

Dispensationalism

A Clarifying Statement in View of the Confused Theological Climate

THE SCRIPTURES, when interpreted in their natural, literal sense, reveal divinely determined dispensations or rules of life which define man's responsibilities in successive ages. These dispensations are not ways of salvation, but rather divinely ordered stewardships by which God directs man according to His purpose. Three of these—the dispensations of law, grace, and the millennial rule of Christ—are the subjects of detailed revelation in Scripture (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 9:17; 2 Cor. 3:9-18; Gal. 3:13-25; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:24-25; Heb. 7:19; Rev. 20:2-6).

FURTHER CLARIFICATION REGARDING DISPENSATIONALISM

When God's Word, the Bible, is taken in a consistent, literal manner, it will result in dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is the result of a consistently literal and normal interpretation. [For a lengthy study on this, see our paper *Con-*

sistent Literal Interpretation. \$2.00]

A dispensation is a unique stage in the outworking of God's program in time, whereby mankind is responsible to believe God and to be a good steward of the particular revelation which God has given (Eph. 3:2,9; Col. 1:25; Exodus 34:27-28; Gal. 3:10-12; 1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 1:10; etc.).

In order to be "rightly dividing the Word of truth" it is essential to distinguish things that differ and to recognize certain basic Biblical distinctions. Examples of these would be the difference between God's program for Israel and God's program for the Church (Acts 15:14-17; Rom. 11:25-27), the separation of 1000 years between the two resurrections (Rev. 20:4-6), the difference between the various judgments which occur at different times (2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15), the difference between law and grace (John 1:17; Rom. 6:14-15; Rom. 7:1-6) and the difference between Christ's present session at the right hand of the Father as the Church's great High Priest and Christ's future session on the restored Davidic throne as Israel's millennial King (Heb. 1:3; 10:12-13; Acts 15:16; Luke 1:32).

The Church is a distinct body of believers which was not present on earth during the Old Testament period and which was not the subject of Old Testament prophecy (Eph. 3:1-9; Col. 1:25-27).

In accord with God's program and timetable, the Church is on earth between the two advents of Christ. The beginning of the Church took place after the conclusion of Daniel's 69th week (the Church began on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2). The completion of the Church's ministry on earth will take place at the rapture before the commencement of Daniel's 70th week (Dan. 9:24,27). During this interval of time God is visiting the nations to call out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14-16; Eph. 3:1-11; Rom. 11:25). Indeed, the Church is God's called-out assembly.

God will literally fulfill His covenant and kingdom promises to the nation of Israel just as the prophets foretold (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:18-21; Deut. 30:3-10; 2 Sam. 7:4-17; Jer. 31:31-37; 33:15-26). The promises of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12,15,17), the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) and the New covenant (Jeremiah 31) were made unconditionally to national Israel and in the thousand-year kingdom these covenant promises to ethnic Israel will be literally fulfilled (Jer. 31:31-37; 33:14-26; Ezek. 36:25-28, 40-48; Rom. 11:23-32). God will not break His promises to Israel. The Church is not the "new Israel" or the "spiritual Israel," but rather "one new man" created of two groups, saved Jews and saved Gentiles (Eph. 2:15; 1 Cor. 10:32). The terms "Israel," "Israelite," and "Jew," are used

in the New Testament to refer to national, ethnic Israel. The term “Israel” is used of the nation or the people as a whole or the believing remnant within. It is not used of the Church in general or of Gentile believers in particular. Saved Gentiles of this present age are spiritual sons of Abraham who is the father of all who believe (Rom. 4:12,16; Gal. 3:7,26,29), whether Jews or Gentiles. However, believing Gentiles are not Israelites [that is, they are not the sons of Jacob]. The Israelites are carefully defined by Paul in Romans 9:4-5.

In every dispensation God’s distinctive programs are outworked for His great Name’s sake, and in every dispensation persons have always been saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8; Gen. 15:6; Heb. 11:4-7; Rom. 4:1-8). The glory of God is the determining principle and overall purpose for God’s dealings with men in every age and in every dispensation God is manifesting Himself to men and to angels so that all might redound to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:6,12,14; 3:21; Rom. 11:33-36; 16:27; Isa. 43:7; 1 Tim. 1:17).

LITERAL INTERPRETATION

The Bible must be interpreted literally which is the way language is normally and naturally understood. The Bible writers frequently used figurative language which is a normal and picturesque

way of portraying literal truth. The Bible must be understood in the light of the normal use of language and usage of words, the historical and cultural background, the context of the passage and the overall teaching of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15).

Most importantly, the believer must study the Bible in full dependence upon the Spirit of Truth whose ministry is to reveal Christ and illumine the minds and hearts of believers (John 5:39; 16:13-15; 1 Cor. 2:9-16). The natural, unregenerate man cannot understand or interpret correctly the Word of God. The things of God are foolishness to him, he cannot know them (1 Cor. 2:14), and his mind is blinded (Rom. 3:11; 2 Cor. 4:3-4).

The regenerate man, who has the Holy Spirit as his Teacher, is able to understand the clear truths in God’s Word regarding dispensations and other doctrines.

For further study, a set of Bible study notes (128 pages) entitled “Shedding Light on Dispensations” (\$4.00) is available from:

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Prepared by The New England Bible Conference

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