singing ability. A modern equivalent is, “do not quit your day job.” Biblical Hermeneutics encourages

- 1) Interpreting the text in light of proper historical, language, and cultural context *and*
- 2) Emphasizing that the text should speak for itself and, therefore, an error is likely to result when one reads preconceived ideas or biases into the text.

Criticisms of the dispensational system of interpretation

A listing of common criticisms and misconceptions regarding the dispensational system of interpreting Scripture follows:

- Some hyper-dispensationalists require a literal interpretation of *all* Scripture, though sometimes, a figurative reading is preferable. Critics are quick to cite a familiar quote of Cyrus Scofield: *“Not one instance exists of a spiritual or figurative fulfillment of prophecy. Jerusalem is always Jerusalem, Israel is always Israel, Zion is always Zion...prophecies may never be spiritualized, but are always literal.”* The Scofield quote is often taken out of context; however, this criticism of dispensationalists is prominent. My counsel is...
 - Lead with a literal interpretation of Scripture.
 - Allow for the possibility that a passage can be figurative, allegorical, or designed to present a dual meaning (physical and spiritual). A proper assessment of the context will determine the reading. A few examples follow.
 - Zechariah 4:10 notes that God has 7 eyes. This verse has a figurative element; it references the number 7, which, in Hebrew culture, is highly symbolic and associated with God, completion, and perfection. A modern era equivalent could be

something like: “*God is all seeing, omniscient and omnipresent.*”

- Matthew 18:8 notes that, “*If thy hand or foot offend thee, cut them off...*” This verse is allegorical, pointing to the high call and expectation of God that His people will pursue purity and be willing to make the sacrifices necessary to maintain their witness before Him. Our gracious God expects that we will fall short, but He also expects great effort.
- Isaiah 14:14-21 references the fall of a powerful notable. Many suspect that on the physical level, the text references **Sennacherib**, the proud king of Assyria (Babylon completely destroyed Assyrian armies in 689 B.C.). Most believe that on the spiritual level, the text references the fall of Satan, who in pride sought to elevate his position above the throne of God (see Ezekiel 28 and Revelation 12).
- Daniel 9:24-27 presents a well-known *70-weeks prophecy*. The timeline has a ‘gap’ between the 69th and 70th weeks. This *gap* can be problematic for those who require a literal, linear reading of every text. But one must allow God to express

His plan and timetable in the way that is pleasing to Him. *Gaps in the prophetic timeline, by the way, are also present in Isaiah 61, Isaiah 9, and Matthew 6.*

- Some criticize the dispensational system thinking the separation between the dispensations are absolute and hard and fast. Yes, there are distinct dispensations marked by distinct expectations of God for humanity. However, there is overlap and transitions as well. Some refer to this as *progressive dispensationalism*, and to some extent, that is true. However, those who align with *traditional* or *classical* dispensationalism should see there is overlap in *faith vs. works*, in *Jesus' teaching to Jews and Jesus' universal messaging for all*, and in *God working with Gentiles in the last days and God rebirthing and working in Israel in the last days*.
- Some are critical of the dispensational precept noting that Scripture should be interpreted in light of its context, which, in part, means, *in light of the dispensation in which the Scripture was presented*. Those critical of this precept look to 2 Timothy 3:16 (“All Scripture is profitable...”) to prove the precept is in error. However, though *all* Scripture is inspired and *all* Scripture is “profitable,” it does not compromise the Word to

recognize that God extends different expectations to different people at different points in history.

For example, through the prophet Elisha, a man with leprosy was told if he washed in the Jordan seven times he would find healing. He washed as ordered, and was healed, but that contract was between that man, the prophet, and God. Most today are not surprised that other lepers who washed in the Jordan were not healed. Why? Because, for lack of a better phrase, *others* were not invited to share in that contract. In the same way, God extends particular *contracts* with humanity at different points in history. In the days of Moses, David, Nehemiah, and Malachi, the contract for Jews was expressed in the Law. For us, the *contract* is expressed by the Spirit through the grace offered by the atoning sacrifice of the Son. Just as most today recognize that Christians are not bound by the Levitical Law, all should see that the dispensational system for interpretation is merely the proper extrapolation of that principle.

- Some reject dispensationalism, thinking, all dispensationalists believe that only a few books of the Bible pertain to the Church today (generally, the writings of Paul). It is true that some dispensationalists hold this view, but only a small minority. In general, dispensationalists believe that sections of Scripture embody a particular application for a particular people or time. For example, it is easy to see how the rules and regulations in

Leviticus were for people living during the Old Testament dispensational of Law. However, most dispensationalists view *all* Scripture as meaningful and believe that passages which had a particular *physical*-level application for certain people (such as the Old Testament code forbidding the tending of swine), also have an important *spiritual* application for believers today (i.e., remain spiritually clean and abstain from the things that defile).

Additional notes on how to use dispensational precepts to interpret difficult passages and topics

What follows are examples of how to use dispensational study and interpretation precepts to resolve apparent inconsistencies and difficult passages in the Bible.

- **The Trinity**
 - **The issue:** Some teach that the Trinity doctrine is not a true (or a biblical concept) because the term is not in Scripture and the doctrine was formalized hundreds of years after the resurrection of Christ.

- **Questions:** What do dispensational study precepts reveal... 1) about what the whole of Scripture says on the subject? 2) about how progressive revelation factors into understanding this doctrine?
 - The concept of the Trinity is present throughout Scripture. The first reference is in Genesis 1. The word to describe God (Elohim) is plural, and in verse 26 we read, "Let *us*...", which again, is a plural reference to God. From the beginning, God revealed Himself as being more than One. It *is* a mystery, but progressive insight (revelation) has been given to humanity through the ages to aid in understanding the mystery.
 - The Apostles advanced the teaching (though not the word).
 - The Gospel writers (particularly John) noted Jesus' many claims to deity.
 - The Holy Spirit is presented as synonymous with God in Acts 5:3-5. The nature of the Father (He is Savior [Isa. 43:11], Redeemer [Isa. 44:6], Creator [Gen. 1], eternal, etc.) are also assigned to the Son (Jesus is Savior, Redeemer, Creator [Col. 1:16; 2:8-10; John 1:3], and eternal [John 1:1, 8:58, 17:5]).

- The three facets of the Godhead are grouped in Scripture (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 1 John 5:7)
- The historical backdrop reveals that though the word *Trinity* was not employed in the first century, the doctrine of the deity of Christ was well known and accepted by the early leaders of the New Testament Church.
 - Pliny the Younger wrote of the divinity of Christ (113 A.D.).
 - Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of John, wrote of the divinity of Christ (130 A.D.).
 - Justin Martyr, writing between 100-165 A.D., wrote of the divinity of Jesus Christ.
 - Ignatius of Antioch (cir. 105 A.D.) wrote of the divinity of Christ.
 - Irenaeus wrote of the divinity of Christ (145 A.D.)
 - Tertullian wrote of the divinity Christ (175 A.D.)

- **Women must be silent in the church** (1 Cor. 14:34)
 - **The issue:** The argument that women should not speak in church appears well-grounded as Scripture states: *“Let...women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak...”*
 - **Questions:** What do dispensational study precepts reveal about... 1) the context of the verse? 2) How can one interpret this difficult passage in light of parallel passages that are clear?
 - The admonition is not to be silent, but to pursue order. In the ancient church, men and women were seated on opposite sides of the meeting area. Asking questions of their husbands in the middle of the service was disruptive. Here Paul is advocating respectful listening (silence) during times of preaching.
 - A review of parallel passages reveals that the same author gave instructions to women regarding praying and prophesying in the church (1 Corinthians 11). This verifies that the directive is not for women to be *silent*, but for there to be order in the Church.

- **Is water baptism (a work) a requisite for salvation?**

- **The issue:** The Catholic teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation appears well-grounded as Scripture states: “*Whoever believes **and is baptized** will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*” (Mark 16:16)
- **Questions:** What do dispensational study precepts reveal... 1) from a study of textual criticism regarding this passage of Scripture? 2) about how progressive revelation and the ordinance of baptism? 3) from a study on what the whole of Scripture states on this topic?
 - A textual criticism review of the passage indicates that verses 9-20 in Mark 16 are bracketed or footnoted in most modern Bible translations. Those verses are marked “*not in the original*” in the Nestle-Aland text as they are not found in the Codex Sinaiticus or Vaticanus families of manuscripts (which are the oldest families of manuscripts). This does not indicate the passage is not inspired; it does, however, prompt the student to investigate all other verses on the subject for proper context and a clear interpretation.

- A review of the history surrounding the passage reminds the reader that the text was written at an early point in church history, at a time when many were transitioning from the baptism of John to the baptism associated with the “Great Commission” and New Testament Church. The timing of this verse prompts the student of the Word to investigate to see if later writings—writings of the Apostles that come after the transition period in the early years after Pentecost and the unfolding of the New Covenant of Grace, provide clarity on this topic.
- A review of the history of baptism provides context for the verse and insight. Though not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, extra-biblical historical writings verify that water baptism has Old Testament period origins. Note that John the Baptist came on the scene (Matt. 3:1-2) and began his work without any explanation about what baptism was. Therefore, there must have been an understanding and cultural reference point concerning baptism.

Historians note that during the period of the

second temple (roughly the 500 years leading up to the ministry of John the Baptist), there was widespread conversion of the Gentile world to Judaism. During this period, the Hebrew word, ‘ger’ (stranger), came to be synonymous with a proselyte (new convert). Rabbinical instructions for receiving a proselyte called for an immersion basin to be filled with about 100 gallons of water. Into this water went the new convert. Jewish elders were present to serve as witnesses. Following the baptism, the proselyte was considered ‘newborn,’ as if he had been born of Jewish parentage. Jewish proselyte baptism references the exodus experience and Israel’s crossing the Red Sea. The Apostle Paul notes, *“Israel was baptized in the cloud and in the sea...”* (1 Cor. 10:2). Thus, converts to Judaism, in effect, belatedly reenacted Israel’s exodus, vicariously sharing in the experience of crossing over from bondage to freedom through the waters of the Red Sea, appropriating this history as their own and thereby becoming part of the covenant people produced by this historic event.

The exodus story is a grand prototype for New

Testament baptism—first instituted by John (the Baptist) and later developed by the Apostles. It is important to note that John located his ministry in the wilderness at the Jordan, near where Israel crossed from the desert into the Promised Land.

In the first century A.D., there was a transition in the meaning of baptism. The Old Testament baptism of the Jews centered on a desire to identify with the Hebrew nation. The baptism of John centered on a desire to identify with righteousness and a commitment to forsake sin. The baptism of the New Testament Church (in Acts) centers on a desire to identify with the risen Lord and the gift of the Spirit (which believers have access to through the death and resurrection of Christ). In the first century B.C., most Jews did not believe baptism was important for those of Hebrew heritage, nor was it associated with repentance or righteousness. According to Jewish *tradition*, righteousness was a birthright. The baptism of the New Testament Church reminds individuals that it is not our bloodline, but the blood of Christ that

assures our salvation.²⁸⁸

The baptism of John the Baptist focused on repentance, a commitment to God, and righteous living. After Pentecost (Acts 2), baptism took on another dimension. In Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:38-42), baptism signified repentance and reception of the Gospel message of Jesus. Those baptized were, "added to the church...[and] they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and Christian fellowship..." No longer were individuals baptized to align with Israel and the Old Covenant of Law; believers were baptized to identify as followers of Christ and the New Covenant of Grace.

In the Epistles, baptism centers on faith in Christ, a belief in His death and resurrection, and is associated with a commitment to walk in "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4,7; Col. 2:12). Linking baptism to believing in Christ as the Son of God is evident in the story of Phillip's baptizing the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37). In Phillip's

²⁸⁸ Galatians 3:7

ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 8:12-17), baptism followed “believing the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:14).

Baptism is not a requisite for salvation. In 1 Corinthians 1:13-17, Paul notes that “*God did not send me to baptize...*” In Luke 23:43, Jesus declared to the repentant man on the cross next to Him, “*today you will be with Me in Paradise.*” That man was offered salvation but had no opportunity to be baptized. According to 1 Corinthians 1, Paul baptized some, but not all, and he emphasized his preaching role over his leading in the ordinance of baptism. Not that baptism is unimportant, but Paul would not have commented the way he did if baptism is a requisite for salvation.

Is baptism important? Yes. For all the reasons noted above. It is considered an *ordinance*, meaning, Jesus desires it—Jesus commands it. Through baptism we declare our desire to be a follower of Christ. It is a proclamation of faith—a witness to the spiritual cleansing and renewal

we have received through our faith in Christ. Nevertheless, our salvation is not achieved or merited by any work or act. We are saved by grace through faith.²⁸⁹ We are to be baptized as a witness *of* our faith, not to *earn* or salvation. Salvation comes from believing in Christ. Good works are an expression of our love for Christ, but do not earn us the love of Christ. Scripture is clear regarding how one is saved:

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

(Romans 10:9-10)

- **Should one keep the Saturday Sabbath?**

- **The issue:** The argument that believers today should *keep the Saturday Sabbath* appears well-grounded as Scripture states:

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the

²⁸⁹ Ephesians 2:8-10

seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth...and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."²⁹⁰

- **Questions:** What do dispensational study precepts reveal about 1) the dispensational setting of this passage? 2) Jesus' teachings regarding the Law and His example? 3) the key happenings that ushered in the current *Age of Grace* and the example set by the early church?
 - The dispensational setting for this verse is the onset of the age of Law. As previously noted, many aspects of Law (particularly the codes noted in the book of Leviticus) have a primary, physical-level meaning for those living in that age, and also, a spiritual-level application for we who live in a different dispensation. The physical level meaning of Old Testament passages on this topic includes: *believers are to*

²⁹⁰ Exodus 20:8-11

worship on the Sabbath day (Saturday), cease from work, on certain holy days one is to eat (or abstain from) particular foods, believers are to observe the primary Festivals of the Lord (later, the directive was to do this in Jerusalem), and there is a host of regulations regarding priestly clothing and duties. The spiritual application of the verse is to honor and worship the Lord—“do not forsake the assembly”²⁹¹ (the congregation of the Lord). The directive for believers today is honor the Lord. Put him first. Worship Him with “all with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...”²⁹²

- Jesus’ teaching regarding observing the Law reminds the student of the Word that the higher application of the Law is spiritual, not physical.²⁹³ Jesus’ example regarding the Law and rabbinic traditions is rather radical. He healed on the Sabbath, brought the infirmed and children into the Temple, picked wheat on the Sabbath, did not wash according to the strict traditions of his day, traveled through Samaria,

²⁹¹ Hebrews 10:25

²⁹² Mark 12:30

²⁹³ Matthew 22:29, Matthew 15:11, Matthew 23

journeyed into a graveyard, spoke to the Samaritan woman, touched lepers, and ate with ‘tax collectors.’ Jesus did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it²⁹⁴—and provide a proper understanding of it. He taught that “*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.*”²⁹⁵

- Leaders in the New Testament Church advocated for worshipping on Sunday because the Lord Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, and the birth of the New Testament Church, at Pentecost, occurred on a Sunday.

- **Does Hebrews 6 indicate that one can lose their salvation?**

- The issue: A superficial reading of Hebrews 6:1-6 may appear to validate the claim that believers can easily lose their salvation. Consider the text”

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of

²⁹⁴ Matthew 5:17-18

²⁹⁵ Mark 2:27

eternal judgment...For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify...the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”²⁹⁶

- **Question:** What do dispensational study precepts reveal from
 - 1) a review of key words in the Greek text reveal?
 - 2) a study of parallel verses?
 - A review of this passage of Scripture reveals the text is referring to believers—those who have:
 - “*left elementary teachings...*” (V.1a)
 - “*pressed on to maturity...*” (V.1b)
 - are “*enlightened*” (V.4)
 - have “*tasted of the heavenly gift*” (V.4)
 - have “*been made partakers of the Holy Spirit*” (V.4)
 - have “*tasted the good word*” (V.5)
 - and know of the “*powers of the age to come*” (V.5)
- * *These are certainly believers*

²⁹⁶ Hebrews 6:1-6

- A Hebrew-Greek Study Bible, Lexicon, or Logos-type Bible Study software can aid in reviewing several the key Greek words in the text. Commentary from Dr. Spiros Zodhiates notes:

*“The key to understanding this difficult passage is the meaning of the Greek infinitive anakainizo (340), ‘to renew.’ It is made up of the preposition ana (303), which means ‘again,’ and kainizo (from kainos (2537), which means ‘new but **qualitatively different**.’ Therefore, anakainizo means to have a qualitatively new and different repentance. Why is it impossible to have a qualitatively different or new repentance? Because to have a different kind of repentance, it would be necessary for Jesus Christ to die again on the cross. Whereas, Scripture teaches that Jesus died once and for all for man’s sins. He cannot come back and die again in order to gain for us another redemption which will see us through this time.”²⁹⁷*

²⁹⁷ Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible (Edited by Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, 1990) 1623-1624

- Key parallel verses reveal that salvation is secure for sincere believers and followers of Christ. Consider the following verses:

- *“Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb. 7:25)*
- *“I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” (John 10:28-29)*
- *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4:30)*
- *“You are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:5)*
- *“These things I have written to you who believe...so that you may know you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13)*
- *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ...Who will bring a*

charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God..."

(Romans 8:31-39)

- *"You are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:5)*

- **Was Jesus crucified at the "sixth" hour or the "third" hour?**
 - The issue: In Matthew we read that Jesus died at the "sixth" hour.²⁹⁸ Mark's Gospel notes that Jesus died at the "third" hour.²⁹⁹ There appears to be a contradiction

²⁹⁸ Matthew 27:45–51

²⁹⁹ Mark 15:25

in Scripture—a grave contradiction can compromise one’s confidence in the integrity of the Word of God.

- **Question:** What is revealed when applying the dispensational precept of studying how culture impacts *language in Scripture*?

- This apparent contradiction is easily resolved when one understands that Mark was writing from Rome, with a Roman audience in mind. Accordingly, he references a Roman timekeeping system when presenting his account of the crucifixion. Matthew wrote in Hebrew to a Hebrew audience and accordingly, references a Hebrew system of keeping time. This is similar to a person noting the meeting will begin at Noon, or 12:00 PM, or 1400 hours. All three designations are the same time, as are the two time designations for the death of Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

- **How can one reconcile 2 Chronicles 24:14 with 1 Chronicles 29:4?**

- The issue: 2 Chronicles 24:14 references 100,000 talents of gold. 1 Chronicles 29:4 (the same story)

references 3000 talents of gold. There appears to be a contradiction in Scripture.

- **Question:** What is revealed when applying the dispensational precept of taking into consideration how culture (different places and times) impacts *weights and measures* in Scripture?
 - This apparent contradiction is resolved when one considers that the books of the Chronicles were written hundreds of years after the fact, covers hundreds of years of history, and the books were written after Hebrew culture had been significantly impacted by Assyria, Babylonian, and Persian cultures. This resulted in changes in the designations of weights and measures. It is *not* similar to America's attempted change from standard measurements to the metric system, where different terms were introduced (such as, the standard unit of distance changed from *miles* to *kilometers*)—often the change involved reassigning a value to the *same* term. For example, a shekel in 1 Kings 10 is twice the weight of a shekel in 2 Chronicles 22 (same term—two different weights).

The variance here can be resolved by noting that

1 Chronicles 29 references a *Mosaic* weight and 2 Chronicles 24 references a *Royal* weight. The two different (but similarly named) measurement systems refer to the same weight (similar to 1 pound equaling 454 grams).

- **Was Jesus in error when He spoke of the mustard seed being the smallest of seeds?**
 - **The issue:** Jesus said the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds.³⁰⁰ However, scientists today note that there are several seeds smaller than the mustard seed. Was Jesus' teaching in error?
 - **Question:** What do the dispensational precepts of considering the teaching style and focusing on the higher meaning of the passage reveal?
 - Interpreting this text begins by recognizing the teaching style—it is a parable. Parables often use analogy and symbolism to illustrate higher truths. Like poetry, parables often offer more than one can glean from a literal interpretation.
 - Jesus was not speaking as a scientist or botanist when he presented this parable. He was

³⁰⁰ Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19

speaking to an agricultural community, sharing imagery and language that resonated with his audience. Jesus spoke in broad terms to make a spiritual point, which has little to do with the specific size of a seed or a mustard seed's size in comparison to other small seeds. *A similar issue is found in John 12:25 and Matthew 13:31-32, where Jesus says "a grain of wheat dies" (rather than noting that it germinates).*

- **When did Nebuchadnezzar first raid Israel?**

- **The issue:** Daniel 1:1 notes that Nebuchadnezzar first raided Israel in the *third* year of his reign. Jeremiah 46:2 notes that Nebuchadnezzar's first raid occurred in the *fourth* year of his reign. This appears to be a minor but important discrepancy, as the Bible is either *without error* or subject to presenting misinformation.
- **Question:** What is revealed when applying the dispensational precept of considering how cultural customs impact the interpretation?
 - When Jeremiah wrote what we now refer to as Jeremiah 46, he was writing in Hebrew, to Hebrews, in the land of the Hebrews (Israel). Accordingly, Jeremiah recorded king

Nebuchadnezzar's activity in a way that was familiar to Hebrews (which happens to be the way the west today records the reigns of monarchs and presidents—*the clock starts ticking as soon as the leader takes office*). However, Daniel wrote when he was in exile in the east. He was taken (as a captive) to Babylon, learned Aramaic, wrote about half of his book in Aramaic, then was moved to Persia. Accordingly, his writing reflects some eastern customs—including the custom of *not* counting the first year of a king's service as part of his official reign. According to eastern tradition, that year was considered the king's *ascension year*. So, both Daniel and Jeremiah were correct in how they recorded a historical event—albeit from two different point of views.

- **How can one reconcile the varying accounts of Absalom's lineage?**
 - **The issue:** 2 Samuel 14:27 notes that Absalom had three sons. 2 Samuel 18:18 notes that Absalom did not have any sons and therefore moves to erect a monument

to memorialize his name. There appears to be an error in the span of just four chapters.

- **Question:** What is revealed when applying the dispensational precept of considering how human perspective can impact interpreting the text?
 - 2 Samuel 14:27 notes: “*And unto Absalom there were born three sons.*” However, four chapters later, Absalom declares, “*I have no son to preserve my name.*” Here we see that Absalom’s comments center on his desire to “preserve [his] name;” he is not stating that he that he never had children, only that he has no children now to carry on his legacy. Scholars Keil and Delitzsch suggest that Absalom did have 3 sons (as stated in 2 Samuel 14), but all died very early in life—perhaps in infancy as their names are not presented in chapter 14. Both 2 Samuel 14 and 2 Samuel 18 reference Absalom’s perspective that his name and lineage would die with him. The greater spiritual truth of this section of Scripture, however, is that the cutting-off of Absalom’s bloodline was, in part, a consequence of Absalom’s sin.

- **Did Jesus err when He said He was presenting a “new” commandment in John 13?**
 - **The issue:** In John 13:34, Jesus tells His disciples, “*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*” However, about 1475 years before Jesus shared a “new commandment” with His disciples, Moses wrote, “...*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself...*”³⁰¹ It appears Jesus’ commandment was not new at all—is this an error on Jesus’ part?
 - **Question:** What is revealed when applying the dispensational precept of considering how moving from a human to a godly perspective can impact the interpretation of the text?
 - The commandment to love in John 13 *does* have a new component in that the level and scope of love Jesus commands His disciples to extend is new. In the same chapter (V.15) Jesus says, “*For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done...*” Here we see that up to that point in history, humans were to love as Moses or their best leaders loved. Jesus’ *new*

³⁰¹ Leviticus 19:18

commandment is to love as He, Emmanuel, “God with us,”³⁰² loves.³⁰³

- **Do the Gospels contradict each other or add detail?**

Consider the Resurrection:

- **The issue:** Mark 16:1 notes that three **women** visited the Jesus’ tomb on resurrection Sunday; Matthew 28:1 notes there were two women at the tomb; Luke 24:10 notes there were at least five women at the tomb on Sunday morning: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and “other women.” This appears to a significant variance in the seminal event in all four Gospels.
- **Question:** What is revealed when utilizing the dispensational precept of considering how the focus and scope of parallel accounts provides credibility to the text?
 - A review of the cultural undertones to this story reveals how unusual (and important to the integrity of the story) it is that women are the initial witnesses to the resurrection. In Israel two thousand years ago, women were not allowed to

³⁰² Isaiah 7:14 (“God with us”)

³⁰³ John 3:16, 13:15

testify in court. The unusual fact that women are the principal witnesses for presenting an account of the empty tomb may not be the best way to win a case in court of public opinion (as that would be poor way to posit a false story), but it is an interesting and effective way to lend credibility to the resurrection account (it is either a terrible lie or, amazingly, true).

- In a court of law, then and now, if multiple independent accounts of an event are exactly the same, the witnesses are likely to be discredited on the grounds of collusion.
- There *are* differences in the Gospel accounts regarding who was at the tomb on the Sunday after the crucifixion, but these differences do not indicate discrepancies, they add detail to, and substantiate, the reliability of the resurrection story. The resurrection story is cited by the Roman historian Tacitus as being so meaningful to the followers of Christ that many *willingly suffered a martyr's death rather than deny what they believed to be the truth.*

- **Was there a donkey, or a donkey and a colt with Jesus at the Triumphal Entry?**

- **The issue:** Matthew 21:2 notes that there was a donkey *and* a colt at the Triumphal Entry. Luke 19:30 notes only that there was a donkey. It seems a minor variance, but skeptics wonder: *If there can be a variance on a simple matter, could there be variances in key verses such as John 3:16 or Romans 10:9-10? Is the Bible subject to error?*
- **Question:** How does the dispensational precept of considering not just what was written, but why it was written, impact the interpretation of the text?
 - The stories do not present contradictory accounts—the variance indicates the inspired writers penned their accounts for different purposes. Luke writes as a historian, with particular sensitivity and ability to write a Hebrew-based story in a way that Gentiles could understand. Luke transliterates Hebrew words into their Greek equivalent; for example, "Simon the Cananaean" becomes "Simon the Zealot." Calvary's Hebrew name, "Golgotha," is noted by its Greek name, "Kranion." Luke does not use the common Jewish term "Rabbi" in

connection with Jesus, but always a Greek term meaning "Master." His proclivity to streamline stories and present facts in ways Gentiles can readily grasp likely played a factor in his not mentioning the colt being with the donkey at the Triumphal Entry. To his Gentile audience, that fact would be incidental to the story.

Matthew, however, wrote in a different style and for a different purpose. His writing is not chronological, but like a rabbinic scholar, he groups his presentations in five great teachings known as discourses. And as Matthew was writing to Hebrews who needed convincing that Jesus was the promised Messiah, he added extraordinary detail that first century Gentiles may have considered *nonessential*; Hebrew readers, however, would find them fascinating. From noting that Jeconiah³⁰⁴ was Jesus' ancestor is to the particular gifts the Magi brought,³⁰⁵ Matthew labors to note with precise detail, how happenings and prophecies validated Jesus' claim to deity.

³⁰⁴ Matthew 1:12

³⁰⁵ Matthew 2:1-12

In recounting the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem the Sunday before He was crucified, Matthew focuses on how the event fulfills the Zechariah. 9:9 prophecy. That prophecy not only notes that Jesus would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey, but that with Jesus would be a donkey *and* a "foal." Matthew's writing emphasizes how Jesus fulfilled every detail of Zechariah prophecy. Luke's account details how Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, which Romans and Hebrews considered an animal of peace. All Gospel writers note that Jesus came into Jerusalem in fulfillment of prophecy, to the praise of the people, knowing that in just a few days, the same crowd would chant, "Crucify Him!" The primary facts of each Gospel writer's testimony are in complete agreement. The variances support the secondary goals the Spirit inspired each writer to fulfill—Matthew, to show the Hebrews how Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies and Luke, to show the Gentiles that the great hero of the Gospel story did not come as a conquering general but as the Prince of Peace.

- **Does Luke's mention of Quirinius prove the nativity story is fraught with error?**

- **The issue:** Luke 2:2 notes that the birth of Jesus occurred when Augustus was Caesar and Cyrenius was governor of Syria. However, historians reveal that the only census coordinated by Cyrenius was in 6 A.D. For skeptics, this glaring error puts the entire story of Jesus in doubt.
- **Question:** What is revealed when employing the dispensational precept of reviewing the Greek or Hebrew manuscripts when the English text is unclear or in doubt?
 - The only known census that Cyrenius ordered is in 6 A.D., which is nearly a decade after the death of Herod, a key figure in the nativity story. A suggestion for how to resolve this seemingly insurmountable discrepancy was made by New Testament Scholar Nigel Turner, who noted that the peculiar phrasing of Luke 2:1-2 in the Greek text could be lost in English translations. The English (KJV) text reads:

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar

Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)”

- *Note: The name Cyrenius is rendered Quirinius in most modern translations.*

Dr. Turner noted that the word for FIRST and BEFORE is the same word in Greek (Protos). PROTOS is always translated ***before*** in the Gospels when followed in the genitive case, as it is in Luke 2:2. This does not indicate an error in the English text, but suggests that a better way for English readers to understand the original Greek would be to rephrase the verse from...

“This [census]...was first made when Cyrenius was...” to

“This was the census taken before the census taken while Cyrenius was governor.”

- **Does the lack of secular records verifying Herod's order to "slaughter the children" prove the biblical narrative to be in error?**
 - **The issue:** There are no non-biblical records verifying Herod order to kill infants in the region of Bethlehem. Skeptics claim that such an infamous event would have been cited in Roman records and by first century historians. The fact that there are no records of such an event puts the integrity of the biblical account in question.
 - **Question:** What is revealed when employing the dispensational precept of considering how local laws, cultural biases, and government policies of the day provide proper context for interpreting the text?
 - It is true there are no non-biblical records of Herod giving an order for infants in the region of Bethlehem to be killed. However, it is certainly plausible that an order like that could have been given. Herod is known to have had Torah scholars burned alive for removing Rome's golden eagle from the Temple Gate in Jerusalem. He had his wife and several sons murdered because he considered them a threat. To assure there would be great mourning associated with his death, he ordered

thousands of men to be locked inside the Hippodrome and massacred when he died. Caesar Augustus is known to have said, “I’d rather be Herod’s pig than his son.” That Herod could have ordered the murder of innocent Jewish children is well within his known behavioral pattern.

- It is also important to note that many scholars suggest the population of Bethlehem 2000 years ago would likely have been in the 1000 range. Using 1000 as a base number, it is estimated that the number of infant males could have been as few as 10-15. Killings of this magnitude could easily have gone unnoticed by historians of the day, particularly in a period of constant human suffering and slaughter.
- **Archeologists note that the biblical narrative of Joshua’s conquest appears to be exaggerated or in error. Does this prove the Bible to be in error?**
 - **The issue:** Joshua 10 presents the names kings and cities that were “utterly destroyed” as Israel advanced and possessed the “promised land.” However, archeologist have found sixteen of those cities, and only three (Hazor, Lachish, and Bethel) show signs of being

“destroyed” when Jacob advanced. This appears to be an error or, at the very least, an exaggeration of Jacob’s exploits.

- **Question:** What is revealed when employing the dispensational precept of establishing the context of the passage by studying the literary or stylistic distinctives associated with particular cultures and periods of history?
 - According to theologian and apologists Dr. Gleason Archer, the broad and semi-hyperbolic language in Joshua 10 is indicative of the time and does not necessarily indicate there was a complete or “utter” destruction of the cities as we would define the phrase today.³⁰⁶ Just as the phrase, “*Yes, I’m ready for dinner—I’m starving.*” may indicate significant hunger rather than a clinical definition of *starving*, the language in Joshua 10 can easily be understood to mean that Israel smote, laid siege to, or captured cities, or that their armies were annihilated, but the actual cities were left standing. For example, the RSV translation of

³⁰⁶ Archer, Gleason L, *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1982)

Joshua 10:20 notes that the army of Israel “wiped out” its enemy, but in the very next phrase, the text notes what became of “the survivors.” Dr. Archer argues this is typical period writing, and supports his supposition by citing a recent find of a 15th century B.C. Egyptian Stele commemorating the exploits of Thutmose III. That Stele notes that “The heads of the Asiatics were severed, none escaped death.” However, a few lines later the Stele references how thousands of prisoners were captured.

- The text is not in error. The student of the Word must allow for culture to occasionally impact the rendering of the text. *Another example is found in Luke 2:1 where Caesar issues an order for “all the world” to be taxed. That rendering of that verse is impacted by the Roman view that their empire was “all the world” (or at least the only part worth mentioning).*

- **Do the time markers noted in 1 Kings 6 and Exodus 1 correlate with what historians know to be true?**

- **The issue:** 1 Kings 6:1 provides a historical marker that can be used to determine the time of the exodus (which appears to be 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, 962 B.C.). This does not seem to fit with Exodus 1:11, which notes that the Hebrews were “building the supply cities of “Pithom and Ramses,” shortly before the exodus—historians note that those cities were built 200 years after the exodus date as extrapolated from 1 Kings 1.
 - **Question:** What is revealed when employing the dispensational precept of considering how cultural symbolism and symmetry in writing impact the text’s interpretation?
 - 1 Kings 6:1 provides a spiritual (more than literal) time indicator for the interval between two seminal events in Hebrew history—the exodus from Egypt and the building of the first Temple during the reign of Solomon. As noted above, a literal interpretation of Exodus 1:11 and 1 Kings 6:1 puts the exodus as happening approximately 200 years earlier than historians document the event.
- 1 Kings 6:1 refers to a *spiritual* timeline having *symbolic* meaning. It references 12 generations

of 40 years (12 x 40) separating the two key events. In Hebrew culture, the numbers forty and twelve are associated with God's perfect working, order, and timing. Just as the 4th of July is *more* than just another date to Americans, the numbers 12 and 40 were *more* than just numbers to the ancient Hebrews. Based on dates presented in the books of I/II Kings, another 480-year (another 12 x 40 years) interval elapsed between the 4th year of Solomon's reign (marking the building of the Temple) to the end of Israel's exile in Babylon. Hence, 1 Kings 6:1 and subsequent time markers in I/II Kings, are symbolic timelines designed to present the dedication of the Temple as the central historical marker for the nation of Israel.

- **Did the disciples of Jesus receive the Holy Spirit shortly before the cross, right after the resurrection, or at Pentecost?**
 - **The issue:** Some suggest that John 14:25-27 and Luke 10:17-20 indicates that Jesus gave the disciples the Holy Spirit before the crucifixion. John 20:22 seems to

indicate that Jesus gave the disciples the Spirit soon after the resurrection. Acts 2 notes the disciples received the Spirit 50 days after the crucifixion (on the day of Pentecost). Does this show the Bible to be in error?

- **Question:** What does employing the dispensational precept of progressive revelation reveal when interpreting the text?
 - The apparent discrepancy is resolved when we allow for God to reveal the wonders of His plan and the mysteries of the faith in a progressive fashion. In Old Testament times, the Spirit was referenced as part of the plural (triune) nature of God (Gen. 1:26), as participating in the work of creation (Gen. 1:1-2), and as a pillar of fire in the days of Moses (Exod. 13:21-22). Jesus revealed the wondrous nature and working of the Spirit in different ways throughout His 3 ½ year earthly ministry. The disciples received the anointing of the Spirit in Luke 10, the promise of the Spirit in John 14, the peace and insight of the Spirit in John 20, and the indwelling presence of the Spirit in Acts 2. Progressive revelation acknowledges that at times, God reveals great

truths (and extends great blessings) in phases, or, in a progressive fashion.

- **Does the lack of archeological evidence for the Tower of Babel indicate the Bible is in error?**

- **The issue:** The story of the Tower of Babel³⁰⁷ is disputed by many. The lack of archeological evidence for the Tower adds fuel to the skeptic's charge that the Bible should be viewed as allegorical rather than a presentation of actual events and high spiritual truths.
- **Consider:** The quest for *proper context* is a key hermeneutic principle for dispensationalists. As appropriate, this will include a study of archeological and scientific research.
 - It seems to me that the more that scientists and archeologists learn about our history and the scope and precision of the universe, the greater the harmony there is between science and theology. For example, a recent study on the origin and development of human language reads:

“There are about 5000 languages

³⁰⁷ Genesis 11

spoken in the world today (a third of them in Africa), but scholars group them together into relatively few families - probably less than twenty. Languages are linked to each other by shared words or sounds or grammatical constructions. The theory is that the members of each linguistic group have descended from one language, a common ancestor. In many cases that original language is judged by the experts to have been spoken in surprisingly recent times - as little as a few thousand years ago.”³⁰⁸

- More than 100 significant archeological finds in the last 125 years verify the accuracy of the biblical record. There has never been an archeological find showing the biblical record to be in error. If something mentioned in the Bible, such as the Tower of Babel, has not yet been found, it either will be found or it was utterly

³⁰⁸ History of the World – The History of Language:

<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ab13>

destroyed by God and no evidence exists today. Either scenario does not show the Bible to be in error. It is well said that “*The absence of evidence is not evidence of error.*” What follows are a few examples of recent archeological finds validating the biblical record:

- The Amarna Tablets were discovered in 1988. These confirm the disputed biblical account of Joshua’s battles at Gezer, Ashkelon, and Lachish.
- The first (non-biblical) reference to Nebuchadnezzar (verifying that he was an actual historical figure) was found in 1899.
- The biblical city of Bethel was found in 1919.
- The biblical city of Jericho was found in 1930. The remarkable biblical account of walls falling forward (away from the city) has been verified by archeologists.
- The Mari Tablets were found in 1933. These tablets confirm the existence of

the disputed city Nahor as recorded in Gen. 24:10.

- The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, confirm the accuracy of the Old Testament.
- The only lithic (and non-biblical) reference to Pontius Pilate was found in 1961.
- The biblical city of Nazareth was found in 1963 (Note the current city of Nazareth is not the city mentioned in the Gospels).
- The Elba Tablets were found in 1970. These verify the existence of the long-disputed listing of noted in Genesis 14.
- The burial chamber of the High Priest Caiaphas was found in 1990. Its contents verify several aspects of the crucifixion.
- The biblical city of Dan was found in 1993.
- The first non-biblical reference to David was found in 1976.

Recommended study resources for the student and teacher of God's Word

What follows is a brief profile of seven resources that can aid in preparing to teach or preach the Word of God. Dr. Charles Ryrie writes:

*"The Spirit illuminates the meaning of...Scripture through study and meditation. [Honorable] study employs all the proper tools for ascertaining the meaning of the text...the end result...is to glorify Christ."*³⁰⁹

Regarding study resources, some pastors may point to newer teacher/preacher/speaker quote or joke books, handbooks for illustrations, and collections of sermons from great speakers. True, all can edify and perhaps assist in bringing humor or an enhanced level of elocution to the presentation. However, the wise teacher/preacher/speaker knows that the opportunity to share God's Word is an honor—it must be viewed as a privilege, not a presentation. The best way to teach the Word and build disciples is to go deep—to explain the deeper and subtle meaning that only those who search in the right places and utilize the best interpretation systems can find. *Rightly dividing the Word of truth*, digging deep, and gleaning as much as possible in the rich and timeless Word of

³⁰⁹ Ryrie, Charles, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995), 116

God results from employing the dispensational principles presented in this book.

Recommended print resources

This profile of study aids will focus on digital resources as they are less expensive than print equivalents, and, in this age of technology, provide the user with quick access to a wealth of information. However, technology is fragile, and it is not wise to be dependent on the internet, or even electricity, for resources to help you properly prepare to teach or preach the Word. Every student of the Word should have a good study Bible, concordance, Bible dictionary, Bible encyclopedia, topical Bible, a commentary set, and several books on systematic theology. This assures you will always be ready, in season and out,³¹⁰ to interpret the Word correctly and preach the Word with authority.

Recommended digital resources

1. **Logos** (<https://www.logos.com>). Logos software is the premier digital study resource available. Logos offers a variety of courses and tutorials, and fine customer support. “In 1989, Dallas Theological Seminary produced CDWord for Windows 2.x. This application featured several Bibles, a Greek lexicon, Bible dictionary, and a commentary. The original \$595 package required

³¹⁰ 2 Timothy 4:2

a CD-ROM drive, which most users had to purchase and install separately. In 1991, the DTS board voted to sell the technology to [Logos Bible Software](#), which incorporated the electronic texts into a new version of its product which, though enhanced, is still available today.”³¹¹ Study search options are intuitive and incredibly layered, with multiple search, cross-reference, and dig-deeper options. This resource is not free, and not inexpensive, but payment options and student discounts are available.

2. BibleGatewayPlus (<https://www.biblegateway.com/plus>).

Bible Gateway Plus is an excellent, low-cost study resource. A Bible Gateway Plus membership gives you access to a fine set of study tools designed to aid in deepening one’s knowledge of Scripture. The nominal subscription fee is \$3.99/Month. Resources include *Commentaries*, *a Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times*; *a collection of sermons by D. L. Moody*, *a King James Study Bible*; *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, and more.

3. Bible Hub Commentaries:

<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/>. This free resource allows

³¹¹ [25 Years of Digital Bible Initiatives at DTS From CDWord to Logos Bible Software](#). *DTS Magazine*. 31 January 2014. Retrieved 26 January 2022.

individuals to access a number of quality commentaries and Bible translations.

4. E-Sword Commentaries: e-sword.net/downloads.html.

This free downloadable resource includes a searchable King James text, Strong's Concordance and Lexicon, Smith's Bible Dictionary, Meyer's Devotional Commentary, and more. Additional, downloadable, study resources and translations are available for modest fees.

5. Greek/New Testament Interlinear: <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Interlinear-New-Testament/index.html>.

This free online interlinear parallels the King James translation and utilizes the Byzantine Majority Greek Text as its foundational source.

Hebrew study helps are available here:

<http://www.godrules.net/wordstudy-index.html>

6. Bible Lexicon: <https://biblehub.com/lexicon/>. This free resource offers mid-level study tools such as commentaries, lexicon support, cross reference tools, and word search options. The site also features a parallel Bible, sermon starter ideas, a Strong's Concordance, and the Treasury of Scripture resource. Bible Hub's mission is to *promote the Gospel of Christ through the learning, study and application of God's word*.

7. Bible Study Encyclopedia group:

(<https://www.studylight.org/encyclopedias.html>).

This ministry group site offers seven free Bible Encyclopedias. Entries are detailed and informative, and provide the reader with rich background information on the topic being researched.

Recommended Websites

- **IAmAWatchman.com** provides free discipleship, prophecy, and evangelism material
- **GotQuestions.com** provides answers to many common theological questions
- **RPMministries.org/free-resources/** provides personal and ministry resources
- **Christinprophecy.org/** provides information on eschatology
- **Biblestudytools.com/kjv/** provide a variety of study resources

Conclusion

Who then is a dispensationalist? Dr. Lewis Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote that...

1. "Any person is a dispensationalist who trusts the blood of Christ rather than bringing an animal sacrifice."
2. "Any person is a dispensationalist who disclaims any right or title to the land with God covenanted to Israel for an everlasting inheritance."
3. "Any person is a dispensationalist who observes the first day of the week rather than the seventh."³¹²

Dispensationalism began before John Darby, whom many identify as the founder of dispensationalism. Christian Zionism existed long before Theodore Herzl, whom many identify as the founder of modern Zionism. The following dispensational teachings have ancient origins:

- The promises and covenants associated with Israel and the Church are distinct
- The events in the book of Revelation are yet future
- Prophecy should be interpreted literally
- The Bible is true

³¹² Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Dispensationalism*. Revised ed.: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1951. 9.

- God speaks to (and works through) humanity in different ways and at different times (dispensations).

Though John Nelson Darby presented hermeneutic precepts in a new way, very little of what Darby wrote or taught was unique or new. Historian Paul Boyer writes:

*“In a sense, Darby’s system contained nothing new. His focus on the future fulfillment of prophecy followed the eschatology of the early Christians. Premillennialism had been an option for Protestant evangelicals since Joseph Mede’s day, while rudimentary forms of ‘Dispensationalism’ go back as far as Joachim of Fiore. Even the Rapture doctrine, as we have seen, can be found in the writings of early interpreters, including Increase Mather. But Darby wove these diverse strands into a tight and cohesive system that he buttressed at every point by copious biblical proof texts, then tirelessly promoted through his writings and preaching tours.”*³¹³

At the heart of the dispensational system is a desire to *rightly divide the Word of truth*. Dispensationalists believe that the quest to properly discern the full context of a passage is critical to interpreting the text

³¹³ Boyer, Paul, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) 88

and best supported by the tenants of the dispensational hermeneutic system.

May God bless you as you strive to grow in Him!

*“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”*³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Acts 17:11

OTHER BOOKS BY GARY RAY

- The Discipleship Handbook
- The Story of Jesus
- The Story of Jesus Bible Study (Leader & Student Guides)
- The Prophecy Book
- Next on the Prophetic Horizon
- The Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation
- The Grid Plan
- How and Why to Teach on Prophecy and Eschatology
- Reasons to Believe
- What the Post-rapture Church and World will Look Like
- The Victor (Christian Fiction)

BOOKS BY TINA RAY

- I Am A WatchKid
- Where Did Everybody Go?
- The Tree

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Email to [**SetFreeInquiries@gmail.com**](mailto:SetFreeInquiries@gmail.com)

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